Din l-Art Helwa 50th Anniversary
The People – The Thoughts
1965 - 2015
THE COUNCIL 2015-17

Executive President
Maria Grazia Cassar

Vice-Presidents
Simone Mizzi
Professor Luciano Mulé Stagno

Hon. Secretary General
Philip Mercieca

Hon. Treasurer
Martin Scicluna

Members
Professor Anthony Bonanno
Albert Calleja
George Camilleri
Cettina Caruana Curran
Dr Petra Caruana Dingli
Joseph F Chetcuti
Carolyn Clements
Dr Alan Deidun
Josie Ellul Mercer
Cathy Farrugia
Ann Gingell Littlejohn
Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon
Judge Joe Galea Debono
Albert P Mamo
Dr Anika Psaila Savona
Patricia Salomone
Perit Joanna Spiteri Staines

Hon. Life Council Members
Dame Blanche Martin
Martin L.A. Scicluna

Patron
HE The President of Malta

Our Name

Din I-Art Helwa means
‘This Beautiful Land’, a name inspired by
the first three words of the Maltese National Anthem.

Our Logo

The symbolic Senglea Gardjola, our logo, stands endlessly in vigil
guarding Malta’s remarkable heritage.

Join, donate or volunteer and help us look after the places you love.
CONTENTS

OUR SPLENDID DIN L-ART HELWA 02
EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT 03
BE COURAGEOUS 04
MESSAGES FROM FORMER EXECUTIVE PRESIDENTS 06
2015 - MESSAGES OF GOOD WISHES 08
MESSAGES FROM OTHER SOCIETIES 10
SPEAKING FEARLESSLY FOR 50 YEARS 12
1967 - THE FUTURE OF THE PAST 18
1965 - INAUGURAL MEETING RESOLUTION 21
1965 - GOVERNOR GENERAL’S INAUGURAL MESSAGE 22
THE EARLY DAYS 24
VALLETTA IN 1945 27
HAL MILLIERI EXPLORED 29
THE CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION AT HAL MILLIERI DISCOVERED 30
TEENAGERS DIN L-ART HELWA 31
2010 AGM SPEECH 32
CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF DIN L-ART HELWA 34
JUDGE MAURICE CARUANA CURRAN 36
AN INTERVIEW WITH OUR FOUNDER PRESIDENT 38
TRIBUTES TO OUR FOUNDER PRESIDENT 40
APPRECIATIONS 42
FOUNDER PRESIDENT RECEIVES TOP EU / EUROPA NOSTRA AWARD 46
48 TRIBUTES TO FORMER OFFICIALS OF DIN L-ART HELWA
50 DIN L-ART HELWA AND YOUTHS
52 MATURE….BUT NOT ENOUGH
54 A PRIME MINISTER’S LEGACY
56 OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER, 31 OCTOBER 2014
57 AN INVITATION TO DIALOGUE
58 LISTEN TO US
59 A FLAWED NEW STRUCTURE PLAN
60 THROWING AWAY OUR HERITAGE
61 MODERNIST MALTA
62 GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR MALTA
64 CONSERVATION IS AS MUCH ABOUT THE FUTURE AS THE PAST
66 THE ENTRANCE TO VALLETTA
68 MALTA’S 2020 RENEWABLE ENERGY TARGETS
69 THE IMMINENT WATER CRISIS
70 NOW HEAR THE BETTER HALF
71 BOTH SIDES WIN
72 MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING
74 50 YEARS OF THIS FAIR LAND - OR THIS BITTER LAND?
75 HERITAGE SAVED 1965 - 2015 THE ANNIVERSARY BOOK
76 HERITAGE SAVED 1965 - 2015 THE ANNIVERSARY MAP
It is with a little trepidation that I write, as the splendid Din l-Art Ħelwa we have inherited today is mainly due to the hard work and good judgement of its past presidents: firstly – and above all – its founder, the late Judge Maurice Caruana Curran. As incoming president, the next chapter is still to be written and still to be judged. It is indeed a great honour to have been given this role, and it is in the knowledge that I can rely on the support of a wonderful team of people, that I have accepted.

When speaking of Din l-Art Ħelwa with others, most of all with other heritage organisations, the question that invariably emerges is “how do you do it?” How is it possible to manage so many sites and coordinate such a variety of activities, almost entirely with volunteers? My answer to this is that it is precisely because Din l-Art Ħelwa is made up of volunteers that all this is possible. Being a volunteer means that one takes ownership of a role and does it with passion. It means that one does what one enjoys doing and therefore does it better. It also means that one will go the extra mile to see it through. I firmly believe that this distinguishes us from other organisations, and that it is our strength. Together with the wonderful family of volunteers, both on the Council and in the field, I hope to continue building on this strength and see it grow.

The participation of young people is one area that is growing slowly but surely. Over the last five years, one of the annual events in the Din l-Art Ħelwa calendar has been the Youth Restoration Exchange. It started when former President Martin Scicluna made contact with French NGO Union Rempart; a collaboration which resulted in the first live-in restoration youth exchange at Qrendi, followed by several others, including return visits to Rempart, in Coucy, France. The Din l-Art Ħelwa Youths meet regularly, and have organised events of their own. Their enthusiasm is infectious, and Din l-Art Ħelwa has great confidence in their future.

Din l-Art Ħelwa has been in the forefront of restoration projects for the past 50 years and the list of sites and monuments saved is impressive. Alongside the ‘big’ restoration project of Our Lady of Victory Church and the Erardi ceiling paintings, now nearing completion thanks to the dedication and determination of President Simone Mizzi, other restoration work has also been undertaken. This is at Torri Mamo, Wignacourt Tower, Wied ġż-Żurrieq Tower, Qala Battery, St Paul’s Statue and Delimara Lighthouse, as well as the restoration of the Preti paintings at Sarria Church.

Din l-Art Ħelwa will continue to seek new challenges and, as Martin Galea once said: “Take on what others dare not”. The next challenge, however, will be to make the properties we manage self-sustainable, or at least generating enough income to make up for those that do not bring in any at all. The furnishing of Delimara Lighthouse as a heritage holiday rental property is a step in the right direction, and we are looking forward to reaping the benefits of this project.

Our biggest challenge, however, is our role as a lobby-group in support of the environment, both built and natural. This is the hardest role for Din l-Art Ħelwa in today’s Malta and it is where our Heritage and Environment Protection Commitee team is on constant alert to raise objections, attend consultations and garner public support via social media and the press to limit the ever-present threat to our environment. The Save the Countryside campaign, which was made possible through EEA Grants NGO Malta Programme, has 13,000 followers, which is a number to contend with. It is heartening to see so many people who have the environment and heritage at heart and we must keep working to educate the public and influence the decision-makers to seek long-term gain rather than short-sighted speculation, and to stop the further destruction of our countryside and traditional architecture.

The fundraising and events team tirelessly organise the packed events calendar, while excellent public relations and communication ensure exposure and visibility. Amongst other things, the Gozo and Comino team devotedly keep the more inaccessible of our sites up and running, come rain or shine. All this work would not be possible were it not for our volunteers, our members and the generosity of our sponsors – who seek to make a difference through their contributions, large and small. I hope that, together, we will continue to do just that.
Maria Grazia Cassar was born in 1962 to Ina Maria and Anthony Spiteri Staines. She was educated at The Convent of the Sacred Heart in St Julian’s, where she was Head Girl in the Fifth Form, and at St Aloysius College, where she was Vice-President of the Sixth Form Council. In 1982, Maria Grazia joined the first group of students at the newly established Art and Design Centre in Valletta, studying design under the Italian tutors sent to Malta under the First Italian Protocol, and obtained a diploma in Industrial Design. She then worked as an interior designer in her father’s architectural firm, completing various projects including the interiors of Bank of Valletta’s Balluta and Sta Venera branches, as well as the Mistra Village Sports Complex. In 1988, Maria Grazia married Pierre Cassar, and two children, George and Chiara, were born in 1992 and 1993 respectively. In 2002, she began a course at the University of Malta and graduated with a diploma in Baroque Architecture in 2004. She is currently reading for a MA in Cultural Heritage Management with the Faculty of Built Heritage at the University of Malta.

Maria Grazia began working as a volunteer for Din l-Art Ħelwa in 2006, forming part of the HEP team, and subsequently becoming a member of the Council in 2007. Her various roles included coordinating the restoration of the Bir Miftuh altarpiece and frescos, the refurbishment of Delimara lighthouse and the restoration of the Mattia Preti paintings at Sarria church, work on one of which was carried out in the Departure Lounge of Malta International Airport.

Together with Council Member Cathy Farrugia, Maria Grazia coordinated and managed the first three Din l-Art Helwa/Rempart Restoration Exchanges for Young People, successfully obtaining a Youth in Action grant in 2012. She represented Din l-Art Helwa at conferences in Paris and Venice at which she was invited to showcase this experience with young people and restoration by the NGO Union Rempart and the University of Malta. She joined the panel of judges of the annual Din l-Art Helwa Architecture Awards in 2010, going on to succeed Martin Scicluna as chairperson in 2013.

Maria Grazia drew up the inventory of the contents of Our Lady of Victory Church for the Guardianship Deed and has closely followed its restoration. She has contributed many articles about the work of Din l-Art Helwa to various magazines, including Vigilo, and has also appeared in a number of television documentaries about the organisation’s work. She has recently coordinated the compilation, translation and editing of The Mattia Preti Guide Book which was published with the support of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector.
As outgoing President of Din l-Art Helwa, the task of compiling this 50th Anniversary Vigilo has been a privilege and one I hope will be as rewarding to our readers as it has been to me.

In all the years I have written, communicated, vociferated for the organisation since I spoke out as Communications Officer over the destruction of the Carrack Stores in Cottonera back in 2000, every day has been a day of learning while doing something for our beautiful island. For that I will be always grateful. Preparing this Vigilo has meant looking back over 50 years on the thoughts that guided the formation of Din l-Art Helwa, its development, its achievements and its continuing challenges, and reliving the thoughts of those many great people, all volunteers, who brought the organisation to where it stands today. I can humbly say that, in so doing, I have walked with giants. It is their spirit I have tried to immortalise in these pages.

Finally, I hope that both the 2015 Vigilo editions will honour those people, all volunteers and lovers of Malta, who gave of their time willingly for the nation and took action to bring about change at all levels – whether in public perception or in tending to the many sites saved for the nation. I salute them all and, if many may remain unnamed and unsung, their work will be best found in Din l-Art Helwa’s fabulous Heritage Saved 1965-2015 publication. We must remain refreshed and endowed with the strength required to keep its proud voice respected, just and impartial in its mission to preserve our island’s built and natural heritage, a voice that will certainly always be heard, even if it is not always heeded.

To cover the last 50 years in this slim volume has been itself a challenge, so much so that we have decided to have not one Commemorative Edition in 2015, but two! The objectives of this first publication has been to capture the vision of those courageous individuals who founded Din l-Art Helwa in 1965 and successively of those many brave leaders, council members and volunteers who took this foresight forward with determination to grow the organisation into a driving force that walks its talk, leaving 49 national monuments and landmarks and two areas of natural importance saved for posterity. That makes one a year in 50 years.

We have also invited many leading thinkers who champion the protection of heritage and the environment today to contribute to this publication so readers will be left with the benefit of their vision. This will make this Vigilo not just a retrospective compilation but one that encapsulates Malta’s environmental problems today and hopefully serves as a guide to the future. On the eve of an ill-
advised new Structure Plan, we cover land use and its inappropriate governance, water, marine protection, the conservation of heritage and today’s experts have spoken within these pages.

The many tributes that have flooded in to us on the demise of our beloved Founder President, my father Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, fortify our spirit and make this edition a vehicle that will further strengthen our resolve for many years to come. The beautiful words written by many of you are in themselves worthy of preservation. Reproducing them in Vigilo, which he himself established and giving its voice such a significant name, will ensure they take their rightful place within our national collective memory and within the very heart of Din l-Art Helwa.

He chose to exit the stage jubilant at having seen the 50th Anniversary celebrations kick off with that memorable concert at Teatru Manoel on 21 February. Those of us who knew and worked with him are honoured to have shared his long, active and successful life dedicated to serving and improving his country.

Later this year, the Autumn Commemorative Issue of Vigilo will immortalise the achievements of the vision portrayed in this issue. It will highlight the many monuments Din l-Art Helwa has saved for Malta through the power of its example and the many restoration projects it has carried out. Strongly featured will be the Architectural Heritage Award Scheme, now also celebrating its 10th anniversary, a most worthy institution by which standards of excellence in conservation can showcase how Malta’s architectural beauty can be truly preserved through the restoration and adaptation of old buildings, with loving care, to appropriate contemporary use. In order to preserve beauty we must convince those who cannot see it or understand it and teach its value before it is too late.

We also remember and honour our loyal sponsors who, over the years, have made our work possible. They are forever entwined with the destiny of the many monuments their generosity has helped to save.

I thank in particular the Council members and volunteers it has been my honour to lead over the last four years – at a time of very difficult change for the country – for their untiring support and friendship. The rewarding experiences Din l-Art Helwa has given me personally are not easily repeatable and for these I must be eternally grateful. Between riding the 17-truck convoy with quarry owners to Comino carrying restoration material for St Mary’s Tower, facing politicians and Mepa in daily tussles over inappropriate land use, sorting out the legal wrangle over Victory Church and then facing the challenge of sourcing the million euros needed for its restoration, convincing a new administration of the worth of Din l-Art Helwa so that our hard-earned Guardianship Deeds could be renewed and being granted Wied iż-Żurrieq Tower to boot, we have shared so many more memorable and satisfying moments. I thank Din l-Art Helwa for giving me the opportunity of working to bring about change for the country we love so much.

I end by saluting all those who are to follow, secure in the knowledge you will never be afraid to stand up and be counted. Malta is well worth it! Take courage in the realisation that the realm of the brave is perhaps the only territory still left uncrowded! It is you who will take Din l-Art Helwa forward. It is you who will continue to make a difference. As long as there is one person left standing who loves Malta and wants to save its beauty – and, thankfully, there are many – there will always be a Din l-Art Helwa.

50th Anniversary Cartoon by Sebastian Tanti Barlo’
Messages from Former Executive Presidents of Din l-Art Ħelwa

Martin Galea
Executive President Din l-Art Ħelwa
2005 - 2010

Looking back at some 30 years of association with Din l-Art Ħelwa, I can only express my gratitude for what it has given me. I have seen an association achieve spectacular growth: an association that has under its management no fewer than two mediaeval chapels, one lighthouse, nine towers or forts, two cemeteries, two nature parks (managed in conjunction with other organisations) and many other restorations in-between. These were carried out very much on a wing and a prayer by a tiny band of volunteers bonded together by a common cause.

We have built up knowledge (obviously using expert advice) on the complicated restoration of buildings, frescoes and paintings and used this knowledge to save so much.

We have also fought a rearguard action to try to protect what is left of our heritage, be it the countryside, our flora or fauna or our built patrimony. We have had to become involved in complex planning issues and put together technical arguments to try to stop poor or ill-conceived development. Our victories have, alas, been too few but significant: the golf course at Majjiesa now Majjistral Park, Ta’ Ċenċ (will it raise its ugly head again?) and many, many others. Unfortunately, the threats remain.

We have become an organisation with international contacts with Europa Nostra, The International National Trusts Organisation, The National Trust of the UK and many other National Trusts worldwide. We are much respected abroad, but perhaps a prophet in the wilderness at home.

The benefits have been great. We have well over 20 beautiful properties and we have two nature parks as a tangible reminder of what we have achieved in 50 years and, on a personal level, many friendships and wonderful memories. It has been a privilege to be involved with this association and an experience which has greatly enriched my life. I will always be grateful.

Professor Anthony Bonanno
Executive President Din l-Art Ħelwa
1999 - 2001

Din l-Art Ħelwa was established when I was in my late teens and very early in my academic career it provided me with the opportunity to be involved in a voluntary organisation of the highest calibre. It also provided me (and the world of archaeological science) with an excellent site for archaeological exploration in collaboration with distinguished foreign colleagues, Dr Tom Blagg and Dr Anthony Luttrell.

Later on, even when the Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University of Malta, of which I was head, required the necessary funds to embark on a new excavation project, Din l-Art Ħelwa provided the necessary funds to cover the first of a series of yearly excavation campaigns at the site of Tas-Silg, before such funding began to be made available by the University. This made possible the training of more students in fieldwork for their career in the field of the archaeological heritage. In more recent years, Din l-Art Ħelwa sponsored a conservation project for the protection of another archaeological site on which the same university department was conducting yearly excavations – the Roman villa of Żejtun.

Throughout my four decades of membership of Din l-Art Ħelwa I have seen it grow from strength to strength. It has saved from advanced decay, threatening collapse and eventual demolition, several coastal watch towers of the Knights’ period, as well as several old churches, including two late mediaeval churches with their precious fresco paintings – the last one being the Church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta, with its exquisitely painted vaulted ceiling and other invaluable artistic treasures. It has been a most rewarding honour for me to be intimately associated with a voluntary organisation that has achieved so much.

May Din l-Art Ħelwa persevere in its mission of guardian and benefactor of this fair country’s natural and cultural heritage for yet another half-century. After that, someone else will make the same wish for another century. Today, Din l-Art Ħelwa is manned by an army of competent veteran volunteers, but the contribution of a younger generation is ever desirable. The recently revamped youth section will make it even easier for its young members to integrate with the more mature members of the organisation to provide the necessary continuity and innovation to ensure its health and vigour.
Martin Scicluna  
Executive President Din l-Art Helwa 2001 - 2005

I have been privileged to serve Din l-Art Helwa in one capacity or another – from Treasurer to Council Member, to President and Vice President – for the last 25 years. My strongest memories are of my time as Executive President and of the outstanding volunteers who have devoted so much of their time to the cause of saving Malta’s built and natural cultural heritage. When I had the honour of being Executive President between 2001 and 2005, my Council focused on four main areas of business.

First, we were determined that – as an effective lobbying and conservation body – our organisation would be tightened up and, moreover, that the long-promised commitment by successive governments to give in trust to Din l-Art Helwa the many properties that it had restored would be fulfilled.

Secondly, in the wake of the mindless destruction of the megaliths at Mnajdra on Good Friday in 2001, we pressed hard to ensure that the government’s long neglect of Malta’s cultural heritage would cease. We fought for, and ultimately achieved, the long-awaited passage in Parliament of an effective Cultural Heritage Act.

Thirdly, we wanted the finances of Din l-Art Helwa to be transformed. Thanks to The Times of Malta’s Mnajdra Appeal Fund and the generosity of our corporate sponsors, this happened.

And fourth, we were determined that Din l-Art Helwa’s voice would be heard, not only by those, such as our members, who had Malta’s heritage at heart, but also – just as importantly – by those placed in power over us, who tended invariably to place the environment and Malta’s rich built heritage second to the perceived needs of the construction industry.

That we were fortunate to achieve these things was not down to me, but to the excellent members of the two Councils with whom I worked – especially my good friends, Eric Parnis and the late Philip Zammit Briffa and the hundreds of volunteers who gave of their time so unstintingly.

Din l-Art Helwa is celebrating its Golden Jubilee. Long may it continue to thrive!

Dr. Petra Caruana Dingli (formerly Bianchi)  
Executive President Din l-Art Helwa 2010 - 2011

Over the years, I have been active with Din l-Art Helwa in many roles – as a volunteer, Council member, director and vice-president. I was elected Executive President in 2010. After a year at the helm, and with the support of the Din l-Art Helwa Council, I moved to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority to lead its Environment Protection Directorate for a period of two years.

Focusing specifically on my years as director, vice-president and executive president between 2006 and 2011, I was actively involved in many campaigns on environmental issues including the Save Ta’ Cenc campaign and the outcry against the extension of the development boundaries in 2006. We had strongly opposed plans for the redevelopment of Mistra Village and a large residential development at Ramla l-hamra in Gozo.

In 2009, we collaborated with the Chamber of Architects to organise a landmark exhibition and book promoting the appreciation of Modernist architecture in Malta. A big achievement in 2008 was the establishment of the Majjistral Park, after years of lobbying.

Another major project in those years was the entire refurbishment and conversion of Din l-Art Helwa’s offices in Melita Street. In addition, we began holding the annual Spring Fête at the Garden of Rest, which is still going strong, and undertook many restoration projects, including the Great Siege monument outside the Law Courts in Valletta and St Anthony’s Battery in Qala.

As always, nothing would have been possible without the dedication of so many volunteers, both at the centre of the organisation and managing the many heritage properties all over Malta and Gozo. In particular, former executive presidents Martin Galea and Martin Scicluna, and the late Edward Xuereb, former Secretary-General, were closely involved in all discussions and initiatives during those years.

During my tenure as executive president, we continued extensive talks with the government on Din l-Art Helwa obtaining a Guardianship Deed on Our Lady of Victory Church in Valletta, and today the organisation is proud to have played a leading role in restoring this building, which is so important to the history of Valletta.

Amid all the controversy in 2010, Din l-Art Helwa took the decision to support plans for the entrance to Valletta by the eminent Italian architect Renzo Piano. Valletta has since moved on and its shabby and ugly entrance has disappeared, replaced by an outstanding project that has caught the attention of the world press.

Today I am again a member of the Din l-Art Helwa Council, and my main activity at present is the Save the Countryside campaign. There is never a dull moment on the environmental front. I am sure that the organisation will continue to do its utmost to fulfill its mission for many years to come, and I wish it a long and successful future.
I remember a series entitled I Was There, wherein people recounted personal experiences lived during the war. The event we are commemorating is less dramatic, but it certainly was innovative in its time and long lasting in its effect. I was there at the Manoel Theatre when, on 9 July 1965, Maurice Caruana Curran, launched Din l-Art Ħelwa. The name stuck. Hundreds were present at the Manoel. Malta was living a new renaissance. Independence had been achieved less than a year before. The economy of the island was on the move. The building industry was heading towards one of its great expansions in history and to remember that only a very few years before, mass emigration to Australia was considered as the island’s only safety valve and that the future of Malta was considered to be very bleak.

Din l-Art Ħelwa’s role as the watchdog of the country’s heritage, was sometimes misunderstood. We moved from an economic doom to an economic boom and remembering the affliction caused by the services rundown, the admonishments of Din l-Art Ħelwa on certain building sprees, were considered by some to be uncalled for. Life is made up of balancing acts. I believe that the role of Din l-Art Ħelwa, as the conscience of a people, was very relevant and very much needed throughout these 40 years which have seen major changes in Malta’s contemporary history. How apt is the word Vigilo – it does carry the message of vigilance and perhaps more than guarding – safeguarding. Today, Din l-Art Ħelwa is accepted as part of the Malta scene. We all heed its voice because it is the voice of reason, built on sound aesthetic principles, bound to our nation’s history, living the cultural environment of our society.

Forty years after, one can look back with pride. One is encouraged to look forward with insistence, persistence and consistence.

Message from
President Emeritus the late
Professor Guido de Marco,
Patron 1999 - 2003,
on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of
Din l-Art Helwa in 2005

I remember a series entitled I Was There, wherein people recounted personal experiences lived during the war. The event we are commemorating is less dramatic, but it certainly was innovative in its time and long lasting in its effect. I was there at the Manoel Theatre when, on 9 July 1965, Maurice Caruana Curran, launched Din l-Art Ħelwa. The name stuck. Hundreds were present at the Manoel. Malta was living a new renaissance. Independence had been achieved less than a year before. The economy of the island was on the move. The building industry was heading towards one of its great expansions in history and to remember that only a very few years before, mass emigration to Australia was considered as the island’s only safety valve and that the future of Malta was considered to be very bleak. Din l-Art Ħelwa’s role as the watchdog of the country’s heritage, was sometimes misunderstood. We moved from an economic doom to an economic boom and remembering the affliction caused by the services rundown, the admonishments of Din l-Art Ħelwa on certain building sprees, were considered by some to be uncalled for. Life is made up of balancing acts. I believe that the role of Din l-Art Ħelwa, as the conscience of a people, was very relevant and very much needed throughout these 40 years which have seen major changes in Malta’s contemporary history. How apt is the word Vigilo – it does carry the message of vigilance and perhaps more than guarding – safeguarding. Today, Din l-Art Ħelwa is accepted as part of the Malta scene. We all heed its voice because it is the voice of reason, built on sound aesthetic principles, bound to our nation’s history, living the cultural environment of our society.

Forty years after, one can look back with pride. One is encouraged to look forward with insistence, persistence and consistence.
In my last address as President of Malta delivered on 13th December, 2013 on the occasion of Republic Day I had said this:

“Maybe the most celebrated victim being affected by the material success is the environment, supposedly considered as everybody’s national heritage but which is not to everyone’s enjoyment. The importance of the building industry in our country’s economy, the preferred option by many individuals to make profitable investments in property, the developers’ strong lobbying and the mentality that the individual’s personal interest supersedes the common good, have all led to an increase in the areas being built around the Maltese Islands. This also means that the countryside continues to shrink. Those that say that Malta is unrecognisable from some decades ago are not exaggerating and this should not be deemed as a compliment. Therefore an obvious question comes to mind – What is going to be left for the upcoming generations or for those that still have to be born?”

Some may argue that this is a portrayal of a negative future scenario. On the contrary, I still believe and have strong faith in our abilities as a nation to face present and future challenges. I venture to add that the result of the recently held anti-spring hunting referendum and its aftermath, has served as a wake up call for all of us, in particular to our political leaders, to address environmental issues in a responsible manner. The time has come for our political parties to move beyond “retail politics”, where policies are tailored to fit pressure groups or lobbyists, for votes’ sake regardless of the common good. Instead our politicians should compete how to develop a political vision by promoting a meaningful dialogue with interested stakeholders and with civil society to have a worthwhile society so that generations yet to come do not inherit an environmentally denuded and exhausted island. The issue to secure the common good of future generations and not just our own, is after all an issue of intergenerational justice which guarantees better politics for a better Malta. This is precisely what Din l-Art Helwa has been strenuously advocating for the past fifty years. This was the vision of its founder, the lamented Judge Caruana Curran and is still the mission statement of its determined successor in title, who have championed without fear or favour this noble cause of preserving our national heritage and instilled in us, especially in our youth, a greater appreciation of the national patrimony.

Din l-Art Helwa ought to be proud of its achievements and we as a nation ought to be grateful to Din l-Art Helwa which has always been a leading protagonist for our tomorrow.
The name chosen for your Organisation’s magazine, Vigilo, aptly fits in the mission statement of your organisation, because ever since Din l-Art Helwa started functioning way back in 1965, it has always been in the forefront to safeguard Malta’s historical and cultural heritage and the surrounding natural environment.

Din l-Art Helwa has been one of the pioneering voices that has lobbied and helped to create public awareness towards anything that is Maltese. All this could be attributed to the untiring work of its founding Executive President, Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, in particular, and all other members who, with their dedication, have actively contributed towards the conservation of our heritage.

It is indeed an honour for me to act as a Patron of such an important organisation, whose mission over these last 40 years, has been to support cultural projects as well as to raise awareness of our cultural heritage. Cultural Heritage gives us our identity, be it linguistic, artistic or traditional. Our cultural heritage defines who we actually are. The cultural treasures, which we have inherited, are now in our hands and we have to ensure that they are valued and safeguarded for posterity so that future generations too could be proud of what Malta possesses. This is precisely what Din l-Art Helwa has been doing, acting as a watchdog over our country’s treasures, lending its voice and providing the necessary means to see to the restoration, conservation and embellishment of the numerous treasures found all over theses Islands and in particular those which have been entrusted to it.

In recent years, we Maltese have become more aware of our national heritage and the environment. This is the result of early educational campaigning and lobbying both by the relevant authorities and by a number of non-governmental organisations, the catalyst being Din l-Art Helwa. Such organisations should provide unbiased criticism on governmental measures in conserving cultural heritage and protecting the environment.

I cannot but express my gratitude towards the work that has been done by your organisation which is supported by a number of volunteers who dedicate most of their spare time towards the upkeep and the protection of a number of our country’s treasures. Through such voluntary work, your organisation has, throughout the years, helped reduce the financial expenditure which otherwise would have had to be borne by government, but most of all it has managed to save a number of monuments which otherwise would have been lost for ever.

For all the sterling work your organisation has done, I would like to thank you and wish you ad multos annos.
Giovanni Bonello  
Deputy Chairman  
Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti

In my own name, and on behalf of the Board of Governors of Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, allow me to share with you the joy of a moment of great gratification that comes from fifty years of uninterrupted activity in the interest of the national heritage and environment. It has been a difficult journey, but it has also been a success story that should inspire you to commit the same perseverance to future battles. My Foundation, as a like-minded institution which has the Maltese cultural heritage at heart, tenders its heartfelt congratulations, and its best wishes for a luminous and fruitful future.

Professor Roger Ellul-Micallef  
President  
Malta Historical Society

Din l-Art Ħelwa, synonymous with the name of the late lamented Judge Maurice Caruana Curran whose brainchild it is, has, over the past fifty years, safeguarded the islands’ cultural, natural and artistic heritage. On this, the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation, it deserves the most heartfelt thanks and congratulations of all those who have the preservation and safekeeping of our heritage at heart. May I, as President of the Malta Historical Society, congratulate, on this occasion, our sister organisation and look forward to many years of fruitful collaboration in the interest of our little island home.
Speaking Fearlessly for 50 Years

Simone Mizzi

Executive President of Din l-Art Ħelwa 2011 - 2015

Dedicated to all members of Din l-Art Ħelwa and lovers of Malta.

Extract from the AGM address February 28 2015

I address this 50th general assembly of DLH members with great pride. The great achievements of the last 50 years must be attributed to all here: members, volunteers and the generosity of our sponsors, but especially to those DLH people who, before us, gave their time, their knowledge and their skills, freely to Malta. With humility too, because, in this my last AGM address, I should leave you with a great many words of wisdom but I find instead that I can do no better than look to our past and to the persons that shaped our thoughts. We must make their wisdom a prologue to our future.

Conservation requires persistence and much patience. Let us be energised by tracing some of DLH’s major milestones linked as they were with the country’s development. In the face of environment in peril as never before, we will strengthen our resolve.

We all know that DLH was founded in July 1965 by a group of volunteers, all lovers of Malta, led by Judge Maurice Caruana Curran. Very much like all of us here today, they were inspired by the words of the society’s newly written Constitution which established that the state had to preserve the artistic and built heritage of Malta, and the landscape. Speaking from the stage of the Manoel Theatre, DLH’s first patron, the then Governor-General Sir Maurice Dorman, said that this was to be our work:

"To promote Malta’s beauty, to fight ugliness, to preserve our heritage in the towns and villages, in the countryside and by the sea”.

So simply put, and still so true. The fine minds that sent in their good wishes for the success of the organisation are worth remembering. They assisted those founding fathers in the formation of their thoughts which in turn shape ours: Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Georgio Bassani, the Italian author and Founder of Europa Nostra, Quentin Hughes, who founded the Faculty of Architecture at the UOM in 1968, Ernle Bradford, the British historian who lived in Kalkara and wrote The Great Siege, Sir Harry Luke, Governor of Malta in the 30s, the artist Julian Trevalyan, Lord Duncan Sandys (in 1970 he was president of Europa Nostra during its first Malta conference), the architect and modernist city planner Sir Hugh Casson, who I shall mention several times today.

When my father and Godfrey Randon, recorded each letter they were so proud of their new Din l-Art Ħelwa. Their actions reverberate still today.

They did things with style: We still do!
They were always in the news: We still are!

DLH positions on myriad issues are in 1500 press releases in my files alone let alone in the archives on issues that vary from blasting at Mnajdra, from tuna and birds, to illegal boathouses, to the Monti, anti Piano, pro Piano. DLH letters to Dom Mintoff and subsequent Prime Ministers must be worth another publication too.

1967, DLH acquired its beautiful headquarters, formerly the Malta Relief Fund whose chairman, none other than Sir Maurice Dorman, Patron of the new DLH, asked for the Government Property Division to release it to the new heritage trust of Malta. The furniture was donated by the British High Commissioner, Sir John Martin.

His words at the opening were: ‘As Ambassador one has to be cautious in the espousal of local causes in case one should find oneself taking sides, but I have never felt any hesitation in supporting DLH’. To be strictly apolitical is a maxim we have adhered to firmly. By 1967 we had a newsletter and Vigilo to showcase our work and campaigns.
A little Green Book was printed especially to immortalise a lecture also given at the Manoel Theatre on 10th January 1967 about conservation and planning by Sir Hugh Casson, President then of the Royal Academy and promoter of modernist planning whose annual award for the Worst New Building of the year we would do well to learn from. Its colour was so representative of its content. It should be Mepa’s bible.

Our outreach programmes grew our database to 1300 members and these are set to grow even further. We had a website in 2002, overhauled it in 2009, but today we reach 6000 persons on FB, and have 14,000 followers on our Save the Countryside Campaign.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

By 1967 our Youth section was scouring the countryside on weekends. In those days we had a countryside and we did not have to go far to find it. It was they who discovered the treasures of Hal Millieri and studied them. For three summers they had work camps to clean the Great Gun at Rinella. We must consider it a compliment that another NGO followed and has taken up this work with such commitment.

For the last four years our Youth Section encouraged by Maria Grazia Cassar have worked on Tal-Hniema Chapel and The Garden of Rest. Led by Tara Cassar, they have won several YIA (Youth In Action) awards and we are very proud of them.

BUILDING BRIDGES

In 1967 DLH became the 7th Member of Europa Nostra founded earlier in 1963. We have sat on its council to influence European thought and learn from it since then, first with Maurice Caruana Curran, then Martin Scicluna, and now I have the privilege of serving on it. With 272 European heritage organizations now members, we learn we are not alone in the problems that arise from planning for large populations.

Maurice Caruana Curran had very early on established reciprocity with the UK National Trust and we have just renewed it. In 2007 Martin Scicluna enrolled DLH into the International National Trusts Organisation, whose aim is to help developing nations with their heritage and environmental issues. Its Founder President Simon Molesworth has accepted our invitation to share his learning and we have just renewed it. In 2007 Martin Scicluna enrolled DLH into the International National Trusts Organisation, whose aim is to help developing nations with their heritage and environmental issues. Its Founder President Simon Molesworth has accepted our invitation to share his learning.

In 2012, I enrolled DLH in Future for Religious Heritage Association. With public disengagement from some religions increasing, and caught in racial strife, historic places of worship constitute the most endangered heritage in Europe today. The focus of this association is to give extended disengagement from some religions increasing, and caught in racial strife, historic places of worship constitute the most endangered heritage in Europe today. The focus of this association is to give extended longevity to redundant churches just as we do with our concerts, lectures and other activities.

MALTÂ’S NATIONAL TRUST WAS ON ITS WAY

1970 – the Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuħ Trust was signed with the Church for 150 years saving their unique frescos. The chapel of Roque was included in 1980, making DLH the first NGO to be vested with historic sites. Today with our example, parishes do protect their chapels very closely. It is the ones that belong to nobody or to the state that need care – even here there is much to do.

1970 – DLH answered an advert in the Government Gazette for the rental of Wignacourt Tower and Maurice Caruana Curran worried so much we would not be able to pay the rent or meet its conditions for restoration.

1975 was declared Europe’s Architectural Heritage Year. Efforts were made in every country to make the public aware of the irreplaceable value of historic monuments. DLH raised LM3,000 through its activities for the first restoration of Wignacourt Tower. Maurice Caruana Curran invited Father Marius Zerafa, then Director of Museums, to attend the opening of Wignacourt Tower on the 10th Feb 1976. And again years later, we relaunched another major restoration on 11 Feb 2012. Finally the work on the tower has now been completed.
By 1986 with the restoration of Wignacourt Fountain in Ordinance St. the restoration function of DLH was well under way. In 1990 The Msida Bastion Garden of Rest was begun, ten years of painstaking work - By 2001 DLH had restored, Torri Mamo, Santa Maria Battery on Comino, Ghallis Tower, Dwejra Tower, Mistra Gate, The Red Tower. Work was also started on Ta’ Braxia Cemetery.

Then, in 2002, came Comino Tower – perhaps the most challenging and exhilarating project, in particular landing a convoy of 17 trucks from Gozo on Comino carrying 300 tons of materials. You know if you need a hammer and nails in Comino you have to make sure you take them with you. We also have to remember logistics. Our coastal towers were made to be inaccessible, this problem persists. Martin Scicluna and Martin Galea were very active during these busy years, assisting with all these restoration projects, raising funds and finding volunteers.

DLH had been screaming for Town and Country planning since 1967 but no serious attempts were made to properly define land use until in 1992 when we saw the Structure plan enacted. In 1994 Scheduling of Monuments was begun but this was only rendered formal in Art 81 of the 2010 Environment and Development Planning Act which is fast being dismembered as I write. We need to keep an eye open for the scheduling Article when this Act is changed shortly.

We were to campaign bitterly to obtain tenure over the 9 heritage sites we had painstakingly restored, we were technically squatters in scheduled monuments for 20 years!

One bitter experience comes to mind. By 1971 DLH restored the Xarolla Windmill in Żurrieq with the Żurrieq Civic Committee, only to have its key promptly taken away from us and given to the Brigata Laburista. I remember my father devasted. Equally so was subsequent Executive President Martin Scicluna when after being promised title for years, government came up with one postponement after another. In 2002 this AGM actually passed resolutions demanding legal tenure, but events of near catastrophic significance had to take place before we could ensure episodes like Xarolla never happened again.

2001 – On Good Friday April 12th at 7 a.m. we all got a phone call. The Neolithic temples of Mnajdra had fallen overnight. What Venice in danger did for Europe with the founding of Europa Nostra and ICOMOS, Mnajdra did for Malta.

With Martin Scicluna as Executive President, we took to the streets and lobbied for heightened protection for Cultural Heritage. The Times Mnajdra fund was set up, and we fostered awareness in 13,000 school children and all government departments through Heritage in Peril (Wirt il-Periklu), a 13 part video series created with the Times Mnajdra Fund. We now have this converted to DVD. Its players may have changed, but its words remain true.

The HSBC Heritage Map, painted for DLH by Kenneth Zammit Tabona was also produced and distrubted to 13000 school children, their pledges to protect heritage placed at the feet of President Guido de Marco, and PM Eddie Fenech Adami who signed them too. They promised to protect heritage but this did not stop that administration from extending the building boundaries in 2006.

2002 – The Cultural Heritage Act was enacted. Through this the Guardianship Deed was created, enabling NGOs to hold sites, a vehicle Martin Scicluna helped formulate. The insistence of Martin Scicluna that DLH is represented on the Committee of Guarantee is finally paying off, since this Committee is the ultimate watchdog of cultural heritage. A lot of good work is being done and our ideas are embraced.
It was on Feb 21 2003, that Martin Scicluna, Executive President succeeded in signing the first ever Guardianship deeds to nine historic sites for an NGO in Malta. I remember a council meeting when he said that in agreeing to take on responsibility for nine sites we were accepting full responsibility for their proper care for evermore.

Being the first Deeds to be awarded, so were they the first needing renewal, no easy task to negotiate with a government with a history of doling out heritage sites to its supporters. However, after months of continual contact with the newly-elected Ministry of Culture, in Oct 2013, they were renewed. Today the Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes (CSRPs) and European funding demand legal title, but it is the investment of hours of loving work by our volunteers that MUST always be protected by legal title lest the sites we have restored are given to the unscrupulous.

On 8 Sept 2011, after long negotiations, I signed the deed for Victory Church for Din l-Art Ħelwa. Today the Victory Church deed is considered to be the non plus ultra of Guardianship deeds, we hope this is what prospective owners for commercial leases of historic sites will receive. Restoring Victory Church meant raising some 1.5 million euros. This Blessed Lady on high has really looked after us. We have pledges of some 1.3 million and work began on this national monument in 2012. Xutu Tower in Wied iz-Zurrieq has followed.

The example of DLH in the protection of Built Heritage cannot be more finely epitomized than with the institution in 2004 of the Architectural heritage Award now to celebrate its 11th anniversary. Established by Martin Scicluna, our former President, it continues to be ably lead by Maria Grazia Cassar. Last year’s award to the Harbour Club Restaurant in a neglected part of the Harbour area will have a ripple effect all the way to the much neglected Perellos isolation hospital and Barrierra Wharf, in the same way as the prize given to the Church of the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt had years later on Pinto Wharf in 2005, itself a Silver Medal winner from both DLH and Europa Nostra.

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM

To lead by example locally is a role we do outstandingly well but achieving international recognition has been the highest honour for DLH and for Malta.

In 2002 the Garden of Rest wins the Europa Nostra Silver Medal for outstanding restoration, the very first ever silver medal award to Malta “for the admirable, painstaking recovery, careful restoration of the monuments of the Msida Bastion Cemetery, and for the conversion of this derelict historic site into a public garden”. Andy Welsh and Jenny, group leaders for the project are to be commended for 11 years of work. Presenting the award in the local ceremony, President of Malta Guido de Marco said: “You managed to give life to a cemetery’. This year the Garden made the news when the National Geographic voted it as one of the top five most beautiful cemeteries in Europe.

In 2005 Judge Maurice Caruana Curran was awarded the Europa Nostra Silver Medal for Dedication to Cultural Heritage, for his unwavering commitment to the ideals of conservation, for his ability to speak fearlessly for heritage, for his unflinching spirit of volunteerism, considered by all in Malta to be the pioneer and pillar of the national conservation movement’. You will recognize these words as those of Martin Scicluna, our former President, who wrote the citation. When DLH became a member of Europa Nostra, Maurice Caruana Curran was invited to give the opening address at the 1967
Strasbourg Forum. His address was entitled *Problems of Coastal Conservation*. He appealed to governments not to condemn us to 300 years of ugliness due to rapid coastal development. He spoke about the need to protect the sea already recognised at the *Pacem in Maribus* Convention in 1971 held in Malta alongside Thor Heyerdahl, the ethnographer explorer writer of the Kontiki expeditions. Even back then, governments were not spared the multitude of issues threatening our cultural landscape.

Subsequent DLH teams have shouted out for better planning and environmental conservation condemning lack of political will. We only have to read the speeches made at each AGM by each Executive President, all our resolutions and letters to Prime Ministers, there is another book there.

In 2006 a DLH shouted out about the proposed development of Ta’ Cenc, obtaining some 10,000 signatures, so that in 2015 Mgarr ix-Xini is still pristine. We may lose it next time around, but we will have delayed it. In 2006 we took to the streets again on the extension of development boundaries and I dare say we will do so again soon.

In 2007 Martin Galea as Executive President, played a pivotal role in found the Heritage Parks Federation and establishing the first ever national park at Il-Majjistral, saving 6 km of coastline from golf courses. That is 2% of our coast. It is not the 7% of the UK National Trust, but they have been around for 180 years, we have some catching up to do!

While for the millennium, Martin Galea worked very hard to set up Foresta 2000 with Birdlife Malta and the Parks Division, a successful project that has seen 20,000 trees planted above the bird sanctuary below the Red Tower.

In Dec 2013, we took to the streets again to protest against the Monster at Mistra. On 31 Oct 2014 the Six Presidents’ Open letter to the Prime Minister made the headlines. It highlighted our grave concerns about the state of the environment and this government’s intentions to further besiege the landscape. It is also a cri de coeur that summarises the havoc that weak protection by successive administrations has wreaked on our cultural landscape over the last fifty years.

Led by former Executive President Dr Petra Caruana Dingli and Council Member Perit Joanna Spiteri Staines, in Nov 2014 DLH launched Save the Countryside Facebook Campaign which is touching new audiences with the beauty of This Fair Land. At the time of writing this article, the page has 12,500 followers.

Our struggle to save heritage is told in Stanley Farrugia Randon’s wonderful new book *Din l-Art Helwa*, Heritage Saved 1965 - 2015 which will surely inspire future generations. We commend him for his four years of work dedicated to this project, apart from all the restoration work with which he is involved.
A MATERIALISTIC MENTALITY

Today our natural environment is threatened more than ever by a materialistic mentality where success is rated by how quickly you make money. Sadly, the use of property purely for financial gain is still very attractive. The current administration is fast dropping most of the protective environment measures painstakingly introduced in the last twenty years, rendering it possible to take development to places where one could not do before, and rendering illegalities legal through amnesties. Government has placed itself above the law with state led projects no longer requiring approvals, such as the upgrading of country roads to farms. While modern agricultural machinery needs passage, the loss of trees, water catchment areas and archaeological remains require monitoring. Valletta’s gracious interiors are being gutted, falling prey to glitzy jewellery shops and boutique hotels, while its market stalls are a blight wherever they remain, especially at its new entrance.

Mepa’s environment protection function seems inexistent and except for rubber stamping development, it has become redundant. By its own admission it has not coped with decades of illegalities. If locations of street markets in World Heritage Cities are planned without it being consulted why – I ask – is it needed at all? The Mepa Chairman has admitted he was not consulted on the granting of amnesties, just as the Minister for Environment said he was not consulted on the new Rural policy which allows construction in the countryside. The development horse has bolted, more demolition of urban conservation areas seems to be on the cards, and the countryside is up for grabs. The task list we gave Government in 2014’s AGM lies ignored. DLH wants scheduling to be stepped up both for protected landscapes, and now for entire streetscapes in our gracious urban conservation areas as developers want to demolish these to turn them into the standard ‘Four Floors with Penthouse’ anonymity. Well it is these matters and more we shall take up with the Prime Minister. we have not forgotten his invitation to dialogue with environmentalists during his New Year’s Eve message and are holding him to it. Environmentalists too have a vote and they shall use it when the time comes. In the meantime our landscape as we know it is set to change.

DLH’s work to fight ugliness and to save beauty cannot be more clearly laid out then in that first letter from Sir Hugh Casson, which bade us:

‘promote a policy of creative preservation of our lovely island’s natural and architectural heritage, in small things as well as large. For this it is important to keep an alert eye upon all new development and ensure that its standards and quality of design do not fall below the BEST of what it replaces.’

With fifty years of crass development of insensitive and abysmal quality, where new and old vie with each other, with hybrids that border on the ridiculous, this should not be too difficult. The one singular improvement we have had is Valletta’s entrance. 50 years ago Europe’s intelligentsia and the best minds in Malta wished the organisation a long, successful and very busy life. Together with the other five DLH Executive Presidents, I too wish successive generations of DLH volunteers many more decades of fighting passionately and caring lovingly for our wonderful heritage. It is a unique privilege leading Din l-Art Helwa and Malta is well worth it.
First may I say how honoured and pleased I am to be your guest speaker here today – honoured for obvious reasons I think, pleased for more specific ones. First it is flattering.

Secondly it gives me a chance to see once again your historic and (so far!) still beautiful island, and thirdly because it gives me the chance of congratulating you, my hosts, members of Din l-Art Helwa – if you are not members I hope you will be after tonight – which in two years has already achieved a membership of over 600, and in particular the Hon. Mr Justice Caruana Curran, President of this Association, upon your enterprises and hard work fighting on this desperately important battlefield – for battlefield it most certainly is – chaotic, bewildering, fragmented, in which it is sometimes genuinely difficult to know who’s side one is on and for how long. Nevertheless, I am genuinely surprised to have been asked:

(a) because I am an architect; and those who love beauty (as you, as members of your Society must certainly do) seldom love architects; and

(b) because I am, as it were, a stranger here happily ignorant of your particular problems and difficulties. This ignorance has its advantages, for I genuinely do not know whose toes I am going to tread on tonight, and those who limp as they leave this beautiful theatre, even if they deserve their bruises, will, I hope, accept them bravely as having been dealt out in innocence.

Now having indulged in this traditional protest of my inadequacy for tonight’s talk, I shall continue, equally traditionally, to prove it. We have got a lot to do and not much time to do it. So may I clear the ground to begin with?

**BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATION**

First, throughout this talk I am going to use the word “conserve” rather than “preserve”. “Conserve” means “wise use” and implies development. “Preserve” has undertones, however unjust, of “embalmment”. Somehow people today think of “preserve” as static and of “conserve” as dynamic.

Secondly, since we are among friends, let us disarm our enemies by admitting the dangers of conservation. They are nostalgia, permanence, timidity, lack of realism and obstructionism, which are all negative forces. We all know about these faults. Let us guard against them in the coming campaign.

Thirdly, since we are involved in battle, let us have a slogan and principles to fight for. May I suggest as our slogan Sansovino’s prescription:

“A city should be built for the convenience and satisfaction of those who live there – and to the great surprise of strangers.”

As principles? May I propose three for your acceptance:

1. We live in an age of technology – motorcars, aerodromes, power stations, factories, jukeboxes, water skiing, and we must come to terms with it, and not pretend it does not exist.

2. You (and I in England) live in a small and overcrowded island. This means there is no room to mess about. It is like living in a boat. Safety, comfort and pleasure depend upon “a place for everything and everything in its place”.

3. Although ultimately an environment is everybody’s responsibility, the chief responsibility lies – as with a factory, a farm, or a household – with management, i.e. the Government and their specialist advisers. I cannot say that in England, or from what I have seen here, we have any of us much to be proud of – and I speak here for my colleagues in the profession of planning and architecture and administration, as a guilty man myself. Having said this, let us waste no time blaming other people for the mess we are in. We made it ourselves, directly as individuals or indirectly through our chosen representatives.

Now we all know that every piece of land here – since there is so little of it – (as in Britain) must be wisely used. There are the development demands of industry – factories, dockyards, housing, agriculture, hotels and power stations. There are mass recreational needs to be catered for. There are minority but essential enthusiasms to be watched over – archaeology, bird watching, rock-climbing, skin-diving, cycle-racing, and even, perhaps simple contemplation.

**NEED FOR IMMEDIATE SURVEY**

How are all these conflicting needs to be met? Only, I suggest, by a thorough and immediate survey and value assessment of what is already there, followed by a strong imaginative and creative policy for action. Obviously no battle can be won without good intelligence. That intelligence must be made available now – i.e. within six months – if not already there. Concentrate on the most vulnerable areas and treat them as “crash problems”. Our Government gave our coastal authorities six months maximum to assemble the necessary information. Better even incomplete information now, than full information that is out of date and useless because it has taken five years to collect.

Now, collecting this information honestly is not difficult or onerous. Some of it can be done by voluntary societies like you, some of it needs people no more expert than senior students. Everybody can help, and the more widely based the help, the more involved people are, the better. But facts are no substitutes for judgements – and these will be difficult.
Lots of money and hundreds of people are personally involved and the atmosphere will be highly charged.

There are three questions to get clear:
- Whether to conserve
- What to conserve
- How to conserve

WHETHER TO CONSERVE
I hope by our presence here tonight we all signify our belief that despite all the dangers previously referred to, a policy of positive conservation of a national heritage, natural or man-made, is not only desirable, but wholly admirable. It is irrational maybe but deeply set, and rightly so, in the human mind. It is also most properly enshrined in your Constitution: “The State shall safeguard the landscape and the historical and artistic patrimony of the nation.” You yourselves have said it. Let us therefore, waste no more time on this question.

WHAT TO CONSERVE
I suggest five categories can be named:
1. The masterpiece – a cathedral, a temple, a castle, this theatre.
2. The group masterpiece – a finely grouped hilltop village, a handsome street, a line of fortifications. None of them individually masterpieces, but together undoubtedly one.
3. The place or building or object associated with a great man or an historic event. (This is a literary, not an aesthetic matter, and is assessed, therefore, on different values).
4. The fragment or oddity – a ruined windmill, a memorial stone, an archaeological relic, a statue, a paved courtyard, a particularly well-shaped tree.
5. A piece of natural scenery, large or small, tame or wild.

SAFEGUARDING THE COASTLINE
Now I would like to concentrate for a few moments on the field of conservation of the coastline, as it is of such vital importance both to you and to us in the United Kingdom. For both of us it is perhaps our greatest glory. We neither of us have much of it, and it is a fast disappearing asset. It is not impossible – unless you do something about it – that Malta, instead of being surrounded with rocks and sand and sea-spray will be a concentration camp of fences, car-parks, hotels, villas, litter bins and tarmac – and who will want to come here then?

You are, in fact, as we were, on the verge of suffering a major defeat upon your beaches – made all the more tragic because it is self-inflicted – and it is a defeat for which you will receive from future generations absolutely no sympathy at all. These problems, which are the products of mass holidays and mobility, and with which you, I am sure, are familiar, include the following:
1. Coast roads, even panoramic roads are too often barriers separating land from sea, thus mutilating that magic line where land and water meet. Watch out for this.
2. There is a conflict between car-parking near the sea where it is convenient but also hideous, and inland where it can more easily be hidden but motorists will not use it. This can only be solved by forbidding parking along the road, but the ban must be strictly enforced.
3. The seaside, because it attracts crowds, attracts squalor, shacks, litter, notice, fencing and the other excesses of what has unfortunately acquired the description “seaside slum”. There is no fitter description. The secret here is to concentrate – do not dissipate.
4. New demands – water skiing, marinas, bring new problems to the ears as well as the eyes. Keep noise and silence apart.
5. Together these problems and demands tend to produce similar answers (or attempted answers) and tend to iron out all differences of personality between one seaside area and another and make them all uniformly faceless. This is fatal.

The solution here again is the familiar one – the simple doctor’s rule – examine, diagnose, prescribe. I assume your examination survey has been done – it is inexcusable if it has not been done – I assume you are, like us, now trying to sort out how to meet the conflicting demands. This brings me to my last question: How to conserve?

HOW TO CONSERVE
Here I am on uncertain ground. I know what we in Britain do (with varying success) but do not know how you manage. One thing is true about both of us. We are not doing enough, (a) because we lack the will and (b) because our planning (since in the end it usually means trying to prevent, in the interests of the community, somebody from doing what they want to do) is to most people either a nuisance or a joke and is beset by the human frailties of expediency, delays, fake tolerance, tidiness and greed. Our conservation machine in Britain is a good one.

We have firm legislation, a system of officially recording in various grades buildings and landscapes of outstanding interest or beauty, a Royal Fine Art Commission that vets the design of all buildings to be placed on positions of more than local importance, and a Historic Buildings Council that makes grants of up to half a million a year to maintain monuments and buildings of a national importance. We also have a network of Amenity Societies of all sizes and interests, the principal one of which is the National Trust, and (thank goodness) a huge army of cranks of all kinds who keep an eye open for vandalism even if they cannot always prevent it happening. But none of this is any good if – as so often happens – the real will is lacking. I hope it is present at least here tonight.

BETTER LEGISLATION NEEDED
Believe me, I know your difficulties, principally shortage of staff and money – plus, I venture to suggest, shortage of clear aims. Your legislation has had a confused history, has proved inadequate and is being revised, but cannot, even with the promised help of experts, be re-drafted and working in under tow years. Your listing procedure is out-of-date and starved of funds. Your Aesthetics Board seems not to be treated seriously enough – perhaps through lack of vigour within itself. Your laws seem better framed for protection of monuments than for the conservation of natural beauty, and not attentive enough to monuments in their setting. The building of the wall round the neolithic temple at Hagar Qim is a case in point, even if carried out with a good intention.

Your fines for aesthetic misbehaviour are ludicrously small. There seems to be no co-ordination of policy in such small, but important, items as the purchasing of street lamps, street signs and other street amenities. Your hardworking planning staff have no time for creative thought and must spend their time in trying to keep their heads above the rising tide of routine paperwork. You are, in fact in exactly the same situation as most countries in the world, but with an easier (because more compact) area to handle and with one tremendous advantage – a glorious natural building material in ample supply right under your feet. So all is not lost.

CRISIS FOR MALTA’S BEAUTY
History provides endless examples of Malta, when faced with a real crisis, coping with it courageously and briskly. But crisis – I must repeat this again – is your situation today. Obviously a crash situation demands crash attitudes and crash techniques. Bearing in mind our slogan and our principles may I suggest – once we have completed our survey on the front line – a few rules to follow? They are not in any order of importance:

1. Coast roads, even panoramic roads are too often barriers separating land from sea, thus mutilating that magic line where land and water meet. Watch out for this.
2. The group masterpiece – a finely grouped hilltop village, a handsome street, a line of fortifications. None of them individually masterpieces, but together undoubtedly one.
3. The place or building or object associated with a great man or an historic event. (This is a literary, not an aesthetic matter, and is assessed, therefore, on different values).
4. The fragment or oddity – a ruined windmill, a memorial stone, an archaeological relic, a statue, a paved courtyard, a particularly well-shaped tree.
5. A piece of natural scenery, large or small, tame or wild.

1. The masterpiece – a cathedral, a temple, a castle, this theatre.
2. The group masterpiece – a finely grouped hilltop village, a handsome street, a line of fortifications. None of them individually masterpieces, but together undoubtedly one.
3. The place or building or object associated with a great man or an historic event. (This is a literary, not an aesthetic matter, and is assessed, therefore, on different values).
4. The fragment or oddity – a ruined windmill, a memorial stone, an archaeological relic, a statue, a paved courtyard, a particularly well-shaped tree.
5. A piece of natural scenery, large or small, tame or wild.
1. Beware of over-enthusiastic antiquarianism, period-snobbery or indiscriminate preservation. This, however well meant, can lead to embalment, paralysis and victory by default to the vandals.

2. Beware of aesthetic rigidity – the formal axial approach to a village church is very dull and uninteresting.

3. Do not confuse judgement with justice; the first is essential, the second impossible.

4. Beware of the cute, the artificially primitive, the curio souvenir, the dressing-up box device.

5. Guard relentlessly your specialities – a hilltop village, a small harbour front, a skyline silhouette. In cases of very great importance or difficulty, full-size mock-ups in scaffold and building board may be justified. If somebody wants to build near a national monument he must be ready to take, and pay for, a bit of extra trouble. After all, we have got to look at it.

6. Do not let the best be the enemy of the good. Modest improvements now should not be postponed for long-term utopias.

7. Do not be over-fussy over small things. You will only get known as fuss-pots and lose respect. People have to live and work. They are not exhibits in a museum.

8. Do not be thrown into panic by the motor car, nor spend millions of pounds and great technical ingenuity on temporary palliative. Obviously you must segregate through, local and pedestrian traffic; avoid widening narrow picturesque roads or streets (make the motorist go slower or go round or even walk); keep car-parks as far as possible out of sight or screened from direct view.

9. Enlist the aid of local newspapers to spot vandalism and encourage thoughtful improvement. They are usually on the right side – and anyway they love a good argument.

10. Never relax, for the battle is never over. Do not forget that the quickest way to kill a good idea is to swamp it with praise and do nothing active about it. Therefore, keep on attacking, but helpfully. Praise Government when it does something well. They do sometimes, and they like praise – they get so little of it. Be positive. Involve everybody in projects. Get the old fountains going. Have an anti-sign, anti-wirescape campaign. Agitate for the Church, the Armed Services and the Government to be subject to the same aesthetic controls as everybody else (why not?).
Historic 1965 Resolution Concerning the Establishment of the National Association Called Din l-Art Ħelwa (“This Fair Land”)  

The Founder Members of Din l-Art Ħelwa (“This Fair Land”)  
meeting at the Manoel Theatre, Valletta, this 9th day of July, 1965:

Considering that Malta and Gozo have inherited from their past a historic and artistic heritage of monuments, buildings and sites, as well as other objects, of well-known and indeed, in certain respects, unique significance;

Considering also that nature has endowed these Islands with rural and coastal landscapes which enhance their beauty;

Considering that this historic, artistic and natural heritage, as known examples bear witness, is in peril of being lost or greatly damaged due to the ravages of time and to the mistakes which are sometimes made by persons unheedful of its importance;

Considering that such loss or damage would be severely detrimental to the spiritual, physical and material well-being of the people of Malta and Gozo, as well as to the aesthetic pleasure and happy relaxation of their visitors from other lands and of those who make these Islands their home;

Considering that while progress and modern development are essential they make it of the utmost urgency to formulate balanced policies and to adopt positive measures for the safeguarding of such vital heritage before irretrievable loss or damage results;

Considering that the present generation of the people of Malta and Gozo have very special responsibilities in this regard, and that to promote a greater public awareness and to stimulate voluntary initiatives a national, non-governmental body should be established, devoted to the task of conserving in co-operation with the competent State organs, the national heritage of these Islands.

RESOLVE:

TO FOUND, as they do hereby found, a national association for the safeguarding of the historic, artistic and natural heritage of the nation, which association shall be known by the second, third and fourth words of the National Anthem Din l-Art Ħelwa (“This Fair Land”) and shall be constituted in accordance with the Rules prepared by the promoters of this Association and distributed at this meeting, three copies whereof, together with three copies of this Resolution, are for future record being signed by the Chairman of this meeting the Hon. Mr Justice Maurice Caruana Curran and by two other Founder Members here present, namely: Mr Salvino Mizzi and Dr Joseph H Reynaud, it being understood that the foregoing approval of the Rules is provisional in the sense that an Extraordinary General Meeting will be called by the Council within six months for the purpose of giving consideration to any amendments thereof that may be moved, at which Extraordinary Meeting such amendments may be decided upon by a simple majority of those present whatever their number.

APPROVED in our presence at the Inaugural Meeting held at the Manoel Theatre on the 9th July 1965, in witness whereof we have hereunto placed our signatures on the same date.

FOUNDER MEMBERS:  
Salvino Mizzi
Joseph H Reynaud

CHAIRMAN OF MEETING:  
Maurice Caruana Curran
Let me sum up briefly the task to which the promoters of Din l-Art Ħelwa call you and through you all in Malta this day. It is:

To promote beauty,
To fight ugliness,
To preserve our heritage, in city and village, in the country and by the sea.

This is a task in which you will have everyone’s support – for we all love This Fair Land. But you will not have everyone’s understanding – for we are not all blessed with eyes to see what improves, what mars or what is crumbling, and you will not have everyone’s help – for we are not blessed with determination, courage and energy to fight for what is worth saving. You are putting your hands to a task which is as arduous as it is essential in Malta today. Welcome to a challenge which will engage all your interest, your insight and your initiative!

If you approve the resolution and proposals put before you today you will be assuming a real responsibility to the people of these islands and a moral obligation involving a heavy schedule of individual effort. There is no one else covering the whole of this field and many will look to you for guidance and for action. You will find, I believe, that your endeavours will group themselves into four main headings: Preservation, Restoration, Education and Prevention.

Sir Maurice Dorman was Governor of Malta from 1962 to 1964 and Governor General from 1964 to 1971.

Firstly, Preservation:

By this I mean activities akin to those of Italia Nostra or of the National Trust in Britain. There are three things you can do here. First, while you cannot immediately develop an organisation which would become a repository for the Stately Homes of Malta you can start working to this end. You will first have to prove your ability and obtain a measure of public confidence. But “mighty things from small beginnings grow”, and we have to start somewhere.

I can foresee the possibility of government, landowners and people being prepared to consign to your care strips of coastland so that they could not be developed and would forever be preserved as they are now. I can imagine your accepting the care of an old house, furnishing it by loans of good things from your members, and maintaining it in conjunction with the Public Works Department from fees taken when it is opened to visitors. But this will take time.

Secondly, you can develop and promote and preserve areas of outstanding natural beauty. You can seek agreement with landowners as to what those areas might be and so prepare the way.

Thirdly, you can in conjunction with the Museum authorities seek to establish which buildings are really worth preservation and to publish a list of them.
Some work has already been done on this, but it is my impression that much remains to be done – all buildings of equal antiquity are not of equal value. There may also be buildings of comparatively modern character, of the last century, which are worth preserving – what about the hospital at Bighi or the Victoria Lines for instance?

Secondly, Restoration:

By this I mean activities akin to those undertaken by the Civic Trust in Britain. The removal of eyesores in town or countryside. Let me quote a few practical examples of what might be done:

Between Floriana and Valletta could not the filling station and advertisers be dissuaded from spoiling an area of great dignity by petty posters which are a bad rather than good advertisement?

In many places barbed wire is offensive. Could not a working party seek to get the Services, farmers and the Agricultural Department, all of whom offend in this way, to remove such eyesores?

In country areas, rusty oil drums are hideous on dry stonewalls. What can be done to persuade farmers to replace them?

Could youth groups be organised to get rid of other eyesores in the countryside, rusted target frames on the seashore at Ta Qawra and other Servicon relics or to rebuild parts of the Victoria Lines.

But everyone can make their own list of eyesores. We can all see that there is scope for endless work of removal, renovation and restoration.

Thirdly, Education:

This might be said to be part of both preservation and prevention. It is not only education of the public to care for their countryside and beaches, but persuasion of advertisers, builders and public authorities to do what is good rather than what is easy, cheap, messy, or garish – to awaken public interest in good street furnishings, in good architecture and in good planning.

I think of good and bad shop fronts and shop signs, of danger from soft drink signs, of overhead cables criss-crossing the streets, of posters misplaced by Government departments, but most of all of the misuse of colour. The fishermen painting their craft never go wrong. The doors and surrounds, the shutters and window frames of a building in Malta stone is seldom done badly.

There is an instinctive understanding among the people here. But one has only think of the “coat of many colours” of Xemxija, the silver B.P. tanks, the blue smoke stack of the Phoenicia laundry, the juxta position of red and green benches in the gardens of San Anton, to realise how much needs to be done. The sun of course will be the greatest help in peeling off men’s worst efforts. But could not some architect members produce a brochure on the painting of modern buildings in Malta.

Fourthly, Prevention:

Here the Association’s role is, when all else fails, to persuade the Government and its ministries to take power to prevent and prohibit the few from marring the enjoyment and appreciation of the many. If necessary, to outlaw hoarding to make illegal billposting – there are many other methods of advertisement open to promoters today. But more important than this is the prevention of haphazard development, the prevention of ugly, urban sprawl, the prevention of overcrowding by reserving open spaces and prevention of the unsightly by the control of industry and of workshops – all this regimes the adoption of effective town and country planning legislation. It is part of your business to ensure and to show that the public do care about these things and it is on that basis that a Government can then act.

I have adopted briefly to outline something of the practical scope of activities which I see as lying before you. It seems a formidable list and you may doubt your ability to tackle it. I do not suggest that you should tackle it all at once. But let me offer you three maxims in the conduct of your affairs:

Be practical – it is no use to say, however true it may be, that the biggest eyesore in Malta is television aerials, because they are here to stay. There is bound to be a clash of interest in those problems.

Tackle the things you can do and do them well.

Be persistent – because you cannot make much impact on a big problem, do not be put off doing all you can in smaller ways.

Never forget the power of persistent publicity.

Be co-operative – you will get better results by offering constructive help than offensive criticism.

Remember that there are others who have been working many years at some of these matters and often with good success; the Museum Authorities, the Aesthetics Board and the Public Works Department – you can help each other greatly.

Your tools of action are persuasion and publicity. Your means of action are men and women of every walk in life prepared to give time and effort to these tasks. You will then be surprised how much help and support you attract from the public, from the authorities and from others interested in Malta.

I wish you every success in the promotion of beauty, the fighting of ugliness and the preservation of our heritage in This Fair Land.
The Early Days

Philip Zammit Briffa
Honorary Secretary General of Din l-Art Ħelwa 2001 - 2005

For 40 years, the association’s volunteers have striven – against the odds, I would add – to preserve our traditional and historical heritage, exemplified in our buildings and monuments, and to safeguard the flora and fauna so typical of our Islands.

During this long period, commencing less than a year after the Maltese Islands achieved independence, the association’s efforts have been greatly influenced by intense political upheaval, building booms and the development of tourism.

Throughout, Din l-Art Ħelwa has never wavered in pursuing its raison d’être – to promote beauty: to banish ugliness. It has, in the main, been an uphill struggle. We have had our successes and have saved various historic sites for enjoyment by future generations. We have advised and argued against the continuous advance of so-called progress that seeks to destroy our heritage for short-term monetary gain.

Some battles we have won, others proved unwinnable and the result is there for all to see. We will, however, persist in the belief that there is still much that can be saved. It will be, however – as the Duke of Wellington exclaimed after Waterloo – “A close run thing”.

While browsing through our old records, I came across various papers and correspondence relating to the setting-up and the first few years of Din l-Art Ħelwa and I would like to share this information with you.

A group of public-spirited gentlemen had, for some months, been discussing the need for an organisation “to do the kind of work which is the special interest of the Civic Trust in England”. The idea was greatly supported by the Governor-General, Sir Maurice Dorman, who was always prepared to give his advice and encouragement, and a Promoters Committee comprising the following was set up:

Chev. V. Bonello
The Hon. Justice M. Caruana Curran, LLD, BA
Mr R. de Giorgio, BE&A, FRIBA
Mr M. Gatt, MBE
Mr E. R. Leopardi
Mr J. Manduca
Dr E. Mercieca, MD, DMR(D) (Lond)
Dr G. Randon, LLD

After much preparatory work and much heart-searching to find a suitable name – Din l-Art Helwa, the first words of the Maltese national anthem, an inspired choice – an article appeared in the press entitled “Protecting The Island’s Heritage” by Judge Maurice Caruana Curran on 12 April 1965, proposing to set up some form of National Trust and outlining the aims of the association. This elicited many letters of interest and support from the general public.

The inaugural meeting was planned to take place at The Manoel Theatre, Valletta, on 9 July 1965. A letter from the theatre stated that the request for the “loan” of the theatre could not be acceded to as “a fee must be charged every time the public is admitted to the theatre”.

However, the letter goes on to say “However – both in their individual and private capacity, and realising fully the laudable aims of your organisation – the members of the Management Committee offer to meet the rent liability of the Theatre, so that the general meeting of your organisation can take place at the Manoel” – a most generous gesture.

On the occasion of the inauguration, many letters of support and congratulation were received. Extracts from a few are reproduced elsewhere in this commemorative publication.

The inaugural meeting commenced at 5.15 pm and an address was delivered by the Governor General, Sir Maurice Dorman. Among those invited were the Acting Prime Minister, the British High Commissioner, Sir John Martin, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker and Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Sir Maurice touched on the aims of Din l-Art Helwa, which would be grouped under four main headings: Preservation, Restoration, Education and Prevention. Extracts are reproduced elsewhere.
for the complete restoration of an old windmill at Naxxar which would animate a large tract of countryside.

A commission consisting of Judge Montanaro Gauci and Mr Richard England to collaborate with the Qormi Civic Committee on a matter of some concern to one of the Qormi parish churches.

Advice given to the Government against the proposal to build a cafe/restaurant on the Upper Barrakka Saluting Battery. The council expressed its concern at the call for tenders for the 50-year grant on emphyteusis and its development involving the raising of permanent structures within the area.

In April 1966, the Governor-General Sir Maurice Dorman agreed with great pleasure to extend his patronage to the association and was also nominated as a benefactor.

The first general meeting was held at the University Theatre in Valletta on 4 June 1966. Judge Caruana Curran expressed his gratitude to the British High Commissioner Sir John Martin who, together with Lady Martin, was the first Life Member of Din l-Art Helwa and was donating furniture, carpets and office machinery for the association’s offices at 133 Britannia (now Melita) Street, Valletta – at the time being shared with the Malta Relief Fund. He also reported that the association had been invited by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Tourism to nominate a representative on the Tourist Board. The name of Dr Edward Mercieca was submitted. In addition Chev. V. Bonello was appointed to serve as Ecclesiastical Liaison Officer for the preservation of religious monuments.

The 1966 Annual Report also listed the first corporate members of Din l-Art Helwa. These were:

- The Corona Club
- Friends of Malta GC
- Floriana School Old Boys Association
- Marsovin Ltd
- The Melita Band Club
- St Catherine Band Club
- St Gabriel Band Club
- The St John Ambulance Brigade
- St Michael’s College
- Xaghra Cultural Centre
- The Boys Scouts Association
- The Royal University of Malta

In January 1967, the Governor General Sir Maurice Dorman declared open the headquarters of Din l-Art Helwa, housed in a 17th century building at 133 Melita Street, Valletta.

Three months later, Judge Caruana Curran wrote in The Times of Malta an account of activities in the first few months of the association’s life. These included:

The setting up of an ad hoc committee composed of Colonel G. Tabona as chairman, Chev. V. Bonello, Chev. E.R. Leopardi, Mr Lorenzo Zahra and Commander D.J. Calnan. The committee was to work in close cooperation with the Vittoriosa Historical Society to repair and tidy up the historic “postes” of the Great Siege and for the restoration of some of the Borgo’s monuments.

A special committee composed of Judge Caruana Curran, Professor J. Galea and Dr G. Randon to discuss, with a prominent Maltese philanthropist, a project...
Since 1965, this building had been shared with the Malta Relief Fund and when this organisation was wound up, the whole building was transferred to Din l-Art Ħelwa mainly due to initiatives taken by Judge Maurice Caruana Curran. After the official opening the UK High Commissioner Sir John Martin presented Din l-Art Ħelwa with items of furniture. The premises were blessed by council member Mgr E. Coleiro.

1967 was described as a year of consolidation, during which there were moments of great satisfaction deriving from the results obtained in some cases and the increasing measure of official and public recognition. Needless to say, there were also times of great despondency.

In his address to the general meeting, the president said that it was the considered view of the association that the last year had seen a further fall in the standard of appearance of our country and, in particular, he referred to:

- The erection of too many high buildings such as in Paceville and Qawra.
- The rapid urbanisation and absorption of most of the littoral of the north west region, of bays and ridges by tourist and villa development.
- The terrible mixture of styles and architecture, without any apparent attempt by the responsible authorities to control them.
- The gimmickry of the Perspex advertisements jutting out of every possible shop and business establishment, which is unworthy of, and in contrast with, the setting of our towns and villages, especially the older ones.

In 1967, the Youth Section was set up and did marvellous work cleaning up the Ħal Millieri Chapel. During the same year, Din l-Art Ħelwa became a member of Europa Nostra, which had been set up in 1963.

The president addressed the general assembly in Strasbourg on the subject of coastline preservation. Judge Maurice Caruana Curran served on the council of Europa Nostra until he retired in 2003 and his place was taken by the present executive president Martin Scicluna.

Newsletter No. 1 was published this year, the cost being borne by the Hon. Mabel Strickland and the Progress Press. It contained the text of a lecture given by the eminent architect Sir Hugh Casson at the Manoel Theatre on 10 January 1967.

A full version of this speech is reproduced elsewhere in this publication.

At the end of the year, on 31 December, the Torca published a poem by Anton Buttigieg, known as the Poet of Nature, then a Labour MP and later President of Malta, dedicated to the president and members of Din l-Art Ħelwa. This read as follows:

**FIL-MIŁIED**

Iwarrad ir-rancis fil-blat u l-moqhxa,
Fi-ghojjet u fil-widien ta’ Malta tagħna.
Alla
Jinsab fil-hlejjajt kolha;
Iżda nistħajjel
Li fil-Miśied
Jitwiedel bambin ċkejken
Fin-nieqa safra u bajda
Ta’ kull narcís!
U biex il-Bambin jorqod
Ferħan f’din-nieqa sbejħa,
Omm Alla giet mis-sema
U mlieta kollha fwejħa!

**Translation**

**CHRISTMAS TIME**

December
The narcissus grows and flowers
Amidst the rocks and wasteland
On the hills and in the valleys
Of our dear land, Malta.
God
Is in all creation
But I think that every Christmas

A tiny baby Jesus is born
In the yellow and white cradle
Of every narcissus flower.
And so that Jesus sleeps
Serenely in this beautiful cradle,
The Mother of God comes down from Heaven
To fill it with a sweet fragrance!

In these first few years, as may well be expected, Din l-Art Ħelwa acted as a pressure group, making suggestions, giving advice and sometimes even launching protests against what were considered ill-advised projects or badly-sited developments. It was only when the boom subsided that the association decided to extend its scope to “Trust” duties. Its first expense was the taking over of Wignacourt Tower in St Paul’s Bay on encroachment terms in 1970. Since then, the association has restored a good number of buildings and monuments and finally, after many years of frustrating discussions, Din l-Art Ħelwa formally took over nine Government properties to look after on behalf of the nation, having previously been given on trust by the Church the three chapels of St Mary at Bir Miftuħ, the Annunciation at Ħal Millieri and St Roque at Żebbuġ.

Our job is far from over. We face even greater challenges in the future. We will continue to advise and criticise when uncontrolled development threatens our heritage and the environment. We accept the need for a balanced approach to the problems that face us but we insist that our patrimony must remain intact for the enjoyment of generations to come.
Valletta in 1945 - Comments and Proposals

Philip Zammit Briffa
Honorary Secretary General of Din l-Art Ħelwa 2001 - 2005

Article first published in Vigilo, July 2005

For many years now we have been hearing and reading about the revitalisation, rehabilitation and restoration of our capital city, Valletta. Major projects and various initiatives have been proposed by our Government over a period of years, and have been discussed and dissected, criticised, revised, postponed and aborted. Countless seminars, symposia, fora and conferences have been held on the various problems affecting our capital and its restoration of our capital city, Valletta. Major projects and various initiatives have been proposed by our Government over a period of years, and have been discussed and dissected, criticised, revised, postponed and aborted. Countless seminars, symposia, fora and conferences have been held on the various problems affecting our capital and its restoration of our capital city, Valletta.

This issue of Vigilo includes a summary of our Executive President’s address to the Annual General Meeting on the 28 February. Valletta: a City Betrayed addresses the current problems and suggests solutions. In 1945, the Government of Malta published a report prepared by Austen St B Harrison and R Pearce S Hubbard outlining a plan for the reconstruction of Valletta and the three cities. A year of unremitting toil was spent in producing this plan in the face of many difficulties. The report makes intriguing reading and includes various comments and opinions which carry as much weight now as they did 60 years ago. The report is explicit and pulls no punches. I am reproducing parts of it which readers should find of interest and which may, perhaps, influence views that have, so far, proved to be intractable.

In his foreword, the then Governor, Lt-General Sir Edmond Schreiber, wrote that the planners had submitted a plan which incorporated the requirements of modern traffic and amenities with a minimum of fresh demolition and the preservation of the characteristic features of the cities and towns in Malta’s harbour area. It is useful to bear in mind that the population of Valletta then was about 24,000. It is now about 7,000. There were about 6,000 vehicles in Malta whereas now there are over 250,000.

Main Proposals

The Report referred to two radical proposals and commented:

Valletta, with its massive ancient, pierced occasionally by tortuous tunnels of access, its narrow streets, many so steep as to necessitate long flights of steps, and its frequent right-angled road-junctions, is manifestly ill-adapted to motor traffic. Yet these obstacles to the free movement of vehicles are among the characteristics which make the Capital of Malta unique among cities and a place of pilgrimage.

Were Valletta only a relic of the past we should not hesitate to recommend the exclusion of motor traffic from its streets with all the consequential inconvenience of its inhabitants; and we have reason to know that there are some so intoxicated by the glory of its past, and so filled with veneration for the monuments which record it, that they are prepared, or believe they are, to practise any austerity which the proper maintenance of them entails.

Valletta is, however, no such relic but, on the contrary, a city palpitating with life and, as we have also reason to know, there are among its citizens some so conscious of this vital urge that they would raze its ramparts to the rock and replace its canyon-like streets with spacious avenues. It appears to us, as we believe it must to most Maltese, that neither of these suggestions is acceptable, because neither frankly faces all the facts.

Whatever might once have been said in favour of the banning of cars from Valletta, the proposal is now undesirable and impracticable. On the other hand, the suggestion that the work of destruction, begun by the enemy, should be continued by the Government, to prepare the way for a contemporary city untrammelled by relics of the past, is one calculated to appeal only to fanatics. By a generation which has witnessed the wanton ruination of so much of its heritage it is unlikely to find general acceptance.

The proposals for Valletta were shaped by two principal considerations. Firstly, the damage caused by the war did not necessarily warrant radical re-planning. Secondly, every care should be taken to conserve the unique character of what remains of the City of the Order.

Entrance to Valletta

The City Gate area was dealt with in some detail. The planners noted the proposal, made on more than one occasion, to remove not only Kingsgate but also the Curtain linking the Bastion of St James with that of St John. They stated that they were unequivocally opposed to this suggestion, not because they regarded the Gate itself as sacrosanct, but because they were convinced that so important a breach in the enceinte of Valletta would, in the long run, lead inevitably to the destruction of the character of the City as a whole. They recommended, on the contrary, that the entrance should be closed to all wheeled traffic.

The planners also commented on the fact that anyone passing for the first time through the tunnel of Kingsgate must have felt that the principal approach to Valletta was as inconvenient, as in character it was unworthy, of the City of the Knights. Early maps indicated that up to the middle of the 17th century the area in question was free of buildings. Those that were there in 1945 had
been badly damaged by enemy action or were condemned as slum property. The planners' recommendations included the creation of an open space and two buildings on either side which might reasonably rise to the height of the Cavaliers and which should be set behind arcades, the terraced roofs of which might be on the level of Queensway, now Pope Pius V Street.

The latest proposal, which has not been proceeded with, envisaged an underground car park and multi-storey building on Freedom Square, with an open area at the back below St James Cavalier.

The Opera House

The planners then went on to tackle the Opera House. They contended that the Opera House was not a historic building, probably as a result of a schedule drawn up by a committee chaired by Chevalier Hannibal Scicluna and including Chevalier Olaf Gollcher, Major Hugh Braun, Professor Antonio Sciortino and Mr Charles Zammit. This committee chose to regard as historic monuments all ecclesiastical buildings of whatever date, all antiquities of a date prior to 1680 and all structures of a notable historic or aesthetic interest of a date earlier than 1798. The Opera House was completed in 1866 and hence did not qualify.

The planners were not very kind when they described the building's attributes as follows:

It is very generally agreed that the acoustics were execrable; that the line of sight of a high proportion of the seats was unsatisfactory; that the number of seats was, from the point of view of an impresario, insufficient; that the stage, with its wings and loft, were too small; that the actors' dressing-room accommodation was insufficient and that the approach to the building by carriage was impracticable. We had supposed therefore, that the opportunity presented by its destruction would be eagerly seized by a people obviously not lacking in musical and histrionic ability, to erect on the same site or elsewhere, a building better adapted to the contemporary needs of music and the drama.

Upon making enquiries, however, we learned that it was the wish of all those we consulted that the destroyed building should be resuscitated. Such striking and, in our experience, rare unanimity of opinion must be respected; we therefore refrain from making any recommendation.

We would, however, point out in passing that only a person unskilled in the practice of architecture could suppose it possible, without changing its form, satisfactorily to remedy so many serious defects in a building.

Aesthetics

Before bringing the report to a close, Harrison and Hubbard chose to devote a short chapter to a number of matters which have only this in common: that they relate to what in Malta is commonly referred to as "aesthetics". An Aesthetics Board existed in Malta for many years but now seems to have disappeared from view. The planners stated at the time that the existence of this Board was proof that the people of Malta were concerned about the appearance of their cities and were convinced that it had served a useful purpose and that the cities, at least, were more seemly for its labours. They also stated that:

Its very success, however, appears to us to have contributed to the propagation of the popular heresy that good architecture is something which may, at will, be applied to, or withheld from, a structure otherwise utilitarian. The truth, of course, is that good architecture – to quote words familiar in another context – is but the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; and no committee, however constituted, and with whatever powers endowed, can ensure good architecture. Good architecture is the work of good architects.

The 60 or so years that have elapsed since this report was published have seen many new buildings take the place of the destroyed and damaged auberges and other buildings of the Order. The uniqueness of Valletta has created great difficulties in the minds of planners and architects. The new Law courts and the General Workers Union building are not gems of architecture.

We must not repeat these mistakes in the area of City Gate, Freedom Square and the Opera House. How much weight should be given to public opinion? In this particular field, is the public sufficiently discerning and cultured to make a correct judgement? Should the plan be one that is acceptable to the majority, a politician’s solution, or should it be a brave attempt to produce exciting structures that will enhance our capital city while at the same time respecting its uniqueness as a fortified city of World Heritage status?
Hal Millieri Explored
Professor Anthony Bonanno
President of Din l-Art Ħelwa 1999 - 2001

Reproduced from Vigilo 1 (New Series) 1978

The year 1977 has marked another important addition to the archaeological heritage of our Islands. A new archaeological discovery has been made which will remain a significant landmark in the history of the study of Maltese antiquities not, however, for the grandeur or monumentality of its finds, but as the first systemic exploration of a purely medieval site. Towards the materialization of this project Din l-Art Ħelwa has contributed its share.

The Annunciation Chapel at Hal Millieri has since 1968 absorbed great part of the attention and energies of the “National Trust” which has succeeded in restoring to this unique jewel of Maltese architecture and art much of its original brilliance. The abandoned site, consisting of the chapel itself and the surrounding cemetery enclosed by a high boundary wall, was tidied up and cleaned of its overgrown vegetation. Necessary work was carried out to prevent deterioration and the church was opened to the public. The conservation programme reached its culmination with the restoration of the wall paintings by an Italian expert in 1974. The whole effort was crowned by the publication of “Hal Millieri: A Maltese Casale, its Churches and Paintings”, a collection of scientific articles on the history and topography of the ‘lost’ village and the architecture and paintings of the Annunciation church, edited by A. Luttrell.

Medieval Archaeology

It was this publication and the inexhaustible energies of Dr. Luttrell that prompted further research, this time of archaeological nature, intended to clarify a number of problems raised by the study of the architecture of the church and to extend our knowledge of its history to the period prior to the first available documents. Such a ‘field’ exploration promised also to throw light on the structural and planimetric evolution of Maltese churches as well as to provide a basis for a stratified sequence of medieval pottery. Considering the poverty of material and historical documentation of our medieval period the study of stratified pottery is indispensable for reconstructing this ‘dark’ age of Maltese history.

The short but rewarding excavation campaign was conducted in the first two weeks of April and the immediate results were illustrated to the public, by way of a preliminary report, at the headquarters of the Trust on April 18th. In the expectation of the publication of a full, detailed report of the campaign and finds, which are presently being studied, we are limiting ourselves in this short note to the main points of information made public on that occasion.

The excavation has revealed the existence of three churches within the present precinct wall of the Annunciation chapel at Hal Millieri. It was found that the present Annunciation church had been preceded by an earlier church, and that for more than a century it was accompanied by another church of similar shape and dimensions. The latter church, which historical documents say was dedicated to the Visitation of the Virgin Mary, was built against the north side of the Annunciation church and at one stage a communicating door was pierced in the intervening wall. It had a semicircular apse at the east end and was divided into five bays by four transverse arches supported by piers. It also possessed a stone pavement and contained one or two graves.

The excavation inside the Annunciation chapel was made possible by the temporary removal, after carefully numbering and recording the exact position of each slab, of the flagstone pavement of the north half of the church. Beneath it, at a lower level, a floor of beaten earth was discovered which must have belonged to the earlier church. More accurate dates for the construction and rebuilding of this church will hopefully be attainable after the careful study of pottery and coins. We can say, however, that this should be one of the earliest known churches of Malta since it precedes the present one which, it is calculated, must have been erected towards the middle of the fifteenth century. This earlier church, as well as the later one, contained burials in the usual Christian manner, that is, with the heads to the west and facing the altar on the east. The skeletal remains are being studied by the Anatomy Department of the University and a report on them is expected to be included in the final publication. Besides a good sequence of pottery, the dating of which will be aided by the few stratified coins, fragments of painted wall plaster were uncovered one of which shows a good portion of the head of one of the figures which are missing from the restored frescoes.

The project was undertaken under the overall responsibility of the Museum Department to which the Trust is most grateful for its generous help in providing equipment and other facilities. The operations on the site were conducted under the direction of Mr. T. Blagg, from the Institute of Archaeology of the University of London, and the present writer.

A number of volunteers helped with the digging and their conscientious and selfless contribution was appreciated by all. Finally, acknowledgement must also be made of the hard work put into the project by Dr. Luttrell who provided, throughout the operation, not only expert advice on historical points but also physical and moral help.
The Church of the Annunciation at Hal Millieri

The story of its discovery and first rehabilitation intervention

Professor Mario Buhagiar FSA MOM

It was in the autumn of 1967 that I first heard of the Church of the Annunciation from a colleague at St Joseph’s Secondary Technical School, where I was a visiting teacher. I was a young 22-year-old with an enthusiastic interest in Malta’s artistic heritage and had had a couple of articles on wayside chapels published in The Sunday Times of Malta that had attracted his attention. “This is an interesting church”, I remember him telling me, “it is old and it has wall paintings but is not easy to find. I can only tell you that it is within the boundaries of Żurrieq parish in the Hal Millieri area.”

The following Saturday, I was at Hal Millieri with a friend (later Professor) Joseph Falzon. We knew the church of St John but did not know of any other. On a country lane, opposite the church of St John, was an enclosed plot of land (‘clausura’) surrounded by high walls, behind which were tall cypress trees. Joe thought he could also see the top of a bell cot. We decided to investigate. The only access in the wall was a rusty, but securely locked, wrought-iron gate and so the only means of access was to climb the wall and jump into the grounds. This we did – and landed on a thick clump of prickly pears with needle-like spikes: it was not a pleasant experience! But we were compensated for our discomfort by the sight of a small, box-like church in an idyllic setting – an island of old Maltese charm. For me it was love at first sight.

We had no difficulty in gaining entry to the church: the doors were falling to pieces. Inside were bundles of straw, a winnowing-fork, the remains of the fuselage of a biplane (presumably salvaged from a Second World War wreck) and two or three hens, that greeted us with their clucking. Our attention was immediately captivated by the monumental hieratical saints painted on the walls.

I told Joe that something had to be done to save the church from further degradation. At St Joseph’s I had gathered together a group of teenagers who were interested in archaeology which, on the invitation of Fr Victor Camilleri, had cleared of soil and debris the two burial chambers in the St Agatha catacombs complex in Rabat. Could this group not be entrusted with a similar exercise at Hal Millieri? The archpriest of Żurrieq was not encouraging. The church and its precincts were under the care of one Pawlu iċ-Ċirkes, a farmer who was the last to practice the trade of a cotton-beater (daqqaq tat-tajjar). Iċ-Ċirkes was not enthusiastic about the idea and was creating difficulties.

It was at this point that I was approached by George Serracino Inglott, a young Jesuit who had established a similar student circle at St Aloysius College. Why, he asked, not join forces and form a common front? It was George Serracino Inglott’s idea that we should work under the umbrella of Din l-Art Helwa, which was then its euphoric infancy.

He approached Maurice Caruana Curran who immediately warmed to the idea. The result was the setting up of a youth branch of Din l-Art Helwa which we decided to name Teenagers Din l-Art Helwa. Girls from the Sacred Heart Convent School, under the leadership of Judith Woods (now Ms Vella Bonavita), were the first to join and they were joined by teenagers from other schools. Judge Caruana Curran sought and secured the support of Archbishop Sir Michael Gonzi, who gave us the green light for the start of the clean-up operation.

It was a taxing, time-consuming undertaking. Every Sunday, for almost a year, the teenagers and other volunteers toiled at Hal Millieri, chopping up prickly pear plants and carting away debris from the site. It added up to 14 truck-loads.

The original nucleus of directors was joined by university lecturer Roger Vella Bonavita, Fr Norbert Ellul Vincenzi and Joseph Darmenia. The initiative received considerable attention in the media and this attracted financial and other support. Thomas Foster, a British conservation architect, was generous in his advice and also donated a set of new doors, produced by Abram Woodworks of Balzan. Ms Vera (Vee) Greer was conspicuous in her encouragement and helped in a number of ways.

In this way, Teenagers Din l-Art Helwa was instrumental for the initial work on the church that led to its eventual scientific study and restoration. But that is another story.

Professor Mario Buhagiar was the co-founder – along with George Serracino Inglott – of the Youth Section of Din l-Art Helwa and Chairman of its Board.

Teenagers Din l-Art Helwa (TDLH) at work outside Hal Millieri
Think back to the late 1960s – what made the news? The Beatles, the Mini, the Vietnam War, the landing on the moon and Malta gaining independence all come to mind, but I don’t think anybody would say: “Oh yes! I remember a society known as Teenagers Din l-Art Ħelwa.” Yet, at that time, we were making ourselves heard on issues relating to our cultural heritage and environment and we also played an active role in the upkeep and conservation of important natural and archaeological sites.

How did all this come about? We frequently hear about the need to engage students in formative and hands-on activities. Well, in 1965 three teachers – namely Fr George Serracino Inglott, Mario Buhagiar and Judith Wood (assisted by Roger Vella Bonavita) were doing just that when they simultaneously set up archaeological groups in their respective schools. This initiative was then consolidated when they joined forces with teachers from other schools, namely Victor Darmenia and Fr Norbert Ellul Vincenti, to set up Teenagers’ DLH in May 1967 “with the aim of fostering interest in Malta’s unique national heritage among the growing up generation”.

What was the initial reaction to this venture? On the one hand, even among the ranks of DLH, there were the sceptics who questioned the wisdom of launching a youth section. On the other hand, however, special mention must be made of the late Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, because not only did he accept and embrace the idea, but he also continued to give us his full support. He would turn up at some of our activities to give warm words of appreciation and encouragement, whether this was in the pleasant surroundings of the chapel of Ħal Millieri or in the sweltering sun during the anti-litter campaign clean-ups.

I also remember being told that our teachers were brainwashing us and also that our new section was simply an excuse to organise mixed youth activities! It seemed that some people couldn’t accept that not only were we genuinely interested in our heritage, but we also wanted to help preserve it in a practical manner. Of course, we didn’t have the gadgets of modern technology eating up loads of our time, so we were able to channel our energy into something positive and constructive under the guidance of dedicated adults.

The youth section was run by a Board of Directors appointed by the Council of DLH. The teenagers were divided into two categories. Category A was Membership (through an interview) and intended for those willing to participate in weekly activities and devote time to long-term projects; Category B was for those who could only join in with occasional activities but made a promise to respect Malta’s heritage. The members of Category A were indeed a dedicated bunch – most members used to meet every weekend for months on end.

Before it was barely a month old, the society had already launched an anti-litter campaign. Monthly lectures about our national heritage were extremely well-attended and the highlight was being entrusted with the upkeep and rehabilitation of the Siculo-Norman chapels of Ħal Millieri and Bir Miftuḥ.

In 1968, members set up an exhibition on Maltese Heritage at the Catholic Institute in Floriana. As our summer project of 1969, we undertook the cleaning of Rinella Battery that still houses a unique 100-ton gun and as our summer project for 1970 TDLH helped in the cleaning of the chapel at Fort Manoel. We also participated in two tree-planting campaigns. In the early 1970s the association expanded by establishing regional branches in Gudja, Mellieħa, Żurrieq and Gozo and a new school group was established at De La Salle College.

We are lucky to have a constant reminder of the fruits of our labour. Whenever the chapels of Ħal Millieri or Bir Miftuħ are mentioned in the media, we can feel a sense of pride and achievement. We can say: “I did my small part in preserving these jewels.” I am sure that we have retained the values acquired during our years at TDLH and continue to support DLH in its present initiatives, particularly as bad taste and problems of conservation are still prevalent on our islands.
Heritage and environmental organisations such as Din l-Art Helwa operate in a scenario where many conflicting interests and divergent viewpoints battle to make their voices heard. The entrance to Valletta is an example of a project where consensus appears impossible. However, nowhere is this difficulty more persistently apparent than at the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa), where different stakeholders are constantly arguing about issues to do with planning and the environment. Din l-Art Helwa is closely monitoring the ongoing reform of Mepa, and we have met with the authorities to put forward our proposals. We are willing to offer our assistance wherever possible as the process moves forward.

Our environment is in shambles. The countryside is scarred with development everywhere and enforcement on illegal buildings is wholly inadequate. Little progress has been made with alternative energy or the control of emissions. Our coastline and marine environment are under huge pressure and our water resources are endangered. Important historic sites such as Fort St Angelo and Fort St Elmo are crumbling to pieces.

The government speaks of the need for sustainable development which balances environmental and economic goals. However so far there has been absolutely nothing sustainable about development in Malta from an environmental point of view.

We welcome the fact that Parliamentary Secretary Mario de Marco has recently committed himself to drawing up a national policy and strategy for the environment. Din l-Art Helwa now looks to Dr de Marco to work towards solutions to the country’s environmental disaster without further delay and to establish the proper environmental priorities in decision-making at all levels.

At this year’s Annual General Meeting Din l-Art Helwa has proposed four resolutions which focus on the urgent need to protect our dwindling natural resources, including water, limestone and fish stocks, and to reduce air pollution from harmful emissions. It cannot be stressed enough how critical and precarious all these issues are. Last year Din l-Art Helwa reviewed architect Renzo Piano’s new designs for Valletta’s city gate and the opera house ruins. Plans for this area have been characterised by a lack of agreement and heated arguments for over 60 years. The situation continues to this day, and Din l-Art Helwa is once again engaging in this debate. If I asked each person present today for their opinion on the details of the project, I might get as many answers as there are people in the room. Essentially, Din l-Art Helwa, with its leadership role in the field of cultural heritage, is a reflection of the community and, likewise, our views on this complex project are not going to be uniformly identical. However, we come together as Din l-Art Helwa because we love our heritage and we have a responsibility to ensure that what is done in this field enhances, not weakens, our built cultural heritage.

Nowhere is this responsibility more important than in Valletta, this outstanding World Heritage City. Our responsibilities here stretch to safeguarding our heritage not only for ourselves but also for the benefit of people all over the world. Din l-Art Helwa has therefore discussed this project in Council, to the best of our knowledge and abilities, conscious that what we decide may have an impact on public opinion and on the final decisions reached.

The whole entrance to Valletta, from the bus terminus to the opera house ruins, is unworthy of a historic city that aspires to the status of a World Heritage site, as well as being the capital of our country. A decision on how to radically improve the entrance to this great city is long overdue. Din l-Art Helwa believes that any decision taken must respect the principles in the Venice Charter of 1964, which lays down guidelines for the conservation and restoration of historic monuments. The Venice Charter is neither restrictive nor prescriptive, but sets the concept of sensitivity to the old while allowing the new alongside it. It encourages respect for the original design and materials.

Unity of style is not the overriding aim of restoration. Rather, it is in line with good heritage restoration principles to harmonise and blend the new with the old. In this spirit, Din l-Art Helwa is not opposed to having a contemporary design of high quality in Valletta.

I believe we can agree on the world class reputation of architect Renzo Piano. When he was re-assigned this project by the government in 2008, the Chamber of Architects supported Mr Piano’s involvement and stated that the project: “...needs the contribution of the best in the world to challenge local talent and be a source of inspiration for the students of architecture who will continue to build the future of Malta.” Likewise, Din l-Art Helwa fully recognises the high standards of Renzo Piano’s buildings all over the world.

This is not to say that one need necessarily agrees with this particular design, but is to acknowledge that in making our own judgements, Din l-Art Helwa recognises that among his peers in the architectural profession, Mr Piano’s designs are considered the work of a master of his craft with a world-wide reputation. We must weigh that in the scales accordingly. Those who admire his work will be more well-disposed to liking his proposals than others, but his work deserves the weight and respect that derives from that reputation.

There is a point at which we cannot get away from subjective judgements of architectural design – or any art-form for that matter – and so it is with Piano’s designs for Valletta. Seeing how passionately many people feel about this historic site, Din l-Art Helwa cannot therefore presume to speak for everybody on the finer points of aesthetics. What we can do, however, is use our judgement, based on the best guidance, experience and heritage principles, to reach an impartial and unemotional conclusion on the best way forward.

Renzo Piano was given the brief to design a parliament building in Freedom Square. This site was built on in the past and only evolved into an open space after the Second World War, Din l-Art Helwa can therefore see no overriding reasons for precluding construction there, including a parliament building, on heritage grounds. Din l-Art Helwa strongly supports the related plan to turn the Palace in St George’s Square into a national museum, once Parliament moves out of that building, and we have no doubt that Valletta stands to gain enormously from having this historic Palace opened up to visitors with exhibitions of cultural artefacts. The opera house ruins are now recognised as having a heritage value, and they have been scheduled as a protected monument by Mepa. Mr Piano’s innovative designs make use of the existing ruins to create an eye-catching
and unusual outdoor performance and meeting place. The idea is intriguing but it has disappointed some people, who had hoped to have a
new theatre capable of staging musical and theatrical productions all year round on this site. It has also been suggested that a lightweight
retractable roof might be designed to enable the space to be used for productions in winter. Din l-Art Helwa can see no obvious reasons
precluding either an outdoor or an indoor theatre there on heritage grounds. However, we favour one holistic vision for the entrance to
Valletta following contemporary designs of the highest standard. As we all know, various ideas have been put forward in the past for a
new, roofed theatre on that site, yet none of the designs were ever accepted and at times they engendered as much controversy as we are
witnessing today about the proposed outdoor theatre.

The Prime Minister has stated that he is still open to ideas from theatre practitioners for this site, and we await the outcome with
interest. However, a decision must be taken and Valletta must be allowed to move on. The city gate project will have major implications on
traffic flow and parking in Valletta. A decrease in traffic pollution and increased pedestrian areas would be welcome from a conservation
point of view. However, it is important to ensure that the city remains alive, relevant and accessible. Din l-Art Helwa is pleased to note that
its recommendation to extend the project to the bus terminus outside the gate is actively being taken on board.

We are also pleased with the recent decision to extend the designs to integrate the façade of the block of flats opposite the proposed
parliament. Din l-Art Helwa wishes to see one holistic vision implemented that embraces the whole entrance to Valletta and is worthy of
its status as a World Heritage City.

Debate is healthy. However, there comes a point when debate must end and action has to be taken, even though we recognise that
consensus is not likely to be reached. Naturally, Din l-Art Helwa has concerns about some detailed aspects of the design which we have
presented to the government. However, overall Din l-Art Helwa backs the implementation of these imaginative designs, which it regards
as a major step forward in the ongoing rehabilitation of Valletta. Din l-Art Helwa believes that this is a project of an exceptionally high
standard, and that the time has finally come for Valletta’s entrance to be given the attention and the expenditure that it deserves. It is a
fitting prelude to Valletta’s designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2018.

On behalf of the Council, I thank our outgoing executive president Martin Galea and honorary secretary-general Edward Xuereb
for the service that they have given to Din l-Art Helwa over the last five years. I have worked closely with both of them, and both have
given huge amounts of their time, energy and enthusiasm to the organisation during this period. We are all very pleased that both intend
to continue being active in the organisation as Council Members.

Edward Xuereb has worked hard to ensure that the organisation stands on solid ground and we are grateful to him for his steady,
reliable and most valuable contribution. Martin Galea has been active with Din l-Art Helwa for over 20 years. His leadership over the last
five years has built on the strengths of the organisation and adapted them to keep up with a fast-changing world. Martin has successfully
taken Din l-Art Helwa forward, while admirably managing the inevitable pressures and difficult decisions with which it is faced from time
to time.

I welcome Ian Camilleri as the new secretary-general and Simone Mizzi as the organisation’s new vice-president. Both Ian and
Simone have already been active on the Council for some years. Martin Scicluna will continue in his role as vice-president.

A special word of thanks must go to the other hard-working members of our executive committee – George Camilleri, Maria
Grazia Cassar, Carolyn Clements, Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon, Professor Luciano Mule Stagno and our honorary treasurer Victor Rizzo,
as well as the other 15 Council members and staff members who all make their own individual and valid contributions to Din l-Art Helwa
and our heritage.

As always, we have many challenges ahead, and to achieve our goals we depend on the continued support of our members, both
individual and corporate, and in particular on the collaboration of our many active volunteers who dedicate so much of their time to caring
for the properties under our guardianship. To all of these we extend our thanks.

I am grateful to the Council for the confidence that they have placed in me to lead this organisation for the next year, which I am
greatly honoured to accept. I have four strong and impressive former presidents to match up to – Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, Professor
Anthony Bonanno, Martin Scicluna and Martin Galea – all of whom are still members of our Council today. That is no easy task, as anyone
who knows them can imagine. However, I will work hard to fulfil this role to the best of my ability, of that you can be certain.
The fact that the Council members of Din l-Art Ħelwa are all volunteers is often overlooked. Yet, for 50 years, men and women of the most varied professions and abilities have been meeting in the council room at 133 Melita Street in Valletta, using their competences to pursue the best way to save and maintain as much as possible of our built heritage. It has been, and continues to be, an uphill battle in the effort to create awareness of the immense, precious heritage of the Maltese archipelago and its environment: our artistic patrimony, our countryside, seashore, air and water, our very Maltese ‘way of being’.

On 9 July 1965, soon after Malta achieved independence, our founding fathers, led by Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, launched the association at the Manoel Theatre, stressing the importance of putting a stop to the uglification of our islands. This year, therefore, Din l-Art Ħelwa has the honour of celebrating its golden jubilee and its hard-working Council members, some of whom have been in office since foundation day, can proudly say that they form part of a chain of lovers of Malta who have overcome various obstacles and look forward to further success.

Around two years ago, one of the subjects being discussed during the twice-monthly meetings in Melita Street was how to celebrate this milestone anniversary. A sub-committee was formed and, at the suggestion of Simone Mizzi, Albert P. Mamo was called upon to head this group and prepare a programme of celebrations. We immediately embarked on creating our 50th anniversary logo – the usual laurel and olive leaves were thought of, but Reno Psaila’s elegant and contemporary design was chosen and now has pride of place on all our correspondence.

What became very quickly evident to an organisation that survives on membership fees and donations was that quite a lot of money would be needed if celebrations of quality were to be held. It was therefore decided that, in anticipation of the actual 50th year, two fund-raising events would be held at the end of 2014 in order to raise money to be used for the completion of the two big projects that were to be finalised during the Jubilee year.

The first was a very successful Al Fresco dinner held in mid September in the splendid gardens kindly made available by Maurice Mizzi at Ras Rihana, Bidnija. In that congenial venue, supported by close to 200 guests – amongst some of Din l-Art Ħelwa’s most affectionate enthusiasts – the fund-raising for Jubilee year took off.

What was to come next? The name ‘Gran Soccorso’ for an art exhibition came to my mind. I am, after all, expected to use my imagination to contribute to the association. In 1565, the Gran Soccorso was the army sent by the Viceroy of Sicily to help the Knights and the Maltese in their battle against the Ottoman invaders. ‘Soccorso’ – which means ‘help’ – is what we badly needed at Din l-Art Ħelwa and this is what was asked of today’s artists: “To come to the aid of Malta’s historic art”. And they came in their numbers, Malta’s best artists, donating their work to the association for a grand exhibition that was held at the Casino Maltese last November. A large number of the works was sold and others now adorn the Judge Caruana Curran Hall at 133, Melita Street. They are available for sale.

Concurrent with the Gran Soccorso art exhibition, a collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute saw a very appropriate talk by Prof. Sante Guido and Dott, Giuseppe Mantella entitled: “Arte Italiana – Patrimonio Maltese/Arte Maltese – Patrimonio Italiano” which highlighted the centuries-old artistic exchange between Malta and Italy, emphasising the works of such masters as Mattia Preti, Melchiorre Cafà and Antonio Sciortino. This was a collaborative event to mark both DLH’s 50th anniversary and the 50th anniversary of Italy’s renewed diplomatic representation in Malta.

Because Din l-Art Ħelwa always has Malta’s endangered countryside in mind, on 24 January the planting of a new grove of trees in Majjistral Park was completed. Present at the ceremony was Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Leo Brincat. The actual tree-planting, supported by Middlesea Insurance plc and MSV Life plc, was carried out on three different days by staff from both organisations, who also cleaned the area from litter and then planted the indigenous trees and shrubs under the supervision of the Park’s staff.
The next big event was a concert held on 21 February in the historic Manoel Theatre which, on 9 July 1965, had been the scene of the launch of Din l-Art Ħelwa. The theatre therefore was the ideal venue for the celebration of the organisation’s Golden Jubilee. To commemorate the event, violinist Maestro Carmine Lauri performed both solo and accompanied by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Brian Schembri. It was a splendid, glittering evening.

In a touching speech, Simone Mizzi said: “Tonight we celebrate the foresight of our predecessors, all volunteers and lovers of Malta who, soon after independence, were inspired by the Constitution that established that the state shall safeguard the historic and artistic patrimony of the island and its landscape. I remember my father, Din l-Art Ħelwa’s Founder President, saying then: “We are now independent. If we don’t look after our heritage, nobody will do it for us.” Since then, public awareness has been raised, conservation is a science and Din l-Art Ħelwa has played no small part. We just have to see the wonderful work going on around us. This marvellous theatre is an example of excellence and one of which we are so proud.”

HE The President of Malta, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, attended this 50th anniversary concert which was made possible by the HSBC Malta Foundation with the support of the Manoel Theatre.

This was also to be the occasion for the launch of a marvellous hard-cover book entitled Din l-Art Helwa, Heritage Saved, 1965-2015 by Stanley Farrugia Randon – the fruits of four years’ research. Dr Farrugia Randon is a DLH Council member and warden of Wignacourt Tower in St Paul’s Bay. His book pays homage to the work of the six executive presidents and hundreds of volunteers who have given countless thousands of hours to the preservation of this, “Our beautiful land”. The book has been published with the support of the Francis Miller Memorial Fund.

At this point, as though planned by fate, celebrations were turned into mourning with the sad announcement of the passing of Din l-Art Ħelwa’s founding father. But Maurice Caruana Curran would not have wished us to stop. It has been said that, of his many achievements, his best is the legacy to the nation by having founded Din l-Art Ħelwa. So, in his name and in his memory, our work and our activities continue – always looking ahead to the future.

In May and June, the prestigious Bir Miftuħ International Music Festival took on celebratory significance with four concerts, supported by the French, Italian and Israeli embassies and the ADRC Trust, founded by the Chalmers family in memory of their late son Alistair, who provided the international festival with the services of distinguished musicians and artists.

Several other events will take place as the year unfolds, including the launch of a Golden Jubilee commemorative postage stamp in collaboration with MaltaPost on 9 July – a unique item for philatelists.

At the same time, Din l-Art Helwa will embark on a drive to increase its membership base. This was the desire of our founding President Maurice Caruana Curran, who used to compare DLH to the British National Trust, which has millions of members. “Malta”, he said, “in proportion, ought to have thousands and thousands of members if it is true that we love our fair land.”

The grand Reunion Dinner will be held on 10 July. As always, this is expected to be a glittering affair, in the beautiful grounds of San Anton Palace and in the presence of our Patron, HE President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca.

In September, we will be welcoming to Malta Prof. Simon Molesworth, QC, president of the International National Trusts Organisation. Prof. Molesworth is visiting Malta at the invitation of Din l-Art Helwa in order that we can benefit from his experience in the fields of environmental law, planning and climate change. He will be the keynote speaker at a seminar to be held at the Old University of Malta that will be open to academia, environmentalists and members of the public.

As we go to print, the doors of Our Lady of Victory Church are open for the public to see the Alessio Erardi ceiling in all its glory. For years, the scaffolding that has been hiding the ceiling has been the workplace of the conservators from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, who have now completed their conservation work. The magnificence of the scenes from the life of the Blessed Virgin, painted on the vaulted stone ceiling, are bound to alter the pages written about Malta’s history of art. The saving of this masterpiece is probably Din l-Art Ħelwa’s most precious achievement. Once the scaffolding is removed, proper lighting will be installed and in December, His Grace the Archbishop will officiate at a Thanksgiving Mass in this, Valletta’s first building.

Another flagship restoration project, this one at the other end of the island, is the Delimara Lighthouse. Lovingly restored to its original condition, the lighthouse is a science and Din l-Art Ħelwa has played no small part. We just have to see the wonderful work going on around us. This marvellous theatre is an example of excellence and one of which we are so proud.”

As we go to print, the doors of Our Lady of Victory Church are open for the public to see the Alessio Erardi ceiling in all its glory. For years, the scaffolding that has been hiding the ceiling has been the workplace of the conservators from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, who have now completed their conservation work. The magnificence of the scenes from the life of the Blessed Virgin, painted on the vaulted stone ceiling, are bound to alter the pages written about Malta’s history of art. The saving of this masterpiece is probably Din l-Art Ħelwa’s most precious achievement. Once the scaffolding is removed, proper lighting will be installed and in December, His Grace the Archbishop will officiate at a Thanksgiving Mass in this, Valletta’s first building.

Another flagship restoration project, this one at the other end of the island, is the Delimara Lighthouse. Lovingly restored to its glory, complete with its unique lamp.
Maurice Caruana Curran was born in Valletta on 11 June 1918 to Paul Caruana and Margaret Curran, daughter of John Patrick Curran who was born in Limerick, Ireland and was Colour Sergeant of the Second Regiment Connaught Rangers stationed at Fort Chambray, Gozo. Maurice Caruana Curran was educated at the Old Lyceum and at the Royal University of Malta where he graduated BA (1939) and LL.D (1943). At the age of 23 he served as Assistant District Commissioner with general duties in the Lieutenant Governor’s office assisting with humanitarian causes and the organisation of Malta’s vital air-raid shelters during World War Two. In 1943, he was offered a Rhodes Scholarship by the University of Oxford which he reluctantly had to turn down in order to help his family and his beloved Valletta recover from the ravages of war.

In 1945-46 he was a leading member of the Malta National Assembly that made proposals for the return of self-government in the 1947 Constitution. An active athlete, he was President of the Malta Football Association and the Malta Amateur Athletic Association. He was a much-loved actor and played leading roles with the Malta Amateur Dramatic Company and British Council Players. In 1959 he was granted a foreign leader Fellowship in the United States to study matters of legal and civic interest.

During his long and versatile career, Maurice Caruana Curran was one of Malta’s most distinguished lawyers, serving as Her Majesty’s judge in 1963 and from 1974 for the Republic of Malta as Senior Judge and on many occasions as Acting Chief Justice. He was a lecturer in law at the Royal University of Malta from 1950 to 1963. He also delivered a number of landmark judgments in criminal, civil and administrative law and is considered an icon by the Maltese legal community. While serving on the Bench, he was most noted for his independent mind and his forthright defence of human rights. The former President of Malta Ugo Mifsud Bonnici described him as “the Islands’ bastion of liberty”. He retired from the Bench in 1983. In 1987, Judge Caruana Curran was appointed President of the Medical Council of Malta. He was also Chancellor of the University of Malta from 1988 to 1995.

He lived in Old Theatre Street and then, with his young family, took up residence at 130 Britannia Street, (now Melita Street) in the 17thcentury palazzo nobile formerly owned by the Caruana Gatto family. The property is now the French Embassy.

Maurice Caruana Curran is considered by all in Malta to be the pioneer of the national conservation movement. In July 1965, at the age of 46, together with a group of like-minded lovers of history, art and culture and intellectuals and scholars, he founded Din l-Art Helwa, Malta’s voluntary National Trust. He was soon to become an outspoken and fearless leader for environmental and heritage conservation and served as Executive President of the organisation for 33 years. With his unwavering commitment to the ideals of conservation and the power of example through the work of Din l-Art Helwa, he succeeded in arousing public awareness to the importance of Malta’s heritage, lobbying against the misuse of land, the destruction of traditional architecture, over-development, speculation and the effects of fast growth tourism. He continued doing so even in the face of much personal criticism.

Maurice gave Din l-Art Helwa its name, taken from the first three words of the Maltese national anthem, provided its symbolic logo – the Senglea gardjola, its beautiful headquarters in Melita Street and, together with other Council members, established Vigilo, Din l-Art Helwa’s watchdog publication. He also founded Teenagers Din l-Art Helwa, the organisation’s youth section. During his long career in conservation he has addressed several prestigious audiences both in Malta and in Europe, lecturing to promote the conservation of the natural and cultural landscape of the Maltese Islands, ever aware that they can justly claim to be the “richest and most densely packed area in Europe, after Rome, in monuments of historic value worthy of preservation”.

Under his inspiring leadership, Din l-Art Helwa obtained prestigious patronage from leading Maltese businesses and corporations that support the organisation’s numerous projects. Since 1965, 40 sites and landmarks have been secured through restoration, with 20 of them being held in trust by DLH from the State and Church.

Maurice Caruana Curran was awarded the Order of Merit of Malta in 1993 in recognition of his services to the country – in particular those related to the field of cultural and natural conservation. In 1995, the University of Malta conferred on him the Degree of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) and title of Chancellor Emeritus in recognition of his contribution to the field of learning and to promotion of Maltese culture. In December 2014 he was presented with the Award of Excellence from the Faculty of Law at the University of Malta and in 1984 the Malta Society of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce awarded him its Gold Medal for his contribution to Malta. In 2005 he was awarded the prestigious Silver Medal by Europa Nostra for his lifetime’s contribution to cultural heritage.

In 1967, when DLH became the 8th member of Europa Nostra, the Federation of European Heritage Organisations, Maurice served as Din l-Art Helwa’s representative on the Council of Europa Nostra until 2003. He served on the Council of Din l-Art Helwa as Founder President till his death. He married Kate Gatt in 1947 (died 1976) and they had a son, Paul and two daughters, Simone and Louise (died 1968). He married Cettina Meilak née Psaila in 1982.
CARUANA CURRAN
(m. Causa), LL.D., B.A
1918-2015

Founder President of Din l-Art Helwa
An Interview with our Founder President - 11 May 2001

Transcript and translation by Patricia Salomone

Din l-Art Ħelwa’s archives are, to a large degree, the memoirs of our founder Judge Caruana Curran who was its president for 33 years. Just a few days before her father passed away, Simone handed me a CD recording of an interview he gave on 11 May 2001 during the filming of the Heritage in Peril series in which the Judge talks about the founding of the organisation and gives advice regarding the preservation of our heritage.

The series was produced soon after the terrible vandalism of Mnajdra’s prehistoric temple (on 13 April 2000) with funds raised through The Times of Malta Mnajdra Fund. Fortunately for us, DeeMedia – the company that was commissioned to do the filming – have generously converted the old VHS tapes to DVD format so we have ensured that they are preserved and we can continue to enjoy them.

This casual chat with our Founder President tells the story of our organisation up until that date. As the Judge is talking in Maltese, this is an abbreviated transcript in English of the salient points of the interview for the benefit of our non-Maltese members and readers.

Judge Maurice Caruana Curran with Lord Sir Duncan Sandys, President of Europa Nostra, Malta 1971

When asked what had prompted the founding of Din l-Art Ħelwa, Judge Caruana Curran explained:

It is a story of love, because we, the group of founders, had a romantic feeling of love for the beauty of this island: for its art, its historic architecture, its beautiful sea, the coast, the light that brightens Malta’s hilltops at sunrise and sunset.

“DLH was born with Independence, because up until then the Maltese people had never taken the initiative to do something to protect Malta’s beauty. But in the summer of 1964, Godfrey Farrugia Randon and I were in St Paul’s Bay, enjoying our summer holidays. We complained that the village was losing its character and so, together with Judge Bonello, Romeo Leopardi, Moses Gatt, Dr Mercieca and John Manduca, the idea of this society started to take shape.

“Architect Roger Degiorgio lent us the boardroom in his offices opposite St Francis Church, so we had a place in which to meet. I asked the UK High Commissioner, Sir John Martin, to provide me with a copy of the constitution of the National Trust of Great Britain and a friend of mine from Italy, Dott Massimo Igliori, who had built Hotel Ta’ Cenc, brought me a copy of the constitution of Italia Nostra.”

Based on these two documents, Judge Caruana Curran compiled the Constitution of DLH which, with some minor changes, is still valid today and, a year later, on 9 July 1965, the foundation meeting of the organisation was held at the Manoel Theatre, with a full house.
“Sir Maurice Dorman came, as did all the Ministers of the time. We approved the constitution of the new society. It had taken us some time to find an appropriate name but one day, as I was working at home, the opening phrase of our National Anthem came to mind. The words: ‘Din l-Art Helwa’ seemed perfect for our society. Dr Farrugia Randon and the steering committee agreed and the name ‘Din l-Art Helwa’ received praise and encouragement from all quarters.”

A second “Cue” was the signal for our founder to continue his story and without mincing his words, he said:

“Our society was created to collaborate with the government which is obliged by its Constitution to care for our heritage. Ours is the role of watchdog but also that of carrying out restoration work. At the time, the satirical newspaper Ix-Xewwa made fun of us and published a vignette saying that this society, Din l-Art Helwa, would be short-lived. I am proud to say that, 36 years later, we are still here and are moving on.”

Asked about the input of the government in his battle to preserve and conserve Malta’s patrimony, Judge Caruana Curran said that there was not enough political will. The government knew what was happening but more political will was needed so that there would be a stop to the ugly buildings that were sprouting up and no building would be allowed along the coastline. On the other hand, the Church, he said, was giving a good example. It had handed over on loan to DLH (the legal term in Maltese is ‘komoda’), the mediaeval chapel of Santa Maria ta’ Bir Mifsud – one of the first 10 parishes in Malta – and that jewel in DLH’s crown, Hal Millieri chapel. Another chapel that had also been handed over to Din l-Art Helwa by notarial deed was the chapel of St Roque. The agreements obliged DLH to care and maintain the chapels for 150 years.

At this point, Judge Caruana Curran raised what used to be a bone of contention: the reticence on the part of the government to give the NGO legal right over the properties for which it cared.

“We began with the coastal towers. We restored, Ghallis Tower, Ghaleet Marku Tower, the Santa Maria Battery in Comino and Dwejra Tower in Gozo. Then there are the chapels and the guard room at the salient of the bastions opposite the Central Bank. We restored the fountain alongside the destroyed Theatre Royal with its inscription ‘Omnimus Idem’ meaning that the water was for everyone to drink.”

At the time of this interview, Din l-Art Helwa had carried out restoration work on 19 or 20 different monuments and all, as the Judge pointed out, without any subsidies from the government.

We depend entirely on the membership fees paid by our members and on the help given us by corporate members. Most of the sites are government properties and, should the government give us legal right to them, we would be able to maintain them better and, without turning them into business outlets, we could develop them to attract visitors and could hold cultural events. We are a non-profit organisation and any money raised would be used for their maintenance and for restoration work.

“So far, we have restored the two British cemeteries. One of them, the Garden of Rest near the public library, was an extremely beautiful example of English funeral art of the 19th century. But after the departure of the British it was abandoned and vandalised. Now we have restored it, with the help of Dr Andy Welsh who deserves all praise as he actually worked there personally. We have now taken charge of Ta’ Braxia cemetery. Another acquisition is Wignacourt Tower in St Paul’s bay, and there is also the statue of St Paul on St Paul’s Island, said to have been where the shipwreck of the Apostle occurred.”

Asked if the society finds much by way of support, Judge Caruana Curran said that sponsors do help and among them he mentioned Galdes and Mamo, which had sponsored the restoration of Dwejra Tower and the Mizzi Organisation, which had sponsored work on Ghallis Tower. But he pointed out only Torri Mamo was the subject of a rental agreement, so DLH could not make use of the other properties in order to make them self-sustainable.

In reply to a question about the degree of interest from members and volunteers, the Judge appealed for people to take the easy step of joining DLH as the English do in the UK, where millions of people are members of the National Trust. He said there had been an increase in awareness in the society’s work which, he said, set an example.

Regarding his predictions for the future, Judge Caruana Curran said that he was not a prophet but that he had faith in DLH’s future.

“I am no prophet but, as we have survived for 36 years, I am confident that we will go on – especially as we have sound people on the Council. I have faith in the future, but Malta is losing so much! There is too much cement, too many high buildings – we already have one skyscraper and another is planned for Tigné Point. I do so hope that it will not ruin the majestic skyline of Valletta.

“The future depends on three conditions. First: that the government gives us some form of written title over the properties that we restore so that we can better care for them and develop them without making profit, because any money raised can be used for their maintenance. I trust that we will eventually reach some agreement. We are volunteers – none of us is paid to do the work that we carry out.

“The second necessity is that we increase our membership base. We need more members and more sponsors. We are apolitical and cooperate with the government, whoever is in power.

“The third point is the creation of a Ministry for Cultural Heritage or at least of a Permanent Secretary. I am quite sure that in a hundred years’ time – in this place and this room – the media, who will be your successors, and my successor will be having as pleasant a conversation as we are having here today.

“His Holiness the Pope recently said that the stronger the Faith of the Maltese, the more responsible are we towards our Faith. So I say, the fairer our island, the more sense of responsibility for the beauty and history of our nation should we have. More responsibility and commitment – and, please, do not demolish our old buildings!”

Dr. Paul Xuereb, Honorary Secretary, Judge Caruana Curran, Albert Gauci, Treasurer at the 1969 AGM
Tributes to our Founder President

Maurice Caruana Curran
A True Son of Malta and a Patriot

Collected by Simone Mizzi
Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa 2011 - 2015

‘It has been difficult to separate the wonderful messages of sympathy received at the loss of my father and Din l-Art Helwa’s Founder President, Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, so together with his wife Cettina, herself a Council member of the organisation, and my brother Paul, I am happy to share them with Din l-Art Helwa’s many members, friends and readers. We thank everyone most sincerely for the beautiful words and tributes we have received and for the many appreciations published in the newspapers. I hope that by reproducing them in this special issue of Vigilo they will be consigned to their rightful place in history as part of our immense national heritage which our Founder President devoted the greater part of his life to save. He was my life coach, my university and my Google. It was a privilege to have enjoyed his counsel both as a father and as President of Din l-Art Helwa for so long. His legacy lives on in our hearts and minds, in the inspiration and determination he passed on to all those of us who continue his work and in the many historic monuments the organisation has saved for the nation’.

Simone Mizzi

‘Maurice’s lasting monument is not of marble or bronze, but in that great gift that he gave to Malta and to us all – Din l-Art Helwa’.

His Eminence, Cardinal Prospero Grech.

‘He was a distinguished son of Malta and we are all so proud of him’.

Marie Benoit, journalist

‘Malta lost a great man’.

Reno Psaila, San Gwann

‘What a wonderful legacy he has left us. It was an honour to have known him’.

Maureen and Alan Meers
former wardens and volunteers of the Red Tower

‘Your dad was a light and inspiration to our little island nation, both professionally as well as through the NGO he set up’.

Rudolfo Ragonesi, president, The Gaia Foundation

‘Maurice was a visionary in the defence of our national heritage. His memory will be cherished for the contribution he has made to the judicial as well as to the heritage spheres’.

Professor Roger Ellul Micallef, president, Malta Historical Society

‘Your father not only excelled in his chosen profession but he was a civic-minded person of a rare kind whose legacy is embodied in Din l-Art Helwa’.

Michael Bonello, Sliema

‘Maurice was a true gentleman of the highest order and excelled in such a wide spectrum of achievement. His legacy will never die’.

Stephanie and Alfred Calascione, St Julian’s

‘Maurice was a great man and a gentleman’.

Ray Miller
former Council member of Din l-Art Helwa, St Julian’s

‘Your father was the sort of person that makes us proud to be Maltese. He boldly and courageously handled the adversities and tragedies of life and still kept the enthusiasm necessary to maintain the high standards which make us civilised’.

Marquis Nicholas de Piro, Valletta

‘I recall the short, yet intense meeting when I visited the Youths at the project at Tal-Hmiena while they were carrying out a restoration programme for Rempart with Din l-Art Helwa. I am sure the good Lord has reserved a special seat in his Council of Wise Men. He was such a knowledgeable and visionary person, his passing away is a great loss to Malta’.

Tudor Alexis, Rabat, Morocco
Former Deputy Head of Mission for the Republic of France in Malta

‘Maurice was a gentleman who made such a significant contribution to justice and the rule of law, his commendable achievements in the environmental and cultural heritage sector are a fundamental element of his legacy’.

Terrence Flynn
Charge d’Affaires on behalf of the Ambassador of the United States, Ms Gina Abercrombie Winstanley and the US Embassy in Malta


Dr Louis Galea
Malta’s Representative to the European Court of Auditors, Luxembourg
Former Speaker of the House of Representatives Malta, and
Former Education Minister

‘Your father not only excelled in his chosen profession but he was a civic-minded person of a rare kind whose legacy is embodied in Din l-Art Helwa’.

Michael Bonello, Sliema

‘Your father was the sort of person that makes us proud to be Maltese. He boldly and courageously handled the adversities and tragedies of life and still kept the enthusiasm necessary to maintain the high standards which make us civilised’.

Marquis Nicholas de Piro, Valletta

‘I recall the short, yet intense meeting when I visited the Youths at the project at Tal-Hmiena while they were carrying out a restoration programme for Rempart with Din l-Art Helwa. I am sure the good Lord has reserved a special seat in his Council of Wise Men. He was such a knowledgeable and visionary person, his passing away is a great loss to Malta’.

Tudor Alexis, Rabat, Morocco,
Former Deputy Head of Mission for the Republic of France in Malta

‘Your father was the sort of person that makes us proud to be Maltese. He boldly and courageously handled the adversities and tragedies of life and still kept the enthusiasm necessary to maintain the high standards which make us civilised’.

Marquis Nicholas de Piro, Valletta
‘The news of his passing touched the hearts of a multitude of persons. He is an icon of genuine culture and patriotism’.

**Lawrence Gatt**, Hamrun

‘We all owe him so very much’.

**James Bonello and Joanna Camilleri**

‘The Judge was a great all-rounder and a “punto di riferimento” in so many fields. His example will continue to be a source of inspiration to us all’.

**Albert Storace**, St Julian’s

‘We will always remember Maurice as the leading light in whatever he did in his long and fruitful life. He was first and foremost a real gentleman, a brilliant lawyer and judge and of course as founder and president of Din l-Art Helwa, he will always be remembered as the champion of the Maltese environment’.

**Tania and Martin Vassallo**, Sliema

‘He was a very learned gentleman who used his intellect and wisdom for the betterment of our society’.

**Louis Farrugia**, Wardija

‘Sincerely put, Maurice was nothing short of an institution, erudite, accomplished and much more. Enthusiastic, passionate and forever young in mind and spirit. I am proud to have known him. Great men are a rarity, but your father was one of them’.

**Hugh Grima**, Valletta

‘He was a man who did a lot for Malta. He leaves ... but his heritage continues’.

**Arnold Cassola**, Chairman and Co-founder of Alternattiva Demokratika, Malta’s Green Party and former Secretary General of the European Green Party

‘Maurice achieved great things and his memory will live on in the history of our tiny island. Philip admired him a lot, as did most of Malta’.

**Carol Zammit Briffa**, Balzan

The late Philip Zammit Briffa is a former Secretary General of Din l-Art Helwa

‘I became a member of Din l-Art Helwa with so much hope and trust in him, as almost the first citizen to begin the long fight to save the heritage of our islands’.

**Helen Caruana Galizia**, London

‘Maurice was a dignified man who conducted himself with decency every single day of his long life. His legal legacy is secure, and he would be so proud of the manner in which you continue to keep his dream alive at Din l-Art Helwa with the articulate and fearless way in which you seek to protect our national heritage. Well done thou good and faithful servant – enter thou in the joy of the Lord’.

**Roderick and Mary Rose Chalmers**, Lija

‘I first met Maurice in 1992 when he claimed me for Din l-Art Helwa. ‘The Judge’ was then at the height of his powers, a charismatic and inspirational public speaker – arguably the best in Malta – he was Chancellor of the University, a brilliant lawyer and Founder President and driving force of our Association. He was a man who would be in the first rank anywhere in the world. He was kind, generous, knowledgeable, witty, brave and honourable. It was a privilege and a pleasure to work with him – he was a true friend over the years.

Failing eyesight and health had kept him out of the public eye for some time past, but he will never be forgotten and his leaving us is a great sadness. He left an enduring legacy in the many achievements of Din l-Art Helwa, and the epitaph of Sir Christopher Wren in St Paul’s Cathedral comes to mind

*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*.

**Dr Alexander Welsh**, Former Council member, project leader for the restoration of the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest and president of the Friends of Ta’ Braxia Association

‘As Hal Millieri’s warden I cannot but call to mind the very strong bond that your dear father, Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, had with the chapel of the Annunciation, which he had so much at heart. He was the prime mover behind its rehabilitation and restoration and time and again he intervened personally in its support as, for example, when he strongly objected to the proposed detachment and transfer of its beautiful frescoes to a museum. All through his life that chapel had a special place in his heart, and it was due to his personal insistence and example that I assumed responsibility as warden for so many years.

The passing to a better life of this great and deeply spiritual gentleman fills me with great sadness, but I derive consolation from the words which he had penned years ago in his presentation to Anthony Luttrell’s book *Ħal Millieri: A Maltese Casale*. In that presentation, Maurice had paid tribute to the passing away of the great Oxford scholar and Ħal Millieri collaborator Fr Gervase Mathew with the words: “With what joy the saints of Ħal Millieri must have received him”. Today these same words may deservedly be attributed to Maurice for his great commitment. May the Good Lord grant him eternal rest’.

**Anthony Mangion**, Warden of the Chapel of Hal Millieri
Appreciations published to honour

Maurice Caruana Curran

Maurice Caruana Curran was endowed with a robust intelligence coupled with an irrepressible vis expressiva to which he added an indomitable courage. This combination made of him one of the most forceful personalities of Maltese public life in the last six decades of the 20th century.

He first made his mark as a public prosecutor in the Crown Advocate’s Office. His performance in court, whether cross-examining witnesses or the accused when venturing to give his evidence was brilliant and, at times, withering. His sparring with the principal defence councils in jury trials of the late forties and fifties, Ġuże Flores and Ċensu Scerri, was as enthralling, at least to us young lawyers, as to the general public, which thronged the gallery.

When, after taking his place on the bench, he presided over the Civil Court, First Hall, his trial of the cases assigned to him afforded him an occasion to show his erudition and his deep knowledge of the law, as well as his penetration into the motives of litigant humanity. In his court, no movement was dull or slow moving. He prompted lawyers, young and old, into engaging in a relentless pursuit of justice, substantial besides formally legal. His lead has been followed by all other judges.

As a judge he was fearless, verging on the audacious, when it was a matter of sustaining the rights of common citizens against the state. The rhetoric we as young lawyers had been hearing from our elders, in the sense that the Courts provided a solid bastion against the inroad of Leviathan into the lives of the citizen, proved to be not vain words, but tangible fact.

His contribution to our Republic continued beyond his tenure as judge. I well remember the day when he called the first foundation meeting of Din l-Art Ħelwa at the Manoel Theatre in 1965, and his speech illustrating his call to attention for the safeguard of our tangible and intangible heritage. The landscape, the townscape, the cultural patrimony, the traditions of our country were very close to his heart.

I well remember his repartee to a member of the audience who rose and made a point that, while he admired the fact that a Maltese language – and not precisely translatable – name had been chosen for the new organisation, and indeed new movement, Judge Caruana Curran had delivered the welcoming speech in English. Maurice replied that the new organisation was meant to uphold the very Maltese traditions of courtesy and he could not be discourteous to the numerous contingents of non-Maltese speakers in the audience.

All through the years, he was a stalwart defender of heritage. When I became a Minister with Culture and Environment within my portfolio, he immediately asked for an appointment to warn me that I should expect no quarter from the society, whereupon I asked him to feel free to criticise, to warn and to counsel. His eloquence when required to speak in defence of our country’s physical and cultural heritage was never at a loss.

The country has lost a man enamoured of our native land, but his message will not be lost. The consciousness for the heritage he has aroused in our countrymen will, I believe, continue.

Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, President Emeritus
Published in The Malta Independent of 14 March 2015
Maurice Caruana Curran, who has died aged 96, possessed two essential qualities that distinguish the leader from the others. Those qualities were judgment and courage.

As a judge he was noted for his independent mind and his forthright defence of human rights. Described by a former President of Malta as “the island’s bastion of liberty” he served on the Bench for 20 years, handing down some landmark judgements in criminal, civil and commercial law that are models of fairness and clarity. But while there will be deserved plaudits for his long, versatile and distinguished career as a lawyer, as Malta’s Attorney General and a judge, it will be as the pioneer of Malta’s national heritage and environmental movement that he will be long remembered. For it was to this cause that his outstanding qualities of judgement, courage and leadership were directed for 50 years, first as the President, then latterly, as he grew older, as its Founder President – a member of the Council of Din l-Art Ħelwa to the very end. He was immensely proud to see it celebrating its Golden Jubilee this year.

In July 1965, at the age of 46, together with a group of intellectuals and scholars – like-minded lovers of Malta’s history, art and cultural heritage – Maurice Caruana Curran founded Din l-Art Ħelwa, Malta’s national trust, a voluntary organisation to assist the newly-independent sovereign state of Malta to uphold Article 9 of the Constitution: To safeguard the historic, natural and artistic patrimony of the nation”. He was soon to become a fearless and outspoken defender of Malta’s natural environment and cultural heritage.

With his selfless and unwavering commitment to the ideals of conservation and the power of example set by Din l-Art Helwa, its restoration projects and its educational initiatives, he succeeded in arousing the awareness of the public and of initially reluctant and unseeing successive governments to the importance of Malta’s extraordinary heritage. He lobbied against the misuse of land, the destruction of our traditional vernacular architecture, overdevelopment, greedy speculation and the effects of uncontrolled mass tourism.

A serene impartiality of judgement was among his virtues. His unerring foresight in focusing early on the dreadful effects of uncontrolled development on the islands he loved has come to haunt us all. He did this with grace and courage, even in the face of much personal, sometimes politically motivated criticism, as well as public inertia. He led the organisation he had founded for 33 years, right up to his 80th birthday, through highs as well as some deep lows, including personal family tragedy, summoning up, year upon year, the energy, dedication, stamina, commitment and enthusiasm to achieve the objectives he had set.

For his life’s work, he was honoured by Malta with the Order ofMerit and awarded the Europa Nostra Silver Medal for Dedicated Service to European Cultural Heritage.

‘Patriot’ is a much over-used word, usually hijacked by politicians who tend to want to wrap themselves in the national flag. Maurice will be remembered as a true Maltese patriot. His love and loyalty to Malta, his deep knowledge of its art and heritage (we could ask him nothing about Malta’s history to which he did not know the answer) transcended everything.

A man of warmth, passion, wide learning and wisdom – the two are not always the same thing – a poet, an actor, a man of selfless leadership, his creation of Din l-Art Ħelwa was a timely and far-seeing – as well as far-reaching – act for which he will be forever remembered. The numerous monuments and historic sites in Malta and Gozo that were saved for the nation as a direct result of his personal intervention bear vivid testimony to his battles to save them and the awareness of our cultural heritage which we enjoy today.

Simply stated, his view was that we are here on earth to do good to others. He can reflect that he left his mark on Malta we enjoy today.

His chequered life, his love of acting and, above all, his brilliant legal mind, place Maurice Caruana Curran in a prominent position in Malta’s legal Parthenon. His sense of public duty, his creative legal mind and his love for our country’s heritage were the hallmarks of his long life. Wherever he sat on the Bench, he tried to change old attitudes and introduce new ones and ruled the government was bound to give reasons for its actions when they severely affected the rights of the individual.

Maurice’s other love was Din l-Art Helwa and Malta’s heritage. At a time when development was deemed more important than preserving one’s heritage, a malady too common even today, he spearheaded a new organisation still active today with such an appropriate name – the first words of the National Anthem.

Caruana Curran was unique. He reminded me so much of Lord Denning, the British judge who always championed the rights of the individual against government arrogance.

Sir Max Williams once said: “My Lords, if I were to summarise the greatness of Lord Denning in one word it would be vigilance – vigilance in upholding his standards and beliefs.” Those words apply to Caruana Curran, the ever vigilant guardian of the rights of the individual.

Dr Tonio Borg, Former European Commissioner and Cabinet Minister

Extract from TALKING POINT ‘THE LORD DENNING OF MALTA’

Published in the Times of Malta of 18 March 2015
The Calling

A tribute to Maurice Caruana Curran

In my mind’s eye it was something like the Kitchener poster in WWI. “I want you” he said. The eminent Judge, President, of Din l-Art Helwa, had stopped by my table at the Annual Dinner at the Union Club and I had just rattled off some grandiose ideas I had for Din l-Art Helwa. He was kind enough to see through my pompous arrogance and perhaps thought that enthusiasm for the cause was at least a start. And so began my long affair with Din l-Art Helwa and my admiration, dare I say friendship, with the man who started it.

Din l-Art Helwa was founded on ideals, something it has maintained to this day, a common cause to preserve heritage, protect the environment, stop pollution and save our wildlife. It was a wide brief, taken up by a motley band of volunteers when faced with indifference, ignorance and greed in the development of our country.

Maurice had founded Din l-Art Helwa soon after Malta attained independence. Always one to do things in style, he launched it at the Manoel Theatre with most of the good and the great of our small country attending. By the time I came along, in the early eighties, Din l-Art Helwa already had a formidable reputation for defending Malta’s patrimony. “Always capture the higher moral ground” was Maurice’s maxim, “Keep our arguments objective and impersonal”. In this way we garnered respect, even if Maurice was dubbed the “workers enemy” by one infamous minister intent on turning over our village cores and countryside to the developers. Maurice was fearless in this respect.

In those days we DLH really was run on a wing and a prayer. Corporate sponsorships, CSR and perhaps even the concept of heritage were hard to come by. Maurice had fought long and hard with the Governor of the time, Sir Maurice Dorman, to obtain a lease for what is now our headquarters (even this name is a relic of the past – I suppose head office is now more appropriate). He then got it furnished through the British High Commission and our council room still bears the plaque “furnished by the people of Britain”. Under his leadership, a youth movement was founded; properties in trust followed – Ħal Millieri, Bir Miftuħ, Wignacourt Tower, ix-Xarolla and Torri Mamo. These were new concepts of public guardianship prized from a suspicious government/curia, with no track record to speak of – only the force of personality and an unbeknown record.

Maurice was a man of culture – a poet, who was genuinely hurt to see his beautiful country debased by poor, ill-conceived development, to have beautiful buildings – indeed, whole towns – pulled down and replaced by architectural trash. Valleys and countryside turned over to developers. He stood up for all of us at a time when there was practically no sensitivity to conservation or appreciation – it was the time of the very common man.

Of course he did not do it on his own. In those days we had many colourful personalities: Walter Zahra, our long-standing Hon. Secretary, Paul Asciak the tenor, our Vice President, Blanche Martin who organized countless dinners and raffles, Colonel Eric Parnis who, single-handedly, supervised the restoration of a number of properties, Peter Kent Baguley who started Vigilo in its present form, Salvatore Mousu our first director and many others. We were not a quiet bunch – there were many arguments, with much spirit but with no rancour. We were (and are) all on the same side and we looked up to him for leadership and inspiration.

Maurice had a distinguished career in law, as a young attorney-general, then a brilliant judge and his attachment to the legal profession remained with him throughout his life. He mentioned one incident during the war when he was at his office in the Palace when it was bombed. Crawling out from under the table where he had taken cover and dusting himself down, he remarked to a colleague that they had better go over to the Casino Maltese for a stiff whisky before resuming work! His sang froid was to be admired. Never one to be cowed, he returned to work suitably refreshed and fortified.

This determination and character did not always serve him well in his profession. Never one to deviate from his principles, he was denied higher office and even demoted when he had to stand up for what he believed was right. His will to do the right thing ensured that his reputation and beliefs remained untarnished. Having said that, he did not bear a grudge nor act in any way other than the gentleman he was.

There are many adjectives one can use to describe him – generous, a brilliant mind, an orator, a poet, an actor (for he trod the boards in his youth), kind and always helpful – but perhaps his legacy to his country is what he has started at Din l-Art Helwa – an organisation still inspired by his ideals to this day; his guiding principles still in the organisation’s psyche. When one sees what is left of our heritage one can see not what is lost, but what the whole movement he started has been able to save.

To his wife Cettina – a long standing Council member, his children Simone – following in his footsteps as President, and Paul, go our sincere condolences.

Martin Galea, Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa
2005 – 2010
Maurice Caruana Curran will remain known for his integrity, his fortitude, his love for the country, his legal prowess, his creativity, his courage and resilience in the face of the most dark episodes of interference by the Executive with the functions of the judiciary. More than ever we need to be inspired by all that he stood for, to discover that our environment and the heritage offer far higher value than senseless development that encroaches on our very identity. More than ever before we need to discover the value of standing up to be counted, to be apostles for the truth.

On 30 March 1969, Maurice was there for the launch of the youth movement, the Teens and Twenties Talent Trust. He had agreed to become its honorary president, exemplifying a sense of utmost generosity. He did not even remotely try to protect the turf of the organisation, (Din l-Art Ħelwa, itself with its own Youth Section) that he had set up a few years earlier, even if it was clear that there would be some areas of overlap. He was only too pleased to offer a helping hand to the formation of another movement that would uphold civic commitment as one of its fundamental pillars of activity. For people who act out of conviction and love for others, personal agendas do not come into the equation.

For Maurice, the value of enriching oneself through giving rather than receiving was one of the fundamental elements of his personality of all that he stood for. He said that young people should be given every opportunity to develop their talents and in that sense, he felt that there was an excellent reason for this youth movement to be set up and move ahead. He expressed with enthusiasm his belief and trust in young people. It was Maurice who understood and appreciated that it was ultimately about promoting the talent of young people, not as an end in itself but for the benefit of society as a whole.

Dr Francis Zammit Dimech, Nationalist MP, former Cabinet Minister, founder of the Teens and Twenties Talents Trust in 1969
Published in the Times of Malta of 30 March 2015

He was fearless in the field of environmental and heritage conservation, described by President Emeritus Ugo Mifsud Bonnici as “the island’s bastion of liberty”. Din l-Art Ħelwa was his brainchild and he was the heart and soul of the organisation. Till the very end he always fought for the environment and in 2013 signed the petition against hunting in the spring. He was a gentleman, an upright judge and a legal luminary whose humility was as great as his wisdom.

Professor Raymond Mangion, Head of the Legal History Department, University of Malta
Published in the Times of Malta

A brilliant lawyer, a wise and learned judge, a man of the arts and pioneer champion for the environment could best describe Maurice Caruana Curran. In 1965 he became aware of the constant unfolding carpet of concrete being spread over our precious natural countryside. As a result, he founded Din l-Art Ħelwa, an organisation whose aim is to promote the beauty of our natural heritage, later the national heritage. A man who constantly encouraged determination in young persons to spur them to success, he was my mentor – encouraging me whenever I did not make the grade in my exams. He advised me to try and try again until I finally succeeded.

Alfred Conti Borda, A friend,
published in the Times of Malta of 22 March 2015

Royal Opera House Sonnets by M Caruana Curran
The European Union and Europa Nostra today awarded Judge Maurice Caruana Curran a top European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage.

Judge Caruana Curran received his award together with the monetary prize of €10,000 from Europa Nostra’s president, HRH the Prince Consort of Denmark, and Harald Hartung, Head of the Culture Unit at the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, at the European Heritage Awards Ceremony at the Håkonshallen in Bergen, Norway.

In total, 38 laureates from 21 countries across Europe were recognised for a series of exemplary achievements throughout Europe, with Judge Maurice Caruana Curran winning top prize in the category of ‘Dedicated Service to Heritage Conservation’ which was awarded for his unwavering commitment to the ideals of conservation, his ability to speak fearlessly for heritage and his unflinching spirit of volunteering.

Judge Caruana Curran has dedicated over 40 years to upholding the cause of cultural heritage in Malta, and is considered by all in Malta to be the pioneer and pillar of the national conservation movement. In 1965 he founded Din l-Art Ħelwa, a voluntary, non-governmental organisation, to assist the state in the conservation of environmental and cultural heritage. He succeeded in arousing the awareness of the public and of the government to the importance of Malta’s extraordinary heritage, lobbying against the misuse of land, the destruction of traditional architecture, the effects of the increase in tourism and development, improved legislation and the listing of buildings. He toiled tirelessly to find volunteers, rally membership, raise funds and campaign on issues. Judge Caruana Curran organised conferences, lectures and educational initiatives, furthered international contacts, studied international legislation and wrote endless letters to the press.

Under his leadership, Din l-Art Ħelwa has restored 30 historic sites, formed a Youth Section was formed, and Vigilo, the watchdog periodical regularly published. All his work was carried out voluntarily, whilst simultaneously pursuing a long and versatile career as one of Malta’s most distinguished lawyers and judges, then as President of the Medical Council and Chancellor of the University of Malta.

In 1967, Din l-Art Ħelwa became the seventh non-governmental organisation to become a member of Europa Nostra. Today, this is now the representative platform for more than 200 heritage associations active in the field of heritage conservation throughout Europe.

Judge Maurice Caruana Curran will be donating this financial award to Din l-Art Ħelwa’s restoration programmes. In 2004, Din l-Art Ħelwa was granted legal guardianship of 12 of the historic sites it has restored, consisting of eight towers dating to the period of the Knights of St John, the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest, with its neoclassic funerary monuments, and three mediaeval chapels, amongst which the most precious is Hal Millieri Church of the Annunciation, dating back to 1450 and containing a unique cycle of wall paintings of the Byzantine rite.

The European Heritage Awards Scheme was launched in 2002 by the European Commission as part of the implementation of the EU Culture 2000 Programme. Europa Nostra, the pan-European federation for heritage, was selected to run this Awards Scheme on the basis of its long experience in publicly recognising, on a European level, individual or joint excellence in the heritage field. In 2006, Europa Nostra will hold its Annual Congress in Valletta from 16 to 21 May in cooperation with Din l-Art Ħelwa.

“This Awards Scheme recognises the skills required to ensure the quality of heritage conservation in an enlarged Europe and is indicative of the support and partnership between the European Commission and cultural heritage practitioners across Europe who protect our historic environment throughout Europe”, said Ján Figel’, Member of the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism. “Support for protecting cultural heritage is instrumental in reaching out to the new member states with their rich and diverse cultural heritage, which constitutes an enrichment for the Union.
On 3 June 2005, Europa Nostra, the pan-European organisation that is the voice of some 260 European heritage organisations, chose to honour Maurice Caruana Curran, Din l-Art Ħelwa’s Founder President with the award of the prestigious Silver Medal for Dedicated Service to Heritage. He was presented with this award in Bergen, Norway by HRH Heinrich, the Crown Prince of Denmark, who was at the time the President of Europa Nostra. To date, Maurice remains the only person in Malta to have been awarded a Europa Nostra Silver Medal.

At the Palace in Valletta, on 27 June 2005, a celebration was held in Malta to mark the presentation of the Silver Medal to Judge Maurice Caruana Curran in the presence of the then President of the Republic, Dr Edward Fenech Adami. Martin Galea, then Executive President of DLH, who spoke at the event, gave a copy of his speech to Simone Mizzi, then DLH Public Relations Officer, for distribution to the media. Simone has treasured Martin’s words all these years and finds them an endless source of inspiration, keeping this precious sheet of A4 in her voluminous file of speeches accumulated while accompanying DLH presidents to events. Also present for the ceremony were several Council members, including Cettina Caruana Curran and former DLH President Martin Scicluna, who was responsible for steering the application for the award of the Silver Medal to its successful conclusion.

On page 46 of this edition of Vigilo, Martin Galea describes his “calling” to DLH and his first meeting with Maurice. On both occasions, his words are memorable. They are words spoken from the heart that will reach many more hearts and will be preserved in our organisation’s collective memory. Martin is perhaps the person who worked alongside Maurice for the greatest length of time in Din l-Art Helwa, as Council Member, Treasurer, Secretary-General and then as Executive President, subsequently as Council Member again. His passion for the beauty of Malta – which reflected that of the Founder President – reverberated through his address and will, I hope, be transmitted through this book to all those who will take it upon themselves to defend it in future. They describe to the letter exactly what we still need to fight for today. Here are Martin’s words:

“Your Excellency, distinguished guests, colleagues,

Today we celebrate the honouring of Maurice Caruana Curran by such an august association as Europa Nostra, Europe’s foremost heritage federation representing heritage NGOs, corporations and even businesses associated with heritage in Europe, that has deemed it appropriate to honour Maurice by giving him the first prize of its annual awards. The citation on the medal reads “For his dedicated service to heritage”. This is a singular honour indeed and recognises the achievements one man can make, and the dedication it takes to do it.

We here in Malta know this. Maurice has spent the greater part of his life fighting for the built heritage in Malta, for the beautiful churches, palaces, ornate townhouses, humble farmhouses – all things of beauty which make our Malta unique. He has fought for the village piazzas, the wayside tracks with rubble walls, the open countryside, the xaghri and the haunting cliffs and rocky beaches. He has fought against pollution, over-development and bad design. Today his words are easily understood, but back in the early sixties he was a prophet in the wilderness. Later, as planning pressures increased, it got worse. Indeed, in the seventies he was dubbed an ‘Enemy of the Worker’ for his firm objection to the poorly planned, building development schemes. They were trying times and, one could say, most uncomfortable. However, Maurice was steadfast. Maurice was the prime mover in the founding of Din l-Art Helwa in 1965. He did this with some panache. Launched at the Manoel Theatre with an impressive line up of personalities and foreign speakers, he laid out his plan for setting up a heritage organisation.

The name of the organisation was inspired – taken from the opening lines of the national anthem – ever the poet, Maurice. In practical terms, he obtained premises in Valletta, a city he loved so much, as its HQ. He got properties in trust, including the important mediaeval churches of Bir Miftuħ and Hal Millieri. He sought out volunteers, founded the youth movement, met with ministers, and lobbied hard using all his influence to put the view of conservation and good planning forward. He became the heritage conscience of the nation.

For us who have worked with him, it was his insistence on always taking the higher moral ground, maintaining dignity and reasoned argument which has left its mark. DLH has a good standing in Malta. We are known as an association which is serious, apolitical and fights in favour of our heritage without fear or favour, and Maurice as its founder and president for 33 years, and since then as its founder president, has been the captain with a steady hand on the tiller navigating his ship through perilous and treacherous waters.

Maurice has had many experiences: pre-war Malta, colonial Malta, independent Malta, a great legal mind, prosecutor extraordinaire, Judge. His love for the land of his birth is real and passionate. Those in Council know the pain he suffers when some bombastic project is announced which will damage our heritage. Ever the gentleman, polite to a fault, and always elegantly dressed, he fights the good fight with good manners, good humour and a certain amount of style.

Maurice, bravissimo on your outstanding achievements. Our most heartfelt congratulations and our most heartfelt thanks – always.”

Simone Mizzi

We must thank you too, Martin, for these wonderful words and also thank Martin Scicluna for having master-minded the application for the award, and all those who accompanied our Founder President in his journey to this recognition.
Tributes to former Officials of Din l-Art Ħelwa

In Memoriam of Paul Asciak

Paul is well-known for his musical career as a tenor of note, whose beautiful voice enraptured the audiences of Covent Garden, no less. Indeed, I first met him as a young choirboy at St Edward’s College when I was seven years old (and a towering and forbidding creature he looked to me then!).

However, he was also a great lover of our heritage and thankfully he chose Din l-Art Ħelwa to drive his passion and enthusiasm. Indeed, Paul was enthusiastic and passionate in everything that he did, and those who worked with him either had to buckle up and get on with it, or get out of the way! Din l-Art Ħelwa was a much smaller organisation then, and Paul helped it grow by manning the office so that, for the first time, we had a functioning secretariat. He also decided to carry out restorations to the office – and lack of funds did not stop him changing the roof of the headquarters as well as updating our pre-war sanitary system. Where he got the funds from I don’t know, but get them he did.

As Vice President he oversaw all the administration of a growing organisation, getting involved in all aspects of the work, whether it be finance, restoration, publications, concerts or correspondence. We could not have done it without him and Din l-Art Ħelwa owes him a great debt.

On a personal level, we will miss his warm personality, his intelligence and most of all his wit and his penchant for some grog after our long (and, in truth, sometimes tedious) council meetings. “A glass of water, Paul?” “Ilma għall-papri – jien niehu whisky, please” (water’s for ducks – I’ll take whisky, please”) was the invariable reply!

To Bice, his wife, and to his children, we offer our sincere condolences and can only tell them that it was an honour to know him and to be his friend. His legacy to this organisation is a matter of record and we are very grateful for it.

Martin Galea

Those who did not know Paul Asciak personally can easily find his bibliography on the internet. He was an internationally renowned tenor whose artistic career spanned the period from 1946 to 1961. I was not born at the time, and so have no personal memories of his career but I well remember the time when, in 1995, he gave me a book written by Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini entitled The Making of a Maltese Tenor – Paul Asciak’s Meteoric Career. He signed it and inscribed it: “To Stanley Farrugia Randon with pleasant thoughts of our association at Din l-Art Ħelwa and with sincere good wishes for the successful pursuit of your career in Medicine”.

I was still a medical student at the time and, as leader of the Din l-Art Ħelwa Youth Section, was as member of the council. It was in fact Paul himself who encouraged me to join Din l-Art Ħelwa in 1993. He was a member of Din l-Art Ħelwa from 1985 to 2000 and also served as Vice-President during that period. Both Judge Maurice Caruana Curran and Maestro Paul Asciak had a strong character but they were gentlemen: honest and upright and not men to accept a compromise on values. Paul spent a considerable amount of time at DLH’s offices, writing letters and organising events as well as restoration projects. He loved Maltese culture and was a true patriot.

Stanley Farrugia Randon
Major Philip Zammit Briffa, who died, aged 73 years, on 15th September 2009 after a brief battle with cancer, was a soldier in the Royal Malta Artillery and the Armed Forces of Malta, in charge of security at De La Rue and, in his retirement, the Secretary-General of *Din l-Art Ħelwa*. Philip Zammit Briffa was one of the golden generation of young men who, in the 1950s and 1960s, went straight from school (in his case the excellent Lyceum) to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and thence into the Royal Malta Artillery. Later, he was one of the few RMA officers who won a place at the Army Staff College in Camberley and, had the unpalatable vagaries of political life in the 1970s not intruded, would surely have gone on to command the AFM. Instead, in 1978, he changed course and joined De La Rue in Malta to run their security operations. He brought to that job the leadership, man-management and organisational skills which he had already so clearly displayed while in the RMA as Adjutant and on the Headquarters staff. When he retired some two decades later, he joined *Din l-Art Ħelwa*, moved by the needless over-development that had afflicted Malta and the need to protect its ever-dwindling environment. He regarded this as a moral issue that had to be confronted. From 2001 to 2005 he served as probably *Din l-Art Ħelwa*’s most outstanding and formidable Secretary-General at a time when the association was undergoing a huge expansion both in its properties and its funding.

Philip was a man for whom commitment to public service was a given. He was, throughout his life, involved in areas where the imperative to give something back to society predominated, whether during his long involvement with the Rotary Club of Malta, of which he was a past President, the Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, or ultimately as Secretary-General, Council member and Vice-President of *Din l-Art Ħelwa*. Whichever task or commitment he chose to undertake, Philip brought to it great verve, wit and humour combined with the most solid common-sense and independent-mindedness and a great ability to see the wood for the trees. He was intelligent, articulate and well-read, but also the most tremendous fun to be with. Who among his friends will ever forget the wonderful practical jokes that he played on them – never malicious, but always utterly original and bound to bring laughter to everybody who was a part of them, including the “victim”. He loved travelling, painting and art (he was one of the six Soldier Artists), music and opera, gardening and literature. Despite his gregariousness, however, Philip was also a deeply private and self-contained person who was guided by his own strong moral compass.

Whether in the sands of the Libyan Desert or the north-west German plains in the Army, in the councils of the Rotary Club Malta, the Chamber of Commerce or *Din l-Art Ħelwa*, Philip could be relied upon not only to be calm under pressure and to bring sound judgment and intelligence to a problem, but also overwhelmingly an often needed spark of humour and laughter. He was lively and a joy to be with – to be with Philip was to confront life in all its seriousness and all its fun.

Edward Xuereb, who died after a long, brave and uncomplaining battle with cancer on 22 December 2012 aged 73, was the epitome of the public-spirited individual who lives his life quietly helping others, but without drawing attention to himself. He was educated at St Edward’s College, where his father – the school’s much-loved bursar – died tragically young playing football with the students on St Edward’s Day, 13 October 1947. Edward, like so many from Malta’s leading school, was commissioned into the Royal Malta Artillery in 1959 after attending the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He made his career in the Army, serving in Germany and Malta, where he held various regimental posts and participated actively in every aspect of social and sporting life. He was an excellent all-round sportsman and represented his regiment at rowing, water-polo and football. His career in the Army culminated with his tour of duty as a major in the newly-formed Maritime Squadron of the Armed Forces of Malta. He left the Army in the mid-1970s when the local political situation became intolerable and he concluded that a new career move to the private sector beckoned.

Those were difficult economic times for Malta, but Edward eventually found his niche as Secretary to the Malta Union Club, a post he filled until his retirement. He brought to that post the excellent organisational, administrative and man-management skills that were to be expected from somebody who had served in the Royal Malta Artillery. But, more than this, he brought to the job (as he was to do immediately after his retirement from the Union Club when he became secretary-general of *Din l-Art Ħelwa*) qualities of tact, commitment, hard work, reliability and sheer common sense, which enabled both these organisations – one a civilian club with notoriously demanding members, and the other a wholly voluntary organisation with inevitably stretched funding and manpower resources – to thrive under his leadership and dedicated support. He went on to become a successful chairman of the Malta Union Club in an unpaid capacity when his experience, friendliness, calmness under pressure and qualities of compromise and mediation were vitally needed. Those of us in *Din l-Art Ħelwa* who served with him on the Council when he became secretary-general, where he replaced his good friend, the redoubtable Philip Zammit Briffa, will always remember with great affection and admiration his amazing conscientiousness, tenacity, industry and dedication over the four years of his tenure.

It was typical of Edward that he would bring to any job he filled those unsung qualities of modesty, reliability, unwavering loyalty to those around him and sheer honesty, commitment and industry that marked him out from the rest. He is very sadly missed by all of us who knew and worked with him, and all his many friends.
Din l-Art Helwa and Youths
Maria Grazia Cassar
Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa

Din l-Art Helwa is 50 years old, but is still very young at heart, with an energy and enthusiasm that renews itself every time another project is embarked upon, or an event successfully concluded. This infectious passion and love for heritage must be passed on to the younger generations to keep the continuity and cultivate future leaders. In the early days, Teenagers Din l-Art Helwa devoted their weekends to clearing out the then forgotten sites of Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuh; today, there is a group of young people who have heritage very much at heart, both in their professional capacity and as members of the Din l-Art Helwa Youths.

Former Executive President Martin Scicluna met Fabrice Duffaud of French heritage organisation Union Rempart at an International National Trusts Organisation Conference in Dublin in 2009 and invited him to Malta to explore the possibility of establishing cooperation between Din l-Art Helwa and Union Rempart. Fabrice duly came to Malta and I was asked to meet him. He explained the concept and framework of live-in restoration youth exchanges, which his organisation ran all year round in various sites around France and abroad, and said how great it would be if we could hold one in Malta. The seed was sown, and it was decided to use the Church of Tal-Ħniena as the site for the restoration work.

Andy and Jenny Welsh, who live in Qrendi and who had been instrumental in carrying out the work that had been done so far at Tal-Ħniena, immediately identified a house belonging to a friend who was willing to let us use it to accommodate the French and Maltese volunteers. It was decided to hold the event in September 2010, and we started putting our heads together to plan it, along with Council member Cathy Farrugia who was soon captivated by the project.

As the date drew near, and the exact number of participants was established, we realised we needed to rent more accommodation to accommodate them all comfortably. Luckily, there was a flat available just a short distance away from the church, which we decided to use as the lunchtime base and then have the evening meals in the Ħurrieq farmhouse. Rempart sent leader Elodie to help us, and she arrived two days ahead of the rest of the group.

It was a wonderful 10 days, mostly spent working on removing the old cement repairs from the parvis of the church. James Licari and Frank Chetcuti, professional conservators with Heritage Malta, offered their help in the afternoons, giving demonstrations on how to mix lime-based mortar and apply it properly, as well as repairing the traditional deffun waterproofing system on the roof. The Maltese and French youths got on like a house on fire, working together and learning a great deal about Malta’s traditional techniques. The long working hours were interspersed with outings, both cultural and otherwise, and Wied il-Żurrieq became the favourite swimming spot.

Cathy and I had planned a daily menu of Maltese dishes, which we cooked for the volunteers in the evening. Elodie, however, insisted that this was not “the Rempart way” and eventually assigned everyone a turn as a helper in the kitchen. They also treated us to a ‘French Night’, where we were not allowed to do anything. During our ‘Maltese Night’, Tara and Rachelle showed off our traditional għonnella, and James barbequed the lampuki. The favourite, however, was the leg of pork, which we took to the local baker’s oven in Ħurrieq to roast. It was either the hunger or the wine, but everyone said they had never had any better-tasting pork!

The following year, we held the second Restoration Youth Exchange and this time also opened it to those who wanted to join us for the experience for just a day. It was a huge success and, by the following year – that is in 2012 – it was decided to apply for an EU Youth in Action Grant, which we were lucky enough to receive.
The collaboration with Union Rempart had, in the meantime, continued to strengthen and Tara Cassar and Nicole Saliba, as youth leaders of this initiative, were invited to experience a restoration exchange in Coucy, France. There they could appreciate exactly how the project was organised and the practicalities of accommodating volunteers to work on restoration projects. Tara and Nicole took their role of youth leader very seriously and, whilst admitting that it had been very hard work, were satisfied that it had all turned out very well.

The enthusiasm of the youngsters involved in this project led to their applying for a return Youth In Action Grant, which was awarded to Din l-Art Ħelwa to enable Maltese youths to participate in an exchange in Coucy, the following September. The young people who came to Malta as part of the 2013 exchange were accommodated in the lovely farmhouse in Qrendi, kindly lent by patrons of Din l-Art Ħelwa, and the church of Tal-Ħniena was once again an excellent site on which to work. Council members Josie Ellul Mercer and Joanna Spiteri Staines generously gave their time to help in the various activities, as did Silvia Mule-Stagno. They joined Cathy Farrugia and me in ferrying the volunteers to their various activities, running the workshops and making sure everything went smoothly.

Din l-Art Ħelwa Executive Council Member Ian Camilleri then laid down the structure for the formalisation of the Youth Section and he took it into his hands to lead the regular meetings, which were held at the DLH’s offices in Melita Street. Thanks to his efforts, the young people organised themselves as a group, with a leader and secretary, and planned the next Youth Exchange in September 2014. This time it was decided to work on the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest, and the volunteers were accommodated at Din l-Art Ħelwa’s offices. It was an ambitious project, as a group from Israel was also involved, as well as those from France and Malta. Alexandra Pace and James Licari helped Tara in the day-to-day management of the event, as did the French and Israeli youth leaders. Another Maltese group also went to Coucy for the second time, led by Bobby Pace.

A further very worthwhile activity was the Restoration Workshop held at Our Lady of Victory Church by conservators Amy Sciberras and Sarah Yeomans Gafa’. They are also very active members and demonstrated the interesting and complex work of conservation on some easel paintings from the church. Hundreds of people visited over the two days of the workshop, including Education Minister Evarist Bartolo, together with Mrs. Bartolo. They were truly enthralled by the project, and applauded the initiative of the youths.

Conservation, restoration, interaction with different cultures and understanding between young people has been at the heart of these exciting activities, which are set to continue, with another visit to Coucy by a Maltese contingent planned for September. Din l-Art Ħelwa Youths have resumed their meetings and are thinking of the future. Many activities are in the pipeline and I am sure that they will be as enjoyable and as successful as those in the past.
Mature.....But Not Enough

Simone Mizzi
Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa 2011 - 2015

Founded in 1965 to safeguard the environment and Malta’s rich built cultural heritage, Din l-Art Helwa’s mission statement binds us to cooperate in the observance of the directive Principle enshrined in Section 9 of our Constitution that provides that “the state shall safeguard the historic and artistic patrimony of the nation and its landscape”. We have followed this guiding principle through successive administrations and now take this opportunity of extending our good wishes to those who will be elected to govern and, in particular, those who will be responsible for our field of action.

The protection of heritage has not been without its growing pains in its search for maturity. We have seen the country commit acts of folly: the breaching of the bastions twice for the building of the Hotel Excelsior; acts of greed: the piecemeal demolition of the gracious Sliema front with DLH leaders branded as Public Enemy Number One; acts of ignorance: the vandalism at Mnajdra and quarry-blasting below the temple sites, and acts of lawlessness: with an absence of political action allowing public land to be stolen by the land robbers at Armier and elsewhere.

Heritage suffered, with British-era forts turned into cattle farms, swimming pools built within Fort St Angelo and even recent insensitive insertions, valleys raped and up until this very day, planning aberrations such as the Tigné metropolis permitted on the grounds of economic expediency, built beautifully for those who live inside, but not for those outside. Good architecture needs to do both. It sounds as if we have failed miserably as a nation, proving that “if education is expensive, try ignorance!”.

But no: slowly but surely, public appreciation of the environment and of cultural heritage has grown, even if we could not prevent such acts. A good cultural conscience has come from such mistakes. We do have a Structure Plan, of sorts, and we do have a Planning Authority, of sorts. After the vandalism at Mnajdra on that fateful Friday 13th – Good Friday – in April 2001, we took to the streets, we lobbied for and saw a good Cultural Heritage Act come into force. This legislation gave operational powers to new state entities to manage our national sites. It empowered NGOs to be entrusted with heritage sites under Guardianship Deeds. Having saved 37 national monuments, and with 17 in our management, DLH leads by example. The designation of conservation areas and the scheduling of buildings has come about. DLH was involved in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Act and of National Environmental Policy. Next came the formation of the Guardian for Future Generations, and its Sustainability Networking arm. We have seen NGOs grow into a respected lobby, whose thoughts impact upon decision-makers and who speak with a united voice on many issues. On the eve of the last election, a powerful NGO lobby – led by DLH, Nature Trust and the Gaia foundation, with Martin Galea as Executive President – saw legislation enshrine the first ever national park land, the Majjistral, protected by Act of Parliament, yes, but not yet as protected as we would like it to be.

We have lobbied for incentives for conservation. In the last two successive budgets we have seen the Investi F’Darek Scheme and the introduction of tax incentives for investors for the regeneration of buildings. Conservation has become another pillar of the economy. €35million of EU funding has seen the restoration of public monuments, providing jobs and creating demand for professional conservators. Work has started on St Elmo and St...
Angelo. Our seas are now spectacularly clean but there is not yet an equivalent of a Guardianship Deed for NGOs who manage natural spaces and we hope the future management of Natura 2000 sites will bring this about.

I venture to say that the nation’s awareness has matured. Governance of cultural heritage and the environment has matured and there are enough laws to protect everything, but I also say it has not yet matured enough. Heritage and environment will not be safe until there is a united political front to act with clout on major issues that remain unresolved. It has not matured enough to put an end to lawlessness, and not enough to prevent the commercial exploitation of our natural and historic assets. Ta’ Cenc, Hondq ir Rummien, Manoel Island and other beauty spots are waiting like lambs being led to the slaughter. There is much still left that needs protection – and our antennae are up.

To this end, on 14 January 2013, in view of the forthcoming elections, DLH launched an on line survey to gauge public opinion on the most pressing issues for Environment and Cultural heritage with the intention of conveying results to our political leaders. With some 800 pollsters, ‘Stop The Building’ led the poll from the start.

**Our sample poll has shown:**

- We are fed up with living on a construction site. We do not want more of our green spaces and countryside given over for building. We want restitution to the public of land illegally taken.
- We want a strategy for that most valuable of resources, our beautiful beaches, for the enjoyment of all the population after both political leaders spoke up out on a limb.
- We want an end to illegal hunting, to enjoy our natural spaces, to be free to roam the country side and feel safe, especially in national park land such as Majjistral, where little or no protection is afforded because of cowardly political interference.
- We want a strategy for our agriculture – our green spaces and countryside – so that we can all have the means to live off the land.
- We want an end to illegal hunting, to enjoy our natural spaces, to be free to roam the country side and feel safe, especially in national park land such as Majjistral, where little or no protection is afforded because of cowardly political interference.

Is this a land where lawlessness pays? Yes, it seems, because the implied threat of losing votes weakens the political will necessary to clamp down on illegality. Only when our politicians can act in unity and ignore the vote implications can the nation say it has matured enough, and only then will these shameful niggling issues be resolved. In the face of the loss of a single vote, political maturity ends and favour lies with the lawless.

**MAY 2015 – TAKING STOCK AFTER THE 2013 ELECTIONS**

The new administration has slowly demolished all the environmental safeguards that have been put in place in the last 20 years.

- Amnesties for illegal development make a mockery of Mepa’s ability to fulfil its purpose as regulator, election promises give the lawless yet more free hand.
- A new Rural Development policy, rushed through after the election, endangers our countryside.
- The coastline is under attack from land reclamation schemes even by the government itself.
- The relaxation of requirements such as the obligation on farmers to collect polluted agricultural water in cesspits will further endanger our water table. New or upgraded access roads to farms in 56 areas no longer require building permits.
- Relaxation of ODZ boundaries, contrary to election promises, is to be carried out with the revision of local plans ‘to correct some injustices” according to the government.
- Our skyline is to be peppered with new towers in six different areas of Malta with no studies to back their necessity.
- Our hotels are now allowed to pour blankets of cement to make them higher; instead of going for quality tourism, the government is encouraging quantity.
- The separation of Mepa’s planning and environmental functions threatens environmental protection ending up out on a limb.
- This scenario is compounded by the fact that the Environment Minister is invisible and has never spoken out in defence of his portfolio.
- The Committee for Guardianship of Future Generations required by the Sustainable Development Act resigned en bloc after two years of a total lack of political will to see it function effectively, a responsibility delegated by the Prime Minister to the Environmental Ministry.
- The demolition of our urban conservation areas within our historic centres is being actively encouraged with the new Design and Development Guidelines.
- The Anti Spring Hunting referendum of 11 April, spearheaded by 14 NGOs and Alternativa Demokratika, was lost by a mere 2,220 votes, less than half a per cent of the population after both political leaders spoke out in favour of retaining this barbaric practice, undoubtedly a political promise made prior to the general election. Our Prime Minister personally rallied the nation on construction shows short-term vision and the desire for immediate gain. I ask you what is to be left of Malta for us to enjoy? What will be your legacy?

*Prime Minister, it is easy to make the economy turn by selling off our environment bit by bit. An economy built on construction shows short-term vision and the desire for immediate gain. I ask you what is to be left of Malta for us to enjoy? What will be your legacy?*

**READ ON.**
It is in the nature of political leaders to be concerned about their legacy. This is neither pure vanity nor hubris, more a natural wish to leave the country with a worthwhile improvement to its social, economic and international standing in the world for the benefit of the people they serve.

A random examination of the legacy left by the last few generations of political leaders illustrates the point. On the world stage, George W. Bush and Tony Blair will be remembered for their disastrous intervention in Iraq. Margaret Thatcher will be remembered for rescuing her nation from the economic morass into which it had sunk, Helmut Kohl for the reunification of his country.

Closer to home, Eddie Fenech Adami’s great legacy is Malta’s accession to the European Union; George Borg Olivier’s is the attainment of independence and Dom Mintoff’s is the huge social strides made for ordinary Maltese.

What about Prime Minister Joseph Muscat’s? Although only two years into his premiership – and, he would like to think, with perhaps another 10 ahead of him – what is likely to be his lasting legacy?

The failure of *Malta tagħna lkoll*, the introduction of citizenship for sale, the reckless approach to meritocracy, transparency and accountability, the shenanigans over Malta’s energy supply are essentially ephemeral political issues – part of the daily-changing tapestry of political life in Malta: here today, gone tomorrow.

Looking back in 20 or 30 years’ time, what substantive legacy will Joseph Muscat have left? Will it be built in marble through the introduction of improvements to the Constitution of Malta leading to a better-governed country? Or will his legacy be marked by concrete, by architectural and cultural vandalism, the loss of Malta’s last vestiges of open countryside and the further rapid degradation of the built and rural environment?

The history of Malta’s environmental and spatial planning over the last 50 years is a dismal story of greed, exploitation, abuse, mis-governance and political ineptitude. Until 1992, Malta’s construction development was like something out of the Wild West, with government ministers (of whom Labour’s Lorry Sant was the most blatant example) treating land as though it were a personal fiefdom, there to distribute as political favours, or sometimes even to line their own pockets. (Plus ça change, you might add).

And the succeeding 22 years since 1992 have been equally fraught environmentally, with the five-year period leading up to the election in 2008 being shockingly botched by the then Environment Minister, George Pullicino. Who can forget – or forgive – the increase in building heights or the totally unnecessary “rationalisation”, actually an expansion, of the building development zones in 2006?

Today, Prime Minister Joseph Muscat seems blind to Malta’s earlier abysmal history in planning. He is understandably determined to push ahead with further economic and social reforms which create stronger growth and wealth for the country. He seeks sustainability through a balance between social, economic and environmental objectives. But the problem is that, in seeking these desirable objectives, he is not starting with a *tabula rasa*, a clean sheet, when it comes to Malta’s environment and land use. He has inherited a legacy of major earlier land abuse. He would be making
a gross error to assume that Malta’s future spatial planning is simply to be a continuum of the construction development that has gone before.

Unless this government – with its fallacious talk of “Dubai and Singapore”, of land reclamation, encouragement of high-rise buildings and a “new rural policy” – acknowledges as its starting point the rampant over-development that has occurred in Malta over many decades, and seeks explicitly to reverse or to slow it down, it risks perpetuating the same faults and mistakes of before, and making things worse. What price economic and social progress then?

Malta’s biodiversity and countryside continue to be threatened by land development and over-exploitation. Further limestone extraction is unsustainable. Freshwater resources are threatened by over-abstraction, pollution from nitrates, a lack of rain-water harvesting and poor infrastructure. Malta’s architectural heritage and culture are under threat from demolition, ugly design and new and restored buildings that undermine street character. Above all, there is an over-supply of housing units, with a quarter of Malta’s housing stock lying empty.

The cultural landscape is threatened by the extent of the encroaching built-up area, industrial and coastal development, taller buildings and urban fringes that obstruct views of historic centres, increased road traffic, poor standards of design and workmanship and a lack of maintenance. Growth in car travel has led to the use of public land for more roads and parking, damaging streetscapes, affecting the cultural and natural heritage and creating a serious impact on health and quality of life. Our air pollution is one of the worst in Europe. The limited coastline has been abused, badly planned, gradually taken up by uses that do not require a coastal location and pillaged with the connivance of both political parties. Prime Minister, look around you and weep. This is the stark state of Malta’s urban and environmental heritage landscape your government has inherited.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the country is at a tipping point. We can either continue to eradicate the last remaining vestiges of “Old Malta” (for example, Mdina, Cottonera, Rabat, Valletta, Lija, Attard, Balzan), and extend the ugliness and ruination (of, for example, Bugibba, Qawra, Sliema, St Julian’s, Mellieha and elsewhere) to the whole island. Or we can change course.

The Prime Minister can determine to make his legacy bringing to an end the last 50 years of over-development. How? The remaining countryside must be tightly protected. The current over-supply of dwellings and industrial sites must be brought under control. The rate of approval of development applications should be reduced by adhering to annual threshold figures for different types of construction, be they dwellings, hotels and so on, until a better balance between supply and demand is achieved. The remaining unbuilt-on plots of land within the development zones must be allocated in a phased manner to slow down and stabilise development. Plans for swathes of high-rise building zones should be dropped.

A hoarding tax should be introduced on any properties lying empty more than 12 months after completion. Buildings left uncompleted should attract a daily fine if they are in shell form for longer than a year after the start of construction and a property tax should be introduced on second homes.

The paramount environmental challenge facing Malta in the 21st century is the need to control building development and the way we use and share this tiny land. The qualities of thrift and moderation must replace the laissez-faire attitude of the last 50 years. Sustainable development in Malta requires a seismic policy shift.

Planning is a balancing act. The core principle should be that it both protects and adds value to the environment. This does not mean stopping construction, but it does mean changing the focus to regeneration, renewal and beautification of what already exists and halting the plunder of the few open spaces that remain.

Is the Prime Minister’s legacy to be one of further degradation and a worsening of Malta’s heritage landscape? Or is it to be one where he is remembered for bringing the construction juggernaut under control and saving the environment?

Martin Scicluna was Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa from 2001 to 2005. He served on the Council of Europa Nostra from 2002 to 2012 and on the Executive Committee of the International National Trusts Organisation from 2005 to 2012. He is currently the director-general of Malta’s only independent think tank, The Today Public Policy Institute, and chairman of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education
Dear Prime Minister,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,

Judge Maurice Caruana Curran
Prof. Anthony Bonanno
Martin Scicluna

Martin Galea
Dr. Petra Caruana Dingli
Simone Mizzi
An Invitation to Dialogue

Simone Mizzi
Executive President of Din l-ArtHelwa 2011 - 2015

This article was first published in The Times of Malta on 3 January 2015

It is good news for the environment to hear the Prime Minister say that one lesson he learnt from 2014 is that more dialogue is needed with environmentalists. This is a good New Year’s resolution and better late than never from a government that promises to listen. Din l-Art Helwa will work to encourage this dialogue and starts by asking him to clarify exactly what his government and its planners intend doing to uphold Article 9 of Malta’s Constitution which specifies that the State must safeguard the cultural and natural patrimony of the nation and specifically the landscape. I ask him not to wait to tell us until Parliament clads his planners’ half-baked Structure Plan with self-respect. Developers know exactly how and where they are going to build, which views, coastline, countryside and trees they are going to pour concrete on. It is they who are writing the rules, street by street and field by field. So those of us who believe that the environment does not belong to this minority, but indeed to everyone, now want some guarantees from government as to what exactly is to be saved of Malta’s traditional characteristic townscapes, its countryside and its coastline. We too want this, street by street and field by field. There is little left and the turning point to total anonymity has now come, and a very ugly one at that.

Dialogue is good but there is a lot to discuss before the planners allow everything to be thrown away in the name of progress, jobs, a quick return and material gain. After that it is too late, and this is a vast agenda. Now that government has recanted on its promise not to extend building further into Outside Development zones, which parts of the countryside are to be spared? Will we have to live without blue sky when more tall buildings go up, losing us that bright clear Mediterranean light that is our heritage? We already have in many places.

Changes to Local Plans are being drawn up with neighbours losing their rights to vocalise objections. So which of our traditional streetscapes will be spared more of the demolition or tasteless interventions that have been the result of senseless, schizophrenic planning? Then what are the planners doing to prevent the graceful interiors of Valletta, our World Heritage City, taking on the look of a garish cruise liner? This is happening in the rush to turn our baroque city into one large boutique hotel, perhaps a good thing if done with taste. However, with very little determination or appreciation on the part of our planners to save internal architectural features, we risk losing the heart of our most precious jewel. Despite the developers’ obvious hold on government, I am optimistic that this New Year’s Resolution by our Prime Minister is sincerely meant. After nearly two years of the environment being conspicuous by its total absence in the government agenda, and with nobody except a handful of NGOs championing it, the Prime Minister has conceded that there needs to be a better understanding between environmentalists and presumably, hopefully, himself as head of Cabinet and of Sustainable Development – a portfolio that has been somewhat mislaid.

More questions for this dialogue. Do the Prime Minister and his planners truly know the beauty of this island? Do they feel deeply in their heart the need and responsibility to protect it? Do they realise that Malta without views of the sea will become a floating city without any island character? That Malta without green open spaces and the natural life these contain will be a sad and sterile place? That by moves of this island? Do they feel deeply in their heart the need and responsibility to protect it? Do they realise that Malta without views of the sea will become a floating city without any island character? That Malta without green open spaces and the natural life these contain will be a sad and sterile place? That by extending construction zones, nature is now so far away that nobody can face the traffic to go out and look for it?

We need to know that our traditional architecture and our beautiful natural spaces are important to the Prime Minister. It is here that dialogue needs to start. Din l-Art Helwa is determined to make this dialogue possible and fast, before the planners allow more concrete into our countryside and sacrifice our traditional streetscapes for the inevitable unimaginative three-floor-plus-penthouse blocks built with not one tree in sight. It would be a good start to 2015 if the Prime Minister visited Din l-Art Helwa’s Facebook page “Save the Countryside” and places a ‘Like’ and ‘Share’ on the magnificent images within, with a written pledge to save the beauty of this land. Promises of jobs and material gain are the drivers of most governments, but a positive dialogue can truly start if we can be shown that these are not sought at the expense of the beauty that remains. Reverse the obscene Rural Guidelines policy and stop the tweaking of building zones. Do not condemn us to live in ugliness, Prime Minister. Let’s give Malta’s beauty a chance.
This year the National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland celebrates 50 years of ‘Operation Neptune’. Set up in 1965 as a reaction to increasing development along the coastline, the launch was enthusiastically taken up and captured the imagination of people in Britain who were keen to save their beautiful heritage. Money was quickly collected and the government chipped in with what was a considerable sum in those days. But the main driver was countless citizens who either gave their own money or worked as volunteers. The objective was to purchase vast stretches of England’s 3,000 mile coastline – singling out the most beautiful and ecologically important stretches.

One can only think how enlightened those pioneers of this project were. Today, over 750 miles of coastline has been purchased by, or gifted to, the National Trust. Thousands of acres of land are protected for this and future generations. Countless thousands enjoy beautiful, unspoiled countryside and can walk along the cliffs and beaches or among the woodlands. A huge tourist industry has also given economic life to the project, strangely enough, without the need for the construction of huge hotels. Wild flowers, forests, cliffs, beaches, woodlands, meadows and wild fauna all have their place in these parks. Wild deer, foxes, otters and, in the sea, seals and basking sharks safe from human encroachment in marine reserves, live in their natural environment.

The contrast with Malta could not be more different. Here, the countryside seems to have no value to our political leaders, save as cheap land, ripe for development.

When Operation Neptune was being set up (indeed, when Din l-Art Ħelwa was set up – also in 1965), Malta still had large tracts of coastline in a pristine state. There was no Magħtab, no Buġibba, Xemxija hill was undeveloped and there was no Mistra Village (although there were fuel storage tanks there). Mellieħa was largely still in its natural state. No huge terminal at Cirkewwa or large hotels at Marfa. No quarries and reverse osmosis plants at Ghar Lapsi; no power stations, no creeping expansion in the villages and towns of the south to become one large mass of buildings (so poorly designed and, alas, so ugly), no now derelict hotels in front of the beautiful fort at San Tumas (touted as critical to the tourism industry at the time).

Of course development was needed, but so much? Did it need to be so poorly designed? Today, so little is left but, astonishingly, we still place little value on our countryside, or on our coastline. We are still led to believe that we need new developments which are critical to our development: White Rocks, Mistra, Smart City, huge hotels at Mellieħa. We have already heard that we need it for hotels, and once this was shouted down, we hear of a university. This is being touted as a sacred cow – education – whereas, in fact, it is just another business venture which, of course, may ultimately morph into another land grab by speculators.

The economic case for conservation is clearly not understood. The argument that tourists would come to see the beautiful countryside we have, the cliffs, beaches, valleys and xaghri has not been understood. Neither has the argument that we too should be able to enjoy our heritage, as well as future generations. Where can one walk alongside the sea shore that is still in the countryside? From Zabbar to Ċirkewwwa it is now almost totally developed and this last pocket is now up for grabs. We have already heard that we need it for hotels, and once this was shouted down, we hear of a university. This is being touted as a sacred cow – education – whereas, in fact, it is just another business venture which, of course, may ultimately morph into another land grab by speculators.

The economic case for conservation is clearly not understood. The argument that tourists would come to see the beautiful countryside we have, the cliffs, beaches, valleys and xaghri has not been understood. Neither has the argument that we too should be able to enjoy our heritage, as well as future generations. Where can one walk alongside the sea shore that is still in the countryside? From Zabbar to Ċirkewwwa it is now almost totally developed and this last pocket is now up for grabs. We have already heard that we need it for hotels, and once this was shouted down, we hear of a university. This is being touted as a sacred cow – education – whereas, in fact, it is just another business venture which, of course, may ultimately morph into another land grab by speculators.

And yet the economic imperative of development in virgin land has failed. It has been used for Lidl supermarkets, quarries, schools, countless hotels – some of which lie derelict (Selmu and Jerma spring to mind). How many times have we heard that it is critical for development and this is the only site? The main reason is because it is cheaper to develop ODZ than to find a site and develop it within the development boundaries.

On the other hand, the moral, spiritual, and even economic argument for conservation has been studiously ignored – especially by our leaders and with those specifically tasked to protect our heritage – Mepa. Their unseeming haste to confirm the site as suitable just beggars belief.

It is way past time that they come on board. Times are changing and we are finally realising that what is left is not for sale – especially not to private developers. This land is ours, our heritage, our patrimony, to enjoy and pass on to future generations. My appeal to the political masters is to listen to us.

Prime Minister – there is a precedent. A golf course was once proposed in what is now Majjistral Park. After the outcry, the government of the day did listen and halted the project. We look to you now to listen, and ensure that this valuable heritage is properly protected.
A Flawed New Structure Plan

Martin L. A. Scicluna

Executive President of Din l-Art Ħelwa 2001 - 2005

This article was first published in The Times of Malta in April 2012.

The government has embarked on a consultation exercise to guide the formulation of a Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED for short) “to provide a strategic spatial policy framework for environment and development up to 2020.”

The proposals in the SPED suffer from one major deficiency: they take scant account of Malta’s abysmal planning history of the last five decades. To compound the error, they seem to assume that Malta’s future spatial planning is simply to be a continuum of the current Structure Plan, albeit tempered by a nod in the direction of “sustainable development” and some form of acknowledgement of other government “national policies”.

Unless a plan of this nature acknowledges as its starting-point the rampant past over-development, and seeks explicitly to reverse or to slow it down, it risks perpetuating the same mistakes of the last 50 years.

The analysis contained in the document simply does not square up with the all-important Strategic Objectives which are its overriding purpose. The analysis itself is balanced, objective and accurate. I quote the following directly from the document. “There is an over-supply of land for housing. The land required for future industrial development up to 2020 can be met by using vacant land within the designated industrial areas. There is an over-supply of “floor-space” for the market services sector. Malta’s biodiversity continues to be threatened by land development, over-exploitation and climate change. Limestone has been over-exploited. Freshwater resources are threatened by over-abstraction, pollution from nitrates, lack of rain-water harvesting and poor infrastructure. Malta’s built heritage is under threat from demolition, inappropriate design and use of new and restored buildings which undermine street character. The cultural landscape is threatened by the extent of the built up area”.

And so the analysis goes on in this vein in all its honest, gory detail. In the face of such overwhelming evidence, it would be logical to assume that the “Strategic Plan” which resulted would reflect the need for future action to correct these past deficiencies. But instead, the Thematic Objectives – as they are called – are bland and do not correspond to the evidence so starkly described in the analysis. The means by which the Objectives are to be achieved are anaemic and so worded as to be open in practice to any interpretation which any future government may choose to place on them.

There needs to be a radically different approach to the National Spatial Strategy. It must start from the clearly stated presumption of a determination to shift the argument, as a matter of government policy, against further speculative construction development and in favour of establishing a clear economic or social need before development may be permitted. This criterion should drive the formulation of the SPED and should form the “Over-arching Thematic Objective”.

The following omissions should also be rectified. The current over-supply of dwellings and industrial sites must be brought under control. The rate of approval of development applications should be reduced by setting – and adhering to – annual threshold figures for different types of construction development until a better balance between supply and demand is achieved. The remaining unbuilt plots of land within the development zones must be allocated in a phased manner, and in the priorities already set out in the document, to slow down and stabilise development. At the same time, a hoarding tax should be introduced on any properties lying empty more than 12 months after completion. Buildings left uncompleted should attract a daily fine if they are left in shell form for longer than a year after the start of construction. A property tax should be introduced on second homes.

Limestone from quarries should be controlled by setting annual limits on extraction. Comprehensive adaptability and mitigation management plans should be developed now in anticipation of the effects of climate change on cultural heritage. The north-south divide that currently exists in Malta, to the detriment of those living in the Inner Harbour areas and their immediate surrounds, should be addressed. Finally, given Malta’s ageing population, greater emphasis must be placed on planning for healthy ageing by abiding with the WHO recommendations of age-friendly city and town environments.

In conclusion, the paramount environmental challenge facing Malta in the 21st century is the need to control building development and the way we use and share this tiny land. The qualities of thrift and moderation must replace the laissez-faire attitude of the last 50 years. If the SPED is to inject reality into Malta’s future planning system, the present draft will need to be radically amended.
What a pity, what a shame! Another old building is about to be demolished. It will be gone forever, the irreplaceable loss of the historic urban fabric of the important Naxxar village core. Such news makes one feel impotent against the destructive onslaught of greed, where developers will stop at nothing to make a quick buck. One also feels impotent in a country where the planning authority will not even accept the suggestions of its own Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee. What is it there for, if its professional and well-informed advice is not taken? How, in the face of such decisions, can one have faith in the boards, acting on behalf of all the citizens of Malta?

Awareness about the importance and value of historic sites has resulted in huge efforts by both the government and the private sector in the conservation of Malta’s architectural landscape. However, it is not only the important landmarks and historic sites that must be preserved. Humble, unassuming buildings also have a story to tell, as well as lending their beauty to the streetscape. Theirs is the integrity of authenticity, which no attempt at reproduction, or nod to their memory, can replicate. It is what attracts residents to our old villages and why tourism is reaching out to tap the resources of these unique places.

In the vision for Malta’s future, a lot has been said about the need to take the tourism product “to the next level”, and attract quality tourists. This is the niche where Malta can excel, providing the services, hospitality and cultural activities that would bring quality tourism to our shores. The traditional built environment is one of the key elements in the provision of this cultural experience; one that extends from the well known Valletta, Mdina and Three Cities to encompass all the other historic towns and villages.

What better setting for a beautiful baroque church, boasting art treasures worthy of world-class museums, than a well-preserved village centre? What better setting for our traditional festa than the winding streets, with houses loved and looked after by generations of inhabitants? Incentives to encourage conservation of the historic fabric would go a long way towards ensuring its preservation. The success of the wooden gallarija scheme, some years back, not only saved hundreds of traditional wooden balconies from extinction but also went a long way towards reviving the craft and skill required to make them.

A lot is to be gained from the preservation of an old town or village. Certainly the view must be in the longer term, but the value of property in historic town centres is most definitely one that would appreciate, if proper protection were afforded to it. Would Taormina be the exclusive resort it is today if the vernacular buildings it encompasses in its narrow streets had been demolished to make way for modern flats and shops? The old village core of St Julian’s, for example, would have been an ideal retreat from the busy seafront for tourists to explore and discover, had it enjoyed the protection Taormina has. Instead, the lovely village houses are being systematically demolished and replaced with flats that crowd the narrow streets and make life unbearable. What a wasted opportunity.

There is much left to preserve and conserve; let us treasure the resource that is our old buildings, however humble or neglected. Once they are gone, they will be gone forever and they are seldom replaced by something better, or more beautiful. Let us stop the destruction before it is too late. The urban core areas are so small, sometimes consisting of just a couple of streets, that it is unthinkable to also give these up to development and add to the mass of architectural mediocrity of the newer village outskirts. Instead, we must ensure that they will survive for the benefit of our children and for posterity.

Our traditional village architecture must be preserved. It is a resource to be treasured and valued. It is what defines the character of our urban cores and speaks to us of the experience and intelligence of our forefathers. Most of all it is our heritage. An appeal is hereby made to the government to intervene.
Modernist Malta
the Architectural Legacy

In 2009, the Chamber of Architects, together with Din l-Art Helwa, organised a photographic exhibition on 20th-century Modernist buildings in Malta. It focused on post-war buildings constructed prior to 1970, including schools, industrial and commercial buildings, tourism developments, churches and private residences.

Five of Malta’s leading photographers were commissioned to photograph around 35 buildings – Patrick Fenech, Matthew Mirabelli, Sergio Muscat, Alexandra Pace and Darrin Zammit Lupi.

The exhibition was accompanied by a publication, edited by Alberto Miceli Farrugia and Petra Bianchi, which includes the black-and-white photographs as well as articles by Alberto Miceli Farrugia, Petra Bianchi and Conrad Thake.

Numerous buildings that formed part of Malta’s modern architectural achievements had already been either demolished or changed beyond recognition. However, a few excellent examples of Modernist architecture still exist, and this exhibition and publication were intended to raise awareness of this aspect of Malta’s recent architectural heritage and to document and promote the historical and architectural value of these buildings.

Photographic Exhibition of Modernist Malta

Qala Primary School
Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

bottom left:
University of Malta,
Old Humanities Building
Photo: Patrick Fenech

bottom right:
Clunaird House
Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi

Modernist Malta: the Architectural Legacy,
eds Petra Bianchi and Alberto Miceli Farrugia,
Kamra tal-Periti, Malta: 2009
The urban landscape south of Grand Harbour has recently come under the microscope. The proposed controversial University Campus site throws light on the current government’s approach perceived as an attempt at improving the economy of this area. However, it fails to take into consideration a number of critical and important factors.

Across the board, there is consensus that an improvement in the urban landscape of the south of Malta is required. One may also add that there is consensus that an improvement in the economy of this part of the island is required as well. The urban landscape that comes to mind in the south consists of authentic villages and towns, largely unspoilt in the centre but lacking in commercial and retail entities, miles of abandoned circuits of fortifications, an absence of pleasant public urban spaces, and quasi-abandoned industrial estates on peripheral areas. Large tracts of open countryside also characterise the interstitial spaces between these towns and villages creating distinctness between the urban areas, and evoking memories of how perhaps other parts of Malta might have been, had development been curbed.

Many of us will still remember a time when Birkirkara was distinct from Msida, San Gwann distinct from Birkirkara and Naxxar distinct from Mosta, for example. The excess development which grew organically along the roads in those previous interstitial green spaces is sadly not one of quality but consists of unsightly garages, bleak blocks of apartments and a general lack of landscaping of any kind.

Sadly, it seems to be the case that the construction of new buildings, irrespective of whether or not they are a positive contribution to our landscape, is hailed as improving the economy. This indeed is a very short-sighted view that can only result in further destruction of our urban and natural landscape. It also betrays a lack of understanding of the very qualities which render our island unique and attractive.

The quality of the landscape in the south of Malta is interesting, varied and requires due qualification by politicians, planners and policy-makers. The urban quality of Senglea is different to that of Kalkara and altogether different to that of Żejtun. They have one common factor: a fragility of historic buildings that is crying out for attention and reuse. Furthermore, the three cities are surrounded with forts, bastions and derelict historical sites, most of which are under-utilised public property.

In focusing on this part of the island, the first and foremost question that should be asked in the upper echelons of the planning and political sphere is: “How can such derelict sites, mostly public property, be restored and put to good use?” and the corollary should be: “How can a new lease of life in these properties help to catalyse change in these depressed parts of the island?” This should be the departure point for a proper regeneration and rehabilitation of the south.

In the light of this basic need, it was therefore quite obvious that the reactions of various individuals and NGOs, upon learning from the press that open countryside was to be developed to accommodate a university campus, all cried out for this campus to be housed within a historic fort or site. The issues that this controversy brings to light are mainly that a large number of people, represented by NGOs, do not wish to see the open countryside destroyed. This is the most salient point of all. The second issue that it highlights is that the general public wishes to see a plan in action that addresses these abandoned historic sites. Whilst these public statements are not the result of professional studied master plans, they bring to light a public sentiment of extreme importance: a need to conserve our natural landscape (ODZ) and our historical sites. To ignore these pleas would be quite foolish, politically.

Good governance is required. A genuine attempt to catalyse change in the economy of the south of the island must be underpinned by professional urban master planning. The basic formula for regeneration consists of an analysis of brownfield or abandoned sites – industrial, historic or otherwise, an analysis of
ownership and statistics in respect of empty buildings together with an analysis of economic and social factors. This raw data helps paint a picture of the neighbourhood physically, socially and economically.

The next step is to identify uses for such sites that would help catalyse the economy and result in long-term physical, social and economic benefits. The final step would be to look internationally at those industries, including possibly foreign universities, which could fit within the profile required and invite expressions of interest. The case of the DePaul University certainly seems to be one of putting the cart before the horse.

The 'university' factor is attractive since it is the classic textbook catalyst for the regeneration of depressed historic cities and towns in many historic cities in the past 50 years. Bologna received an injection of life in the 1970s when the university was relocated within the historic centre, attracting students from beyond its city walls. The old abandoned buildings were reused to house the various faculties, whilst the locals thrived off a market of rentals to students together with the other indirect benefits of a student town. The so-called 'campus' is within the heart of historic Bologna and renders the whole historic centre alive with students. One need only look at how the Msida area thrives off rentals to Gozitan and foreign students attending the University of Malta.

The 'university factor' would be a key catalyst for the historic towns of Senglea, Birgu and/or Cospicua. An unstudied example of how this could be made possible would be to house the faculty blocks within the various empty bastion buildings along the Margherita or Cottonera Lines, whilst creating a route to link all faculties along the top of the fortifications. The entire route runs alongside various sports facilities and other abandoned buildings that could act as accommodation. This is simply one idea. There are many other possibilities that require proper in-depth analysis.

To locate an ‘American’-styled campus on virgin land, with sea views, linked solely by vehicular transport is not good governance. It is simply politicians reacting to a perceived injection of cash, and yet another construction project a stone’s throw away from one which is not even being fully utilised: Smart City. The key to finding a solution for the south can only lie in a proper regeneration strategy carried out by professional planners and not politicians.

Perit Joanna Spiteri Staines is an architect and specialist in the conservation and regeneration of historic centres and their buildings.
Conservation Is As Much About The Future As The Past

Professor Conrad Thake

“At the risk of embarking on a paradox, we must recognise that conservation is as much about the future as the past. In fact true conservation, far from being a reactionary attitude as its opponents often imply, stems from an historical awareness of the need for healthy change. Paintings, sculpture and the applied arts cannot be understood without reference to their architectural and physical context, nor similarly can any of them be intelligently conserved without an appreciation of the evolutionary processes – social, economic and political – which produced them. In short, to make the trite distinction that ‘people come before buildings’ is to be blind to the fact that people are buildings: buildings, people.”


In recent times it has become fashionable to promote the notion that in order for Maltese society to progress, flourish economically and become more affluent, we have to unilaterally embrace all kinds of physical development, be it in the form of high-rise building, agro-tourism projects in Outside Development Zone areas, land reclamation projects, relaxed permissible height limits for hotels and various proposals for new ones to be built along pristine coastal areas, etc.

The urban vision being peddled is that of a glitzy ‘Dubai of the Mediterranean’ which will become a Mecca for locals and visitors alike. Considerations relating to environmental sustainability, the conservation and preservation of our architectural heritage and the safeguarding of the limited areas of natural landscape and coastline have been relegated to the back-burner and at times are being perceived as impediments to economic progress.

Whilst the government is actively promoting the construction of an extensive campus for a new American university currently being proposed in virgin open countryside, there are several historic buildings and structures in the vicinity which lie in a state of dereliction and are crying out for conservation and regeneration – suffice it to mention Fort Ricasoli and extensive parts of the Knights’ period Cottonera Lines, the latter festering as a tip for the illegal dumping of waste material or even in parts unceremoniously integrated within cattle farms.

There are also other opportunities in the southern part of the island awaiting redevelopment, such as the dilapidated site of the former Jerma Hotel in Marsascala. Such is the paradox to which the British architectural historian John Wilton-Ely alluded when he reiterated that “conservation is as much about the future as the past”.

One of Malta’s precious assets is the richness and diversity of its architectural heritage in time. With our prehistoric temples, archaeological remains and the vast architectural legacy bequeathed by the Knights, we have the potential and capability to lure anyone to our shores. The wilful importation of the hollow glitzy type of speculative development à la Dubai will, over time, not only do irreparable damage to the physical fabric of our towns and villages but will also seriously threaten our architectural and cultural authenticity. Our collective historical memory will be gradually eroded to the point where the urban landscape will become totally alien to us all.

I still recall how, in the early 1990s, the late eminent British architect and conservationist Sir Bernard Fielden made an impassioned plea to the local planning authority to reconsider the scale of the proposed development on the Tigné peninsula as, to his mind, what was being proposed would dwarf and trivialise the majestic scale of Fort St Elmo as it once stood – dominating the sea approach to Marsamxett and Grand Harbour.

 Needless to say, his plea fell on deaf ears as powerful corporate interests ensured that the high-density real-estate project would obtain the official seal of approval. The end result is known to all and any further architectural judgement would be superfluous.

And yet there is a perception that the powers-that-be seem to be in the juggernaut of the real-estate magnates. Elite gated residential developments are sprouting up in various areas, particularly Sliema and St Julian’s, and are being touted as tangible evidence of progress. In the meantime, existing hotels rush to add a couple of additional floors or else bite the dust and re-invent themselves as real-estate-cum-hotel projects. While some localities are transforming themselves overnight, we still have to contend with depressed neighbourhoods in the lower end of our
capital city – residential quarters that have gradually depopulated and today lie in a state of dilapidation and abandonment.

The government could show its mettle and vision by channelling the energies of the local construction industry to those depressed areas in dire need of regeneration. This it could do in creative ways by declaring specifically delineated urban areas as “free enterprise zones” where, for a specified period of time, entrepreneurs who commit to investing in such zones are given tax breaks. The government should intervene in a positive manner by being a catalyst for change in a sustainable environmental manner rather than taking the easy route of opening up the floodgates to unbridled development.

Over the past three decades, the country has invested heavily in major infrastructural projects that have contributed in a significant manner to the economic well-being of the country: a new power station, airport terminal, state hospital, primary and secondary schools, reverse osmosis and sewer treatment plants and various new arterial roads. All these capital projects were essential for the development of the country and yet we have to be acutely aware of the very finite nature of our land resources. As a small island state, land is a very precious commodity which we cannot dispose of without very serious considerations. The loss of virgin rural land cannot be reversed.

One of the major deficiencies to my mind is the lethargy demonstrated to date in the drawing up of a comprehensive revised structure plan that would set out, in a strategic manner, the spatial requirements for the next two decades based on projected needs. We should certainly be seriously discussing whether, where tourism is concerned, we have reached saturation level in terms of the volume of tourists. Tourism, as one of the main pillars of the Maltese economy, also brings about a considerable strain on our infrastructure and land resources. We should certainly not operate under the misconception that the sky is the limit in terms of the number of tourists we can accommodate.

Land reclamation has also been bandied around as an ‘easy and profitable’ way of expanding our physical land resources. Apart from the obvious adverse impacts that land reclamation would have on our marine environment, which certainly should not be under-estimated, the fact remains that reclamation is a very expensive venture, fraught with complex economic and technical issues. In Dubai, the much publicised ‘World Islands Project’ – a land reclamation project that envisaged the creation of a man-made archipelago of islands resembling the continents of our planet – has degenerated into a spectacular failure. The artificial islands are eroding and literally sinking back into the sea, with the investors facing major financial losses.

It is of paramount importance that we channel the forces of our local construction industry into areas where development would have a positive effect on the quality of our built environment. Thus, development has to be regulated within a sustainable spatial road-map that consolidates and improves the quality of life in our towns and villages whilst safeguarding what remains of our countryside.

A recent government initiative, which merits praise and should be further expanded, is the public offer scheme made to restore, rehabilitate and re-develop four government-owned historic properties which, to date, have been abandoned and lie in a state of dereliction. By engaging with the private sector to create private-public partnerships, there is a good chance of giving these historic buildings a new lease of life. This model still needs to be put to the test but it could certainly offer new directions in serving as a catalyst for the regeneration of our architectural heritage.

The government should actively seek to engage with local NGOs that are active in architectural conservation to explore ways of fruitful collaboration. Whereas NGOs are driven by passion to safeguard our natural and cultural heritage, most developers are primarily driven by an agenda of maximising profits, which many a times comes at the expense of the state of the environment. Old historic buildings are also an economic resource that should not be underestimated. By preserving them we are also respecting that continuum with our collective memory.

To conclude, it would be wise to recall the words of William Morris, the founder of modern conservation, when he was establishing the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings:

“It has been truly said that these old buildings do not belong to us only; that they belong to our descendants unless we play them false. They are not in any sense our property, to do as we would like with them. We are only trustees for those that come after us.”
The entrance to Valletta is unworthy of a World Heritage City. The debate about plans for this site has raged for over 60 years and it is highly unlikely that consensus will ever be reached. Any government taking decisions on this special project must therefore expect to finally go ahead without consensus. There is no other way.

*Din l-Art Ħelwa’s* concern is that any decisions taken should follow good heritage conservation principles. Unity of style is not the overriding aim of restoration. Sensitive blending of the new with the old has long been followed as a guiding principle and was confirmed in the Venice Charter in the 1960s. Different layers of history lie visibly over one another. *Din l-Art Ħelwa* believes that a contemporary design of a high standard is the most desirable solution for this site.

*Din l-Art Ħelwa* recognises the high quality of architect Renzo Piano’s buildings all over the world and considers that Valletta is fortunate to be able to incorporate the designs of this great Italian architect in the 21st century. Opinions on aesthetics are inevitably subjective; however, the proposal is imaginative, skilled and sensitive to its context.

The designs engage with the shapes and masses of the adjacent bastion walls and the cavalier and respect the traditional stone out of which Valletta was built. The entrance will feature massive blocks of limestone, Malta’s most beautiful natural resource and the building material of our island’s historic and colossal defensive walls.

The government intends to build a new Parliament building in Freedom Square. This area was built on in the past and only evolved into an open space after World War II. Constructing a building, including a Parliament building, in this square is therefore perfectly acceptable on heritage conservation grounds. Valletta also stands to gain enormously from the plan to turn the Palace in St George’s Square into a national museum when Parliament moves out of that building.

It is not part of *Din l-Art Ħelwa’s* mission to comment on where the government’s financial priorities should lie. There will always be competing priorities. However, we would insist that when the entrance to Valletta is tackled, a budget proportionate to the importance of this site must be allocated. It is absolutely unacceptable to imagine that anything on this site should be done ‘on the cheap’.

Valletta is a World Heritage site and we owe it not only to ourselves but to the whole world to ensure that the new entrance to the city follows today’s standards of great world architecture – to which Mr Piano is no stranger. The decision to assign a budget to this site will always be a difficult one for any government. *Din l-Art Ħelwa* therefore welcomes the fact that a commitment has finally been made to invest substantially in our much-loved city.

The opera house ruins are recognised as having a heritage value and have been scheduled by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority. Any new designs for this site should therefore incorporate them. Mr Piano has transformed the ruins into an unusual outdoor performance and meeting space, with backstage facilities beneath the adjacent area near St Catherine of Italy church.

*This article was first published in The Times of Malta on 10 March 2010*

*Photographs: Luis Rodriguez*

Intricate stone work and fine angles of the new Renzo Piano Parliament Building
The post-war building that now houses the police station next to the church will be demolished for the site to be turned into an open square and reveal the auberge behind it. The idea of an open and functional space within the ruins is intriguing and *Din l-Art Ħelwa* has no objection to this on heritage or aesthetic grounds.

Many designs have been put forward in the past for an “indoor” theatre on the ruined site, including the results of various competitions. None of these designs were ever agreed to and, at times, they engendered as much controversy as we are witnessing today about the outdoor space.

Questions about a roof and the required backstage area are under discussion and the idea of building a large theatre on a different site has also been put forward. We await the outcome of these questions with interest. However, *Din l-Art Ħelwa* favours one holistic vision for the entrance to the city.

When the government came forward with the idea for this project in 2008, *Din l-Art Ħelwa* and other stakeholders were consulted. We were consulted again in 2009 when the plans were drawn up. A large model of the proposal was exhibited last year at the Museum of Archaeology in Valletta for the public to view.

In the meantime, hundreds, if not thousands, of different comments and divergent views have been put forward through Mepa and the newspapers and in discussions, blogs and articles. *Din l-Art Ħelwa* is pleased to note that some of our suggestions have been taken on board, such as extending the designs to include the bus terminus and the residential block opposite the Parliament building.

Consultation and debate are healthy. However, there comes a point when debate must end and a decision must be taken. Valletta must be allowed to move on. *Din l-Art Ħelwa* backs the implementation of these imaginative and contemporary designs, which it regards as a major step forward in the ongoing rehabilitation of Valletta.

*Din l-Art Ħelwa* believes that this is a project of an exceptionally high standard and that the time has come for Valletta to receive the attention and the expenditure it deserves. It is a fitting prelude to the designation of Valletta as a European Capital of Culture in 2018.
We have all heard about the European Union’s 2020 climate change targets. These are sometimes dubbed the 20-20-20 targets – a 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gases (GHGs), 20 per cent of energy derived from renewable energy sources and a 20 per cent increase in energy efficiency (compared to 1990 levels for GHGs). While the main motivation for these targets is the health of the planet, they also make economic and geopolitical sense, since Europe imports most of its energy. These targets have also created jobs, spurred innovation and had a positive direct effect on the world (1). The 20 per cent renewable energy target has been translated into targets for individual countries based on their existing position viz-a-viz energy use, and their realistic potential. These targets range from the most aggressive being close to 50 per cent (Sweden) to the most modest being Malta’s, at 10 per cent. The reason our target was so modest is that when these discussions were being held a few years ago, we had virtually no renewable energy production, whereas some countries – such as Germany, Austria, Sweden and Denmark – already had a significant portion of their energy originating from renewable energy sources. Sweden, for example, was already at almost 40 per cent in 2005. We have to keep in mind that renewable energy includes hydro-electric power derived from river sand energy from biomass, such as wood, both of which are abundant in these countries and absent in Malta (2).

Malta’s plan to meet this target was drawn up in 2010 (3). The majority of renewable energy was to be generated by a large offshore wind farm on Sikka L-Bajda (a couple of kilometres outside Mellieha). Sizeable contributions were also going to be made through the introduction of biodiesel and waste-to-energy, with the balance being contributed by photovoltaics (PVs), onshore wind and solar water heaters. Recently, however, the government has announced that it is abandoning the plans for an offshore wind farm, following Mepa’s rejection of its application – essentially sealing its fate – in February. The government now says it will make up the difference primarily through the installation of a large number of PVs. The original target was quite modest – about 27MWp (or about 100,000 panels) – but the new target is about seven times higher (about 190MWp) and will require some 2.7km² of area (4-6).

Why this sudden shift and is it achievable? The original plan was formulated in the latter part of the last decade. At that time, wind energy, including offshore, could generate energy at a lower price than a PV system. While the price of wind turbines has seen some reduction over the past decade, the drop in price of PVs has been a lot more dramatic. (Figure 2). Between the time that the original plan for renewal energy generation in Malta was made and today, the price of PV panels has fallen by as much as 75 per cent, making PV power plants far cheaper than off-shore wind farms. Moreover, wind power presents other challenges, such as visual impact, noise pollution and the disturbing of birds’ migratory paths. The plan for onshore wind farming in Malta was always to use a small number of smaller turbines in two or three locations, but it is highly doubtful that even these will be considered now. So is the new target of close to 190 MWp achievable? Well, one important point is that, as at the end of 2014, we were already over a quarter of the way there (53MWp) and about twice the initial target set in 2010. Moreover, several large projects on public properties (factories, schools and government buildings) still need to be realised and several entrepreneurs are awaiting approval for building large solar farms. It should be noted that Mepa has made it clear that no solar farms will be allowed on ODZ land: these farms will be on private roofs, parking lots, land within development zones or unused quarries (7). There is definitely enough space to achieve this target, and I believe it could be achieved under the right circumstances.

The other forms of renewable energy that are also included in the plan – biofuels, energy from waste and solar water heaters – are already being implemented. Heat pumps will also be added to the mix, augmenting the required amount. While 10 per cent renewable energy production might not seem like much, we also have to consider that this is 10 per cent of total energy consumption (not just electricity, but also fuels, etc.) so it will be closer to 20-25 per cent of electricity production. To look at it another way – on a bright, temperate day, when neither air-conditioners nor heaters are not being used, those 190MWp of PV panels could be generating more than half of our electricity. Not a bad situation, considering where we were a few years ago.

References
(6) “Solar farms set to cater for half of Malta’s 2020 renewable Energy targets, Malta Today, 22 Dec 2014.
(7) Solar Farm Policy, Mepa, November 2014.
A comprehensive report by the Today Public Policy Institute has found that Malta is among the world’s most water-stressed countries. Its groundwater reserves are being depleted. They are severely affected by both nitrate pollution and increasing salinity—the consequences of largely unregulated human activities.

For 35 years, Malta has been increasingly dependent on energy-intensive desalination. However, groundwater still contributes most of the water used in the country, especially by water-thirsty agriculture during the dry seasons. Inadequately regulated private groundwater extraction has exacerbated the situation, while the recycling of water or rainwater harvesting is far behind in application.

While Malta has obligations and guidance under the EU Water Framework Directive to address these problems, any mitigation efforts have not changed the rate of groundwater depletion. A comprehensive integrated water policy and plan is urgently required if the nation is to address a potential crisis that could easily occur. Should our reverse osmosis plants cease to work, an oil spill could render our desalination plants useless, with untold consequences for our drinking water, our tourism and industry.

The Maltese population is largely ignorant of its water problem and its dimensions. Even within government, there is a dearth of reliable data relating to the water situation. This was recognised before the last election by the three political parties when they pledged to produce a National Water Plan.

Shortly after the 2013 election, the Malta Water Association (MWA), a reputable, highly informed NGO, presented a document to the new Labour government on how to develop a sound Policy Framework through systematic analysis, stressing that the development of a Water Plan required agreement among the political parties to achieve the necessary action.

Signs of action by the government since then are still not evident. The Plan appears to have fallen between the cracks in government, somewhere between Agriculture, Resources, Environment and Energy. An under-resourced Water Unit within the Ministry for Energy and Health has been tasked with developing a National Water Plan, but the terms of reference for this plan, its funding and the timeframes for its development have not been published.

The think-tank’s report, Why Malta’s National Water Plan Requires an Analytical Policy Framework (www.tppi.org.mt), argues convincingly for the development of a comprehensive water policy analysis, followed by a proper Framework and Plan. An objective policy analysis based on reliable facts detailed the aspects planners need to consider. These include the real value of water and its economic contribution as a justification for future public expenditure; the choices, costs and benefits of various options for enhancing water supply; the essential sectoral linkages, especially between water management and the agricultural sector; the social, environmental and income factors; the legal and regulatory framework; the demand for water and its elasticity; and financial issues, including tariffs, revenues and the levels of justified subsidies to water users.

Overriding in the Maltese context, reverse osmosis needs to be considered a fall-back rather than the leading edge of water management. The highest priority must be given to the rehabilitation and conservation of the water aquifers, which will require extensive analysis of the rate and causes of deterioration and an integrated and fully-costed strategy to achieve measurable goals. Following this, a feasible and affordable plan of action to win public support needs to be put in place.

Because agriculture is the major user of Malta’s groundwater, a Water Policy Framework and Plan requires the same comprehensive level of analysis of the agricultural sector itself, so that the use of water by farmers can be properly understood in terms of economic and income contribution, efficiencies, market competitiveness and social value. Only then can long-term commitments be made about water usage in this sector.

The creation and management of a long-term Water Plan requires a level of analysis and information generation for which the government does not currently possess the capacity. Malta needs to follow the practice of other European countries in which objective analysis is carried out by independent policy institutes, based perhaps in the University.

Successive Maltese governments have turned their faces against confronting the impending water crisis. It would appear that the difficult political challenges of dealing with the farmers and commercial interests have led successive ministers to prefer to believe in miracles to solve the problem. Astonishingly indeed, a recent legal notice has removed the obligation on small farm holdings for the collection of nitrate ridden irrigation water runoff into cesspits, thus further endangering the aquifers.

We may prefer to live as if the crisis is not happening, but the fact is that while the biggest perceived threat to the environment has been property development and the loss of countryside, we have failed to focus on the polluting effects of agriculture and its huge impact on water resources as a result of the extraction of groundwater.

We might secretly be afraid of the impending disaster if the mean sea level aquifer becomes contaminated or disaster strikes our desalination plants, but it seems we are also confident that a divine miracle will somehow spare us the worst consequences. The reality is that only a catastrophe will force politicians to recognise the gravity of the situation and to tackle it objectively—by which time it may be too late.
I cringe with shame for my country and yet rejoice that the result of the anti-spring hunting referendum is a lesson for our politicians. I cringe because, with a slim majority of some two thousand voters – under half a per cent of the electorate, we have voted to allow hunters to go forth and kill this spring, as the hunting season is declared open. I cringe because half the island, concentrated mainly in a few tight areas and in Gozo, has voted compassion towards this group of people so they can continue with their murderous hobby for many springs to come.

While there is hope in the numbers, there is still national shame to overcome. I cringe that the two main political leaders, the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader, encouraged their followers to vote in favour of spring hunting. Their example, no matter how it was dressed, did not do them or our country any honour. Desperate to placate political promises and hiding behind the majority, they have no qualms about making Malta the only European nation where hunting is allowed to take place in spring – a pathetic state of affairs that takes Malta back to the Dark Ages. So, again, the countryside is to be overrun by an army of gun-wielding bird-stalkers who will continue to decimate endangered species until there are none left to kill. I am comforted by the fact that hunting will by gunned down by its own pellets one day – and not so far off, either. However, that our leaders would stoop so low to garner political favour is a painful state of affairs for our country.

Yet, despite the dishonourable example of the party leaders, despite having no television station nor any far-reaching media to assist the anti spring hunting campaign, and with only a handful of volunteers to help, the ‘No’ movement obtained a remarkable turnout of what can be termed 50 per cent of the electorate, successfully moving the hearts and minds of this other half that wants to bring about change. The island has shown it has a better half and one that deserves to be heard. This is an amazing result, and those of us who want to see Malta evolve for the better must take strength from the fact that political leaders can be held to responsible action by the sheer numbers of the ‘No’ voters. They have stated categorically that they want better management of our environment, that they wish spring hunting to stop and they want the countryside to be free for the enjoyment of everyone. Half the island has spoken to its leaders.

The Prime Minister has brought himself some redemption by saying this result has shown that there is a great part of the electorate who wish to see the government put the environment higher on the national agenda, but his ‘last chance’ warning to hunters did not impress many. He does not need the result of this referendum to communicate his intentions after two years of administration, although it is never too late to start. There are many things to be done: restricting development boundaries for further incursions by construction into the dwindling countryside must surely be the priority. Even the hunters would want that. Excellence of development, to save Malta’s attractiveness for our own quality of life and as a visitor destination, is of equal importance. Stringent rules for the preservation of our unique built heritage, in both urban and rural spaces, are essential, while the better management of our marine resources and coastal areas is of supreme urgency.

These are too important to be left in the hands of an unscrupulous group of people of influence who look on the environment as a quick means of making money. Nor are they to be left in the hands of those who are fast relaxing policies at Mepa or approving new ones without an overriding national structure plan in place. The referendum is over, its momentary focus on one single aspect of environmental care a most worthy distraction from the next pressing issues at stake.

Where is this country going if it is to remain a pleasurable place in which to live? We only need to look around us to see the havoc wreaked by construction over 50 years that has resulted in shambolic and substandard development. Malta is an island of unfinished eyesores. The Prime Minister’s invitation to dialogue with the environmental movement and with those who simply love Malta has not been forgotten. The referendum will allow birds to be shot out of the sky, but the plea to save what is left of Malta’s beauty remains.
Both Sides Win
Stanley Farrugia Randon
Council Member of Din l-Art Ħelwa

A Post Anti Spring Referendum observation blogged on the DLH website dated 16 April 2015

Notwithstanding that the two Party leaders opportunistically said they would vote ‘Yes’ in the referendum regarding Spring Hunting, nearly half of the voting population voted ‘No’. The ‘Yes’ campaign that asked the nation for its support was based on instilling fear that other hobbies like hunting would be next in line to be removed. Sadly, very few people understood that the referendum attempted to remove a law which permitted the practice of a hobby – spring hunting – and not to remove a law that regulates such a hobby. Other hobbies do not require a law in order for them to be practised, only rules that regulate them.

The result was a victory for us, the environmentalists, as nearly half the population voted in favour of the environment against all these odds. This should fill us all with courage. I am not against hunting, *per se*, but I have serious reservations about hunting in the spring, when birds are breeding and when many people are enjoying the countryside while hunters are shooting nearby.

Another unfortunate effect of hunting is the defacement of parts of the countryside, evidence of which can be seen everywhere. Access to many places in the countryside is restricted simply because it is used as a hunting ground. Notices stating ‘Privat’, ‘Tidhola’, ‘R.T.O.’, denoting private ownership, are very common it is difficult to know whether they are legal or not. If the area is truly private, then one should not enter, but at least the owner should leave a right of access through a passageway to other areas that are public.

The government urgently needs to devise a system whereby people can know whether or not they are trespassing on private ground and hunters should not be allowed to deface the countryside and leave their hides and surrounding areas in a mess.

Hunters’ Hides Debris littering the countryside
Making the Case for Marine Spatial Planning within Maltese Waters

Prof. Alan Deidun
Council Member of Din l-Art Helwa

Marine spatial planning aspires to minimise the environmental footprint of burgeoning and competing marine economic activities. Originally conceived as a management approach for nature conservation in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park over 30 years ago, it has been used recently in the more crowded seas of European countries as an effective way of achieving multiple objectives.

Since Joe Borg’s term as EU Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (2004-2008), the EU Commission has grown a shining to a more comprehensive, and sustainable, exploitation of the European seas, and with good reason. The numbers are compelling: 23 of the 28 EU member states have a coastline; 41 per cent, or 206 million, of EU citizens live within coastal areas and marine and coastal activities within the EU account for an estimated gross value added ranging of between €330 billion and €485 billion, employing between 5.4 and seven million people.

The EU’s thrust towards the sea has crystallised within the Blue Growth Strategy, which was formulated on the back of the Limassol Declaration signed by all EU countries during the Cypriot Presidency in 2012. This Declaration, which paved the way for ‘The Blue Economy for Smart, Inclusive and Sustainable Growth’, involves a pledge by EU countries to enhance innovation and marine and maritime research, to work towards the effective development and accessibility of marine knowledge, to support the integration of maritime surveillance and the improvement of marine governance, to support the implementation of marine spatial planning (MSP) and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and to assist in the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). This the EU’s flagship directive when it comes to the holistic monitoring of marine ecosystems and is the culmination of a long process that started way back in 2006 with the release of the Green Paper on the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), followed by the release of the Blue Book on the same theme a year later.

An enhanced effort by Malta in favour of marine spatial planning is solicited by the intense jostling for marine space by competing users currently underway within our limited shallow-water area as the development of a tailor-made marine spatial plan seeks the minimisation of use conflicts through spatial allocation of activities, with such a dynamic and adaptable plan being continuously revised in order to reflect the situation in the field. In fact, within the 30km stretch extending between the marine area off Delimara to the waters east of Comino, competition for space is cut-throat. There are at least six aquaculture operators and an offshore aquaculture zone, at least four bunkering and conveyance zones, two port approach areas, vessel waiting areas, numerous wrecks and other scuba-diving sites, at least one spoil ground for the dumping of inert waste at sea, a reef (Sikka l-Bajda) earmarked for possible offshore wind farm development, an AFM firing exclusion area and extensive coverage by seagrass meadows (posidoniaoceanica – P. oceanica), protected under the Habitats Directive as a priority habitat.

Such fierce competition for space is due to the paucity of shallow depths within our extensive territorial waters. In fact, just 11 per cent of such waters are less than 50 metres deep, which puts severe constraints on activities such as bunkering and offshore renewable resources, although technology is fast coming to the rescue, especially for the latter type of activity. To tighten the noose even further, not all this shallow water is readily available for economic activities with no strings attached. In fact, 31 per cent (145 square kilometres) is dominated by P. oceanica meadows and 38.5 per cent (180 square kilometres) falls within any of the five Marine Protected Areas (Marine Protected Areas) designated within local coastal waters.

It was the listing of P. oceanica seagrass meadows as a priority habitat within EU environmental legislation, along with the presence of other protected species and habitats, that prompted the local authorities to designate five Marine Protected Areas within local waters, which together cover over five per cent of the islands’ territorial waters. At its inception almost 25 years ago, the Structure Plan had recommended a total of 14 sites as potential candidates for Marine Protected Areas status.

With the exception of Delimara, these have all been incorporated within the currently-designated five MPA sites. Despite the extensive coverage of
these MPAs, especially the one in the north-east – which encompasses the near-shore waters extending from the north Gozitan coast down to St George’s Bay – to date these MPAs exist almost exclusively on paper, with very little if any implementation of any management measures taking place in the field. While management plans have been formulated for some of the designated MPAs, notably Dwejra (Gozo) and Rdum Majjiesa (north-west Malta), such plans are still only in the offing as far as the other sites are concerned.

If anyone needed any convincing about the economic importance of different maritime sectors locally, and the importance of conserving the marine area hosting such sectors, here a few eye-opening statistics: Malta’s Shipping Registry is the largest in the EU and seventh largest in the world, with a total of almost 52 million gross tons registered under the Maltese flag at the end of December 2013. There are a considerable number of shipping agents and brokers in Malta, employing a total of 3,000 workers. Of the total Maltese workforce, 24.7 per cent (around 40,000 workers) are employed in the coastal tourism, fisheries, sea sports and ship-repair sectors. According to the NetMarIIMed project, the marine and maritime sectors are thought to be responsible for 14.7 per cent of the GDP of the islands, a contribution that is expected to rise to 18 per cent by 2039. Malta already exploits its strategic location along the major east-west oil traffic transit route within the Mediterranean through extensive fuel conveyance services offered in its six bunkering zones, which together cover almost 60 square kilometres, with Hurd’s Bank being one of the largest of such offshore areas in the Mediterranean.

One of the cornerstones of the Blue Economy is the promotion of ocean literacy and several funding calls in the EU’s Horizon 2020 Programme are specifically geared towards its promotion. The Physical Oceanography Unit at the University of Malta has managed to make considerable headway on such an important aspect through its participation in the PANACEA project, which has materialised in the opening of the first marine environmental education centre at Dwejra, Gozo, the filming of three appealing underwater documentaries and the publication of popular seminal science material on marine ecosystems and species aimed at both students and the public at large.

To date, however, ocean literacy initiatives have been undertaken locally in a fragmented nature, but Malta has the potential to become an ocean literacy platform for the southern Mediterranean. The marine hub concept could incorporate such considerations.

Cross-border cooperation on maritime spatial planning (MSP) is essential, as marine ecosystems, fishing grounds, marine protected areas as well as maritime infrastructures – such as cables, pipelines and shipping lanes, together with oil, gas and wind installations – run across national borders. The EU’s Directive on Marine Spatial Planning, which was approved in July 2014, promotes an ecosystem-based approach that should ensure that the collective pressure of maritime activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of good environmental status. It will help enable the sustainable use of marine goods and services by present and future generations.

The waters of our islands are becoming ever more crowded, with increasing demands for yacht marina berths, enhanced inter-island transport, increasing cruise and commercial shipping traffic and government-sponsored renewed interest in land reclamation. The compilation and publication of a holistic marine spatial plan, rather than a fragmented, piecemeal, sector-based approach, can ensure that the ecosystem-based approach prevails and that the long-term integrity of our waters is not compromised.
Judge Maurice Caruana Curran and Dr Godfrey Randon founded Din l-Art Ħelwa in order to assist the government with regard to Chapter II of the Declaration of Principles No. 9 of the Constitution of Malta, which states that the government is obliged to safeguard the environment and the historical patrimony of the nation. These are principles that any government that has Malta at heart is to follow.

Let us examine these words carefully. The word ‘obliged’ means that whoever commands or is given some form of authority over decisions that influence the nation is obliged to safeguard these assets. The word ‘safeguard’ indicates that whoever is in charge of the Maltese State is to protect the environment and the historical patrimony of the nation as it was at the time of the writing of the Constitution in 1964, when Malta gained its independence. Therefore the environment and historical patrimony of Malta cannot be touched or changed. This does not mean that there is to be no development or progress but it must not alter the environment and the historical heritage.

The Constitution spells out that we are to protect the material heritage such as the bastions, the fortifications, historical documents, the Maltese language, the archaeological sites, the chapels the ancient buildings and all that forms part of the history of our nation. This clause in the Constitution also covers our natural environment which is untouchable, although it is not as tangible as the stones of historical sites and the documents.

Not only do the surroundings of particular sites include the land but they are comprised of the contiguous characteristics, the anthropology, the bio-diversity and aesthetics of the place. Hence, even if the site itself is not disturbed, its environs may be changed in such a manner that the essence of the place is lost. A case in point is the development of Tigné Point, where Grand Harbour still exists but its environment has been severely altered.

The last word of the sentence from the Maltese Constitution which we are examining is ‘Nation’. Nationhood entails several unifying factors that distinguish one nation from another. The environment and the historic patrimony give us this distinguishing national identity, therefore if a Maltese national feels that he belongs to his nation he is in duty bound to care and safeguard its heritage and environment by taking pride in being Maltese. The politician, who is elected to represent the nation, is obliged to set an example.

I am sorry to say that many times our very leaders do not practice this maxim. They do not communicate the sense of nationhood and are more concerned with abiding by what others think about us, with “pleasing the foreigners”. And yet, each one of us has a duty and an obligation to care for our surroundings, which may be divided into the urban, rural and coastal environment.

The Urban Environment
The urban environment must be protected. The Planning Authority determines the Urban Conservation areas, but these boundaries are often ignored. The urban environment is also being altered even in such historical spaces as Valletta. The construction of structures such as the new Parliament building, the use of aluminium fixtures, unnecessary changes to the façades of old buildings and the lack of proper maintenance of places of historical value that are allowed to deteriorate speak for themselves.

While sites that are uncared for attract the interest of developers who use the excuse that a new apartment block is better than an uncared-for dump, it is necessary to create more gardens, more open spaces for the public to enjoy while getting away from buildings, cars and pollution. There should also be a clear policy regarding the height of buildings in various places.

The Rural Environment
The Maltese countryside and rural environment are under constant threat. Not only have we continued to build in the valleys, but we continue to exploit fertile land as people apply for permission to build a farmhouse to later develop and inhabit it. Mepa has issued plans showing Outside Development Zones but pressure is often applied by developers for the altering of these plans. The authorities ought to maintain the original ODZ plans.

The Coastal Environment
It is a fact that people have occupied coastal areas with the excuse that they need space for fishing vessels. These so called ‘boat houses’ are not even built to accommodate a boat. Furthermore, many hotels and restaurants are appropriating coastal land to increase their earnings to the detriment of the general public. The coast forms part of the public domain and yet parts of it continue to be usurped. Bugibba, Marsalforn and Xlendi are clear examples of this. Some hotels go so far as to bar access to the coast which should be open to the public.

Land reclamation involves a change to the nature of the coastline. Our coast is extremely limited and, wherever possible, the coastal land that has been abused should be allowed to return to its natural state. A case in point would be a bridge between Malta and Gozo, also involving the minor island of Comino. Such a structure would cause irreversible disturbance to our coastline and the contiguous land and marine environment.

A Final Thought
Whether or not Din l-Art Ħelwa, this fair land, remains truly fair depends on us Maltese – for it is the people who make a nation and not the land on which they live. It is up to every Maltese or Gozitan citizen who loves his country to do all within his power to care for those qualities that give Malta its particular national character.
**DIN L-ART HELWA HERITAGE SAVED**

*1965-2015*

*A Din l-Art Helwa Publication*

Written by Council Member Stanley Farrugia Randon, this book is dedicated to future generations.

It tells the remarkable story of Din l-Art Helwa, Malta’s volunteer national trust, founded in 1965 to safeguard Malta’s rich heritage from the perils of neglect and fast urban development. Spanning the work of five decades from the early years when conservation was still in its infancy, this book describes the unique historic monuments and landmarks saved through restoration by the organisation and the challenges faced by its volunteers.

This 3D photo is by Daniel Cilia and we thank Daniel for his passion and continual involvement immortalizing Malta’s heritage through his lens. The publication of the book is made possible by the Francis Miller Memorial Fund and Din l-Art Helwa is grateful to the Miller family for their generosity, help and advice in its production. The book is available from all Agenda bookshops at a price of €49.99. Din l-Art Helwa members may purchase the book from Din l-Art Helwa offices at 133, Melita Street, Valletta at a special discounted price of €45 available for members only.

**VOLUNTEERS**

*DIN L-ART HELWA NEEDS YOU*

You are artists, authors, accountants, architects, archivists, engineers, environmentalists, gardeners, historians, keepers of graves, odd job persons, secretaries, tourist guides or just lovers of Malta. You are bankers and business persons, cooks and cake makers, conservators, heritage managers, historians, IT experts, lecturers, marketing persons, you love organising activities, you love meeting people and learning about the far away lands they come from.

You are just enthusiasts who have Malta’s best wishes to heart.

**JOIN US!**

Help us save more of Malta’s historic treasures and its countryside.

Help us look after the places you love.

For more information write to info@dinlarthelwa.org or call Rosanne Zerafa on 2122 5952.
The Autumn 2015 Commemorative Edition of Vigilo will be dedicated to the many historic monuments saved through restoration by Din l-Art Helwa and its volunteers.

Taking down the fresnel lenses from Delimara Lighthouse

The newly restored altar of St Philip Neri at Our Lady of Victory Church
Din l-Art Ħelwa Corporate Members & Sponsors

**2014 – 2015**
ADRC Trust
Alfred Mizzi Foundation
APS Bank Ltd
Avantech Ltd
AX Holdings plc
Bank of Valletta plc
Best Print Co Ltd
Central Bank of Malta
Charles Darmanin and Co Ltd
Curmi and Partners
Cyberspace Ltd
Deutsche Bank (Malta) Ltd
Dingli and Dingli
Farsons Foundation
Fimbank plc
Finance Malta
Forestals Ltd
GasanMamo Insurance Malta
GlobeGround Malta
GO plc
GVC
HSBC Malta Foundation
Island Hotels Group Holdings plc
KPMG Malta
Malta Environment and Planning Authority
Malta Financial Services Authority
Malta International Airport Foundation
Malta Stock Exchange
Malta Tourism Authority
Medserv plc
Middlesea Insurance plc
Ministry of Education
MSV Life plc
P Cutajar and Co Ltd
PWC Malta
Rotary Club Malta
Round Table Malta
Shireburn Software Ltd
Sparkasse Bank Malta plc
Strickland Foundation
The Francis Miller Foundation
The Tanner Trust
Tug Malta Ltd
VJ Salomone Marketing Ltd
Vodafone Malta Foundation

**PRE 2014**
Air Malta plc
Allied Newspapers Ltd
Arriva Malta Ltd
Atlas Insurance PCC Ltd
Auto Sales Ltd
Avantech Limited
Body Shop Malta
Central Cigarette Company Ltd
Computime Ltd
Corinthia Group of Companies
De la Rue Currency & Security Ltd
Eden Leisure Group
Enemalta Corporation
Environmental Landscapes Consortium
Exalta Projects
General Workers Union
Gozo Channel Company Ltd
Greich & Co Ltd
Ignazio Anastasi Limited
Infinitely Xara
Joinwell Ltd
Kemmuna Ltd
Lombard Bank Malta Plc
M Demajo Group
Malta Maritime Authority
Malta Union of Teachers
Marsovin Ltd
Megabyte Ltd
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Rural Affairs & Environment
Mizzi Holdings
Multi Packaging Ltd
P. Toledo Limited
Pisciculture Marine de Malte Ltd
Playmobil Malta Ltd
Salvo Grima Group Limited
Simonds Farsons Cisk Limited
Toly Products Ltd
Transport Malta
Union Haddiema Magħqudin
Vassallo Builders Group Ltd

**BENEFACTORS AND LEGACIES**
Karmen Micallef Buhagiar
Marjorie de Wolf
Anne Crosthwait
Major Nesto Jacono – The Agape Trust