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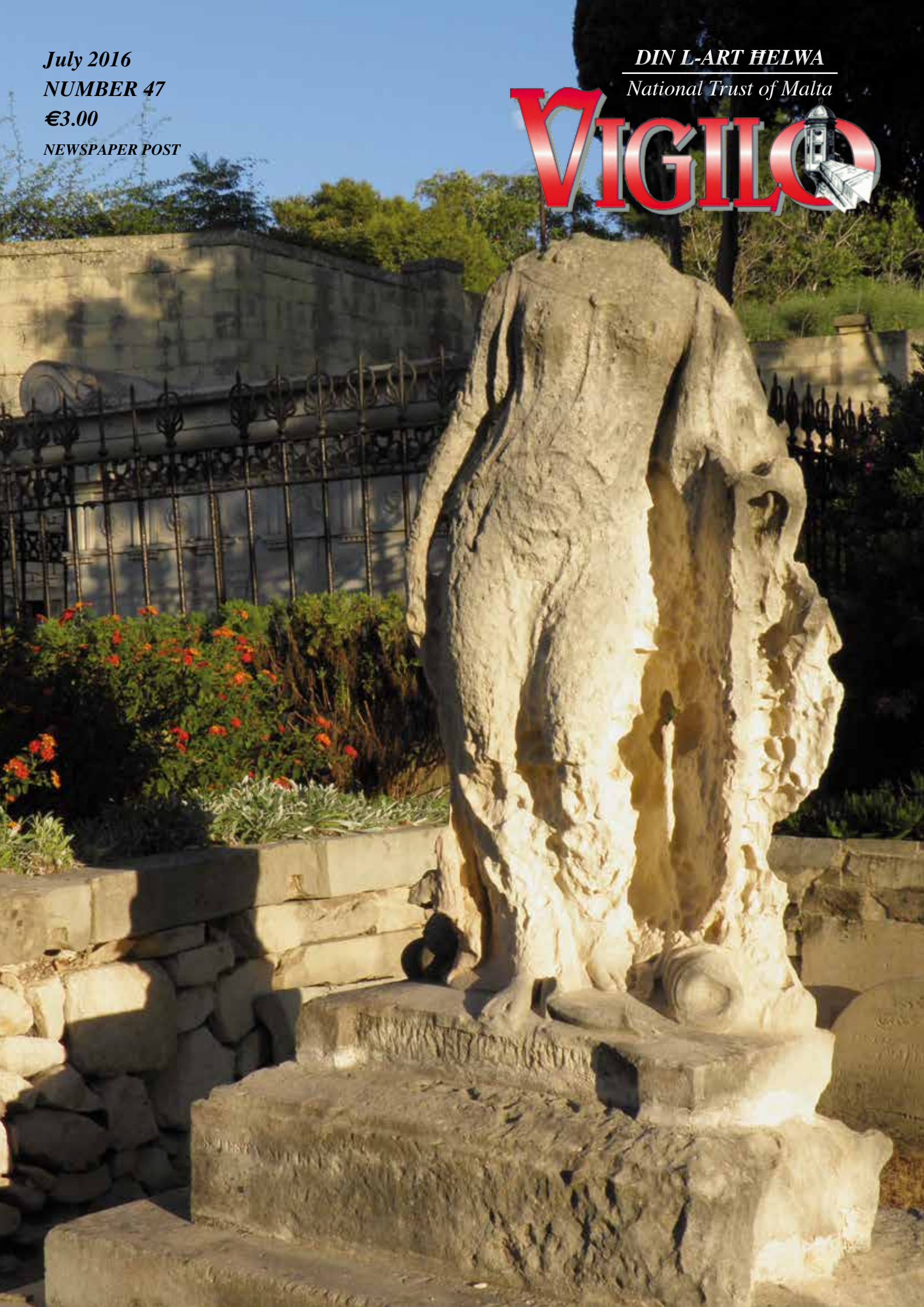
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NEWSPAPER POST

*DIN L-ART HELWA*

*National Trust of Malta*

# VIGILO



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Monday - Friday  
9:00 am - 12:00 noon

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

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

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



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

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

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

*The National Trust for Scotland*

*The Barbados National Trust*

*The National Trust of Australia*

*The Gelderland Trust for Historic Houses*

*The Gelderland 'Nature Trust'*

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

*ICOMOS - Malta*

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*The International National Trusts Organisation (INTO)*

*The National Federation of NGOs of Malta*

*The Heritage Parks Federation*

*Qantara*

*Future of Religious Heritage Association*

The views expressed in  
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Statue representing  
an allegory of Hope.  
Msida Bastion  
Historic Garden



## BACK COVER

The icon of  
Our Lady of Victory  
within its sculptured  
masonry setting



## Heritage and Environment Protection

**Maria Grazia Cassar**

*Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa*

As we reflect on the last six months of *Din l-Art Helwa* activities, it seems incredible that so much could be achieved by a voluntary organization. Thanks to the energy and hard work of its many volunteers, supported by the solid presence of the office staff, we saw a string of talks, lectures, concerts, exhibitions, cultural tours, garden fêtes, and re-enactments, which were over and above the daily work of coordinating the management of the sites under our care, and current restoration projects. *Bravo* to the Council and all volunteers, and thank you to the staff, without whom this would not have been possible.

Another important aspect of *Din l-Art Helwa*'s work is lobbying to protect the built and natural environment. The Heritage and Environment Protection Committee within the Council has been working tirelessly on this, together with other dedicated volunteers. The sheer increase in development applications to build new, to extend or sanction "tool rooms" Outside Development Zones (ODZ) since the implementation of the Rural Policy of 2014, has necessitated a dedicated part-timer to vet and object to these applications which run into several scores every month. This burgeoning of structures in our landscape, sometimes replacing the quaint, older ones, is one of the recent scourges that is slowly spreading across the countryside and marring areas of "high landscape value" at an alarmingly steady pace. *Din l-Art Helwa* is working on a report which analyzes the outcome of the policy, and making suggestions to improve it.

The threat to the countryside, and ODZ, is relentless, with large-scale development applications, that eat away at more land. The recent refusal of the Wied Ghomor application has protected that valley from further urbanization, but other developments, such as another retirement home in Santa Lucia on ODZ land, are being favourably considered. The battle for the protection of our environment is far from over.

The importance of *Din l-Art Helwa*'s constant watch for undesirable planning applications has led us to be instrumental in voicing opinion and engaging in public debate on the protection of the built environment. In spite of our objections to the proposed demolition of the three Art Deco houses in Hughes Hallet Street, Sliema, permission was granted, and we had no other option but to file an appeal against this. We joined forces with the Sliema Heritage Society and Sliema Local Council and are waiting to have the hearing on this case. It is a sensitive issue, which sees the pressure from the developer's side vie with the architecture lover's wish to preserve what little remains of this period's architectural expression in Malta. The gross failure on behalf of the Planning Authority to seek the advice of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage on this case is worryingly symptomatic of an 'ad hoc' decision-making process, clearly favouring demolition as against preservation. *Din l-Art Helwa* will continue to make its objections against the demolition of Malta's built heritage, be it of vernacular, historical or period architecture. We will continue to speak out against the irreversible loss of our cultural landscape and national identity, which is so well expressed in our architecture. We cannot afford to lose any more.

Conservation and restoration make a lot of sense in this day and age. Among the myriad reasons for doing so, but not a minor one nonetheless, is the protection of our environment. Demolition is such a waste of precious resources. Stone is always harder to come by, and quarrying of the material in Malta will soon run out. Yet it is thrown away and dumped as waste, adding to the ever-increasing problem of where to

*"The threat to the countryside, and ODZ, is relentless, with large-scale development applications, that eat away at more land."*

*New development closing in on a historic kiln in Sannat, Gozo.  
Photo Simone Mizzi*



put it. The enormous excavated pits of many large projects should be quarried carefully in order to put the material to good use, and allow for its recycling. This will be an added cost to the project, but one that in my opinion is justified for the sake of limiting waste. In many areas, such as Swieqi, the life span of a building is averaging 10 years, and going down. This is not because there is anything inherently wrong in the structure or style, but because speculation is dictating this trend. Buildings have become a disposable commodity, and they are consumed without very much regard. In environmental terms, this is like making monumental ice-statues using tap water, and leaving them out in the sun. The environment and ultimately all of us are paying dearly for this. Sustainability is a culture that is being promoted across all areas of energy consumption, but unfortunately has not been embraced as a key factor by our construction industry.

This thought brings me to another big hot topic, that of high rise buildings and 'mega developments'. Here again, Sliema seems to be bearing the brunt of it, with 40 storey developments planned at Tigne' Point, and more in Paceville and St George's. A public consultation was carried out before these areas were zoned by the Planning Authority for high rise development.

Mriehel, however, was not included and slipped in as one of the zones without public consultation. Now there are four towers planned, the highest twenty storeys, which will ruin the iconic view of Mdina from Valletta and vice-versa. The most worrying thing is that we will be seeing these buildings from all over Malta. Unfortunately, due to Malta's small size and flattish topology, high rise buildings will be perennially present in our vision, even when out in the countryside and enjoying nature. They will make our environment feel much smaller and claustrophobic, because high rise buildings will ruin the one thing that helps us imagine Malta is bigger than it actually is, the illusion of infinity.

There are many divergent views about this, even within *Din l-Art Helwa*. However, we are all concerned that not enough studies have been carried out regarding the tangible impact of all this development, and no plan has been drawn up as to the quantity and heights of tall buildings that the country can sustain. More importantly, we feel that such an irreversible modification of the quality of life, cultural and historical landscape of our small country should not be brought about without wide consensus among its citizens.

On a more positive note, *Din l-Art Helwa* welcomes and commends the recent rejection of the proposed Hondoq ir-Rummien project which it campaigned vigorously against for several years.

*"Now there are towers planned which will ruin the iconic view of Mdina from Valletta and vice-versa. The most worrying thing is that we will be seeing these buildings from all over Malta."*

*Is this what we want for our country?  
The Mriehel Towers and Valletta*



# Secretary General's AGM 2016 Report

*Philip Mercieca*

*Secretary General of Din l-Art Helwa*

Good morning members, friends, volunteers and members of the press. I welcome you to the 2016 annual general meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

This last year has been a truly memorable and very special year for DLH, being the year of our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – our Golden Jubilee – which was appropriately celebrated by a series of important and prestigious events throughout the year, so capably organised by our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee, chaired by Council member Albert Mamo, whom we thank for their hard work.

I must, however, start my address by paying tribute to the late Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, our founder president, who established and led DLH for 33 years during which he fought passionately to create awareness of the importance of conserving our extraordinary heritage and preserving the environment, establishing DLH as the conscience of the nation in this regard. Judge Caruana Curran sadly passed away on 11<sup>th</sup> March, a few days after our last AGM and also a few days after the opening event of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, which was the concert at the Manoel Theatre on 21<sup>st</sup> February. We are proud to continue the work he started through DLH and preserve his legacy.

## People

The last AGM saw the election of 15 Council members for the period 2015 to 2017, to which were added an additional seven co-opted members, providing a group of dedicated, first-rate people bringing with them a wide range of skills and a wealth of experience in heritage and environmental protection, as well as the organisational and management skills necessary to enable our organisation to continue moving ahead and achieving its goals.

Albert Calleja will, however, unfortunately be retiring from Council. We wish him all the very best, and thank him for the excellent contribution he has made over the years. Meanwhile, we are delighted that Martin Galea has decided to return to the Council. His experience and expertise will be invaluable.

A significant change in 2015 saw the statutory transition in July in the position of Executive President, with Simone Mizzi – an inspirational and exceptional leader for the previous four-and-a-half years – stepping down to be replaced by the equally accomplished Maria Grazia Cassar who was elected to replace her. Simone will, nevertheless, remain active within the organisation in the role of joint Vice President. We should also mention that she has been elected to replace our other Vice President, Luciano Mulé Stagno, on the executive committee of the International National Trust Organisation, while continuing to represent DLH at *Europa Nostra*. She also continues to sit on the Board of the MIA Foundation and HSBC Foundation and on the Committee of Guarantee.

Council member Prof. Alan Deidun has been voted to represent all eNGOs on the new Environment Resources Authority Board. This is an honour for DLH and we would like to thank Prof. Deidun and wish him all the very best in his new post.

We are also fortunate that Dr John Vassallo accepted the invitation from the Council to be appointed as DLH representative on the EU Funds Monitoring Committee within the Planning and Priorities Division of the Parliamentary Secretariat. John's knowledge, expertise and wealth of experience in this area will be of great benefit to DLH.

In view of the extensive work involved in our efforts to monitor and scrutinise development applications being submitted to Mepa and, where necessary or pertinent, prepare a case objection, it was considered necessary to engage an architect on a part-time basis to assist us in this area. Consequently, Sarah Zammit Calleja was engaged on this basis in June 2015, and has since been extremely busy and active, with 140 objections having been submitted by DLH to Mepa by the end of the year.

Our long-serving warden at Dwejra Tower in Gozo, Nigel Brittain, decided to step down after 11 years in the job. We thank him for his hard work and

*Simone Mizzi (right)  
and  
Maria Grazia Cassar*





dedication over the years – he will be sorely missed. We were fortunate to find a replacement in Colin Hamer, who has already done some voluntary work for DLH at Majjistral Park. We welcome him and thank him for offering his services.

Finally we must also give a very big thank you to John Gafà for his loyal and dedicated service as handyman to DLH for the last 15 years and who has now retired. John will be sadly missed and finding someone to replace him, on secondment from the government as was John, is so far not proving to be an easy task, despite our endeavours.

**Promotion**

DLH has continued to avail itself of every opportunity to promote and publicise its declared mission of protecting our heritage and environment and lobbying for support, with courtesy visits to government officials and potential sponsors, as well as with the public in general. Recognition of our efforts has been forthcoming as evidenced by the ever-increasing level of membership as well as the impressive level of public support given to our campaigns on social media.

On 28<sup>th</sup> March, DLH was presented with an award on the occasion of *Jum il-Fondazzjoni tal-Belt Valletta* (Valletta Foundation Day) and later in the year we received further recognition when we were nominated for the first time for the prestigious ‘Peter Serracino Ingott Award’, which is awarded to groups or individuals for their civic engagement or for making positive change to society. The winner was MOAS, but we are proud to have been nominated.

The restoration of Wignacourt Tower was launched by Tourism Minister Edward Zammit Lewis on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, providing good media coverage for DLH.

On 9<sup>th</sup> July, Council members were invited by HE President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca to an informal meeting at San Anton Palace at which the President was presented with a copy of the book by Council member Stanley Farrugia Randon entitled *Heritage Saved*.

Delimara Lighthouse was officially opened on 21<sup>st</sup> July by Transport Minister Joe Mizzi, an event that was also well-reported in the media.

A courtesy visit to our offices by Economy, Investment and Small Business Minister Chris Cardona and Malta Industrial Parks Ltd chairman Tony Zahra was made on 18<sup>th</sup> February to present

*Simone Mizzi and Stanley Farrugia Randon presenting a copy of Heritage Saved to HE President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca*

DLH with the MIP sponsorship for the restoration of our Valletta premises.

Our officials also visited the Gozo Ministry on 28<sup>th</sup> August for a meeting with Gozo Minister Anton Refalo to discuss various pending matters and initiatives by DLH relating to Gozo and Comino.

Finally, on 15<sup>th</sup> December we were honoured to receive a courtesy visit by former EU Commissioner for Culture Ms Androulla Vassiliou, who was attending a conference in Malta and who expressed her staunch support for *Din I-Art Helwa* and the work it is doing.

**Sponsorships and restoration**

The continued generous support of our sponsors, who will be mentioned more specifically later in our Treasurer’s report, has enabled us to continue with our ongoing restoration work on new projects as well as the regular maintenance of all the properties under the care of DLH.

I would like to start by remembering the late Major Nestor Jacono, a past member of DLH, for creating what is known as the Agape Trust, through which DLH received a significant legacy of €25,000, which has been used to help fund the restoration work at the Our Lady of Victory church.

The past year has seen the start of the restoration of the Wied iż-Żurriq Tower, thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Malta International Airport Foundation. The internal walls have been cleaned and the external walls are currently under restoration. The roof, including the original cannon, has been restored and a new carriage for the cannon and missing apertures have been constructed.

The restoration of Wignacourt Tower was completed with funds acquired by the Malta Tourism Authority from EU funding and we have to thank Wignacourt warden Martin Vella and his team, as well as Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon, for the sterling work carried out at the tower, as well as the Eden Leisure Group who carried out the clean-up exercise. The statue of St Paul was restored for the third time – again with the support of the Malta Tourism Authority.

In 2015 the restoration of Delimara Lighthouse was completed and its refurbishment for use as a heritage holiday rental property was completed and launched in July. Special thanks go to our sponsor, GasanMamo, as well as The Malta

*Delimara Lighthouse*





*One of the cannon at Santa Maria Battery  
on Comino*

*opposite:*

*The AFM base in Marsamxett*

*St Agatha's Tower*



Maritime Authority, and in particular Council members Josie Ellul Mercer and Stanley Farrugia Randon for the supervision of the work carried out and Maria Grazia Cassar, Simone Mizzi, Rosanne Zerafa, Rina Mamo and Josette Cini who were instrumental in completing the furnishings to enable us to open for lettings. The initial response and bookings have been very strong and here we also have to thank Sarah Mizzi for the initial promotion and subsequently Quicklets Letting who agreed to manage the bookings on our behalf at no charge.

The programme for OLV church meanwhile is going to plan. Last May, Giuseppe Mantella's team finished treating two-thirds of the ground floor perimeter walls and the altars and reredoses of St John of God and St Philip Neri. Meanwhile the restoration of the magnificent Erardi painted ceiling by the Courtauld Institute has nearly been completed. The wooden ceiling that had concealed the paintings was removed

after almost 20 years and on 19<sup>th</sup> August, in the presence of the sponsor HSBC Foundation, and the media, the Erardi paintings were revealed to the public. The church's new illumination scheme was also inaugurated by His Grace Archbishop Charles Scicluna at the DLH Te Deum Mass on 9<sup>th</sup> December.

We have continued the work on the restoration of the Mattia Preti paintings at Sarrja Church, Floriana, which is being undertaken by restorer Giuseppe Mantella. After completing the restoration of the centre altarpiece of the Immaculate Conception and the painting of St Sebastian, thanks to the financial assistance of Shireburn Software and Malta International Airport respectively, this year we undertook the restoration of the paintings of St Roque, with the assistance of Mr David Curmi of MSV Life, which has been completed, and of St Rosalia, sponsored by the Malta Rotary Clubs and District Clubs of Palermo, which is still ongoing.

You may also have noticed that work has this year started on our prestigious Valletta offices in Melita Street which is being made possible with the support and sponsorship of Malta Industrial Parks Ltd.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September, an agreement was signed between DLH and the Malta Tourism Authority, which kindly undertook to apply for EU funding for restoration work at St Agatha's Tower, Dwejra Tower and the Santa Maria Battery on Comino. We are eagerly awaiting the outcome of these applications.

A new waterproofing membrane was installed at the mediaeval church of Bir Miftuh to replace the previous one that had been in place for about 15 years. Emergency work was carried out on one of the sides of St Agatha's Tower and we are grateful to Council members Stanley Farrugia Randon and Josie Ellul Mercer for coordinating and supervising this work. DLH would also like to thank the Friends of Ta' Braxia who carry on with their arduous task of looking after the cemetery against all odds. Charles Gatt, Andy Welsh and Tony Camilleri are to be thanked for all their work. Council member Stanley Farrugia Randon is currently collaborating with Mater Dei Hospital to install a series of displays outlining Malta's medical history. This very interesting project should be completed by the end of the year.

Another project planned is the enhancement of the Garden of Rest, which is being prepared by architect Joanna Spiteri Staines from our team, with the assistance of fellow architect Alberto Miceli Farrugia. Finally, I would like to mention that – following an application for support, on the initiative of Simone Mizzi – the Community Chest Fund has confirmed their agreement to award *Din I-Art Helwa* a sum still to be established, which will hopefully be used to purchase a sorely needed pick-up car.



### Heritage and environmental protection

In 2015, DLH took forward its mission to lobby in favour of the natural and built heritage of the Maltese Islands. We participated in public consultation exercises, conducted a public survey, published numerous statements in the press, attended a protest rally, contributed to meetings of the Parliamentary Committee on the Environment and Development Planning, organised a public debate and continued with our *Save the Countryside* awareness campaign on Facebook which, by the end of 2015, had reached over 15,000 followers.

DLH began 2015 by calling on the Prime Minister to ensure increased dialogue prior to the approval of planning policies that will further erode the countryside and destroy Malta's rich architectural heritage due to the demolition of traditional street and townscapes.

Between January and April, DLH formed part of the Coalition against Spring Hunting (CASH), campaigning against spring hunting. Ultimately, in the referendum held on 11<sup>th</sup> April those against spring hunting achieved 49.6 per cent of the vote, falling short of a majority by only 2,220 votes. The Coalition stated that this close result sent a clear message that the environmental movement had matured and had proved to be a challenge to both the hunting lobby and the political parties represented in parliament. In April, the Coalition welcomed the early closing of the hunting season following an incident in which a protected bird was shot and fell into the playground of a school.

In February, DLH wrote to the Prime Minister objecting to the relocation of the Monti market stalls to Ordnance Street, near the ruins of the Old Theatre and the Parliament building.

In March, DLH condemned Mepa's decision to allow the pouring of concrete for new kiosk platforms directly onto the sand at Ghadira, which is a Blue Flag beach, and urged the Authority to reverse this decision.

Also in March, DLH's 'Save the Countryside' campaign carried out a public survey of the Maltese population's views on the countryside in collaboration with MISCO International. The survey showed that 97% of the population believe that the countryside should be afforded more protection and 88% that Malta should have more protected nature sites.

Then in April, DLH gave its support to the Public Domain Bill, which has huge significance in the protection of natural and heritage sites against speculation, inappropriate use or neglect.

In May, DLH raised strong objections to the government's proposal to grant land to contractors to build an educational establishment in an area outside the development zone at Żonqor instead of considering disused or brownfield sites. It is our view that whether modern or historic buildings are identified, projects of this type should be accommodated close to population centres and not in the countryside.

In June, DLH voiced its opinion that if the proposed Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED), intended to replace the Structure Plan, was approved in Parliament, the protection of the countryside would decrease. The proposed Strategic Plan would, in fact, increase the regulatory loopholes in favour of more development/speculation in the countryside.

Also in June, DLH participated in the 'Save Żonqor' public rally against the government's intention to encourage the building of a new university at Żonqor Point. The protest was attended by around 3,000 people, the largest public protest that has ever taken place in the history of environmental campaigning in Malta.

DLH said it deplored the new building at the AFM base in Marsamxett which obstructs the view of the Floriana bastions, which is yet another example of insufficient sensitivity to the negative impact on historic views by the government.

Then in July, the government published three draft Bills to regulate the forthcoming demerger of Mepa. DLH participated in a meeting of the Standing Committee for Planning and the Environment in Parliament, and noted that the government's insistence on having the plenary debate before the public consultation had taken place was, in its view, nonsensical, and that the proposals are set to strengthen the hands of developers and weaken the environmental voice when it comes to planning decisions.

DLH reiterated its position that the new Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED) was not an acceptable replacement for the Structure Plan, saying that one would have expected the standards for a document of strategic national importance to be set at a much higher level.

In August, DLH presented its comments on the proposed Mepa demerger, and noted that the new Planning Authority seemed to be divesting itself of all environmental responsibility. The involvement of environmental expertise during the processing of planning applications is set to reduce with the new structures.

In the same month, DLH noted that it was strongly disappointed by the Prime Minister's statement that a new university was still to be built at Żonqor. The public consultation exercise to identify alternative sites seemed to have been merely a sham, as the site had already



been chosen. DLH welcomed the re-use of buildings at No. 1 Dock in Cottonera, but deplored the use of ODZ land at Żonqor in Marsascala.

In October, DLH's 'Save the Countryside' campaign organised a public debate entitled '*Il-Futur tal-ODZ: Għall-Maltin kollha jew għall-ispekulaturi biss?*' at the Old University in Valletta. The debate was chaired by journalist Caroline Muscat and the participants were the then Parliamentary Secretary for Planning Michael Falzon, Shadow Environment Minister Marthese Portelli and the then chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on the Environment and Development Planning Marlene Farrugia, as well as the president of the Malta Developers Association president Sandro Chetcuti and *Din l-Art Helwa* Council member Prof. Alan Deidun.

In December, DLH noted that the transfer of ODZ land at Żonqor to a private developer was forging ahead without due consideration being given to the alternative sites proposed in the public consultation.

Also in December, Council member Joanna Spiteri Staines represented DLH on the panel of a conference about the environment, organised by the Church Commission for the Environment. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were also on the panel.

Thanks must be extended to all the HEP team, in particular Council members Petra Caruana Dingli, Joanna Spiteri Staines and Alan Deidun, supported by Maria Grazia Cassar and Simone Mizzi, for the complicated and sometimes delicate work carried out in this area.

### Events

This has undoubtedly been an exceptional year for the number of events organised in view of the additional 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.

The popular annual Spring Fête was held in the Bastion Garden on 26<sup>th</sup> April, organised by Albert Calleja and his helpers. A Christmas Fair was also held in the Gardens on 5<sup>th</sup> December. Thanks go to Mary Aldred, Albert Calleja and all the volunteers at the Garden of Rest.

This year we were treated to four wonderful concerts at Bir Miftuh, on 15<sup>th</sup> May sponsored by the Chalmers family, 23<sup>rd</sup> May by the French Embassy, 30<sup>th</sup> May by the Italian Embassy and 13<sup>th</sup> June by the Israeli Embassy. As usual, these concerts were well-supported and appreciated and we must especially thank Cettina Caruana Curran, Charles Gatt, Pat Salomone, Amelia Calleja and Anne Marie Navarro for their organisation.

An innovative idea this year was to hold a day's seminar with all our volunteers meeting together as a working group to brainstorm and discuss any issues they may be facing and propose ideas and strategies to improve DLH. This event, which was held on 1<sup>st</sup> June at the Paradise Bay Hotel, was very well attended and a great success. Everyone agreed it should be repeated. Thanks must be extended to Martin Scicluna and Carolyn Clements for taking on the organisation.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June a very enjoyable party to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was organised by Carolyn Clements and her Gozo volunteers and attended by Council members.

On 9<sup>th</sup> July, the actual date of our founding, DLH launched a commemorative stamp celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary which was sold as a first edition.

On the same day, as mentioned earlier, we were invited for a courtesy visit to San Anton Palace by the President Coleiro Preca. The following day a fund-raising dinner was held at San Anton, also attended by the President as well as Tourism Minister Edward Zammit Lewis. This was a wonderful evening, once again impeccably organised by Cettina Caruana Curran assisted by Charles Gatt, Pat Salomone and Cathy Farrugia, amongst others. On this occasion, our Executive President Simone Mizzi formally handed over the reins of office to Maria Grazia Cassar.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> August an activity was held on Comino, in conjunction with Ghajnsielem Local Council. Gozo Bishop Mario Grech said Mass, which was followed by a Maltese feast and a re-enactment in 18<sup>th</sup> century costume. Carolyn Clements and her Gozo team of volunteers are to be thanked for working on this event, which attracted 340 people.





Our Youth Committee organised an open-air film show on 19<sup>th</sup> August as part of the Sliema Arts Festival. In September, our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary sub-committee organised a series of prestigious events covering the five-day visit of Prof. Simon Molesworth, world-renowned environmentalist and long-standing President of The International National Trust Organisation. Prof. Molesworth gave a public talk on 16<sup>th</sup> September at Valletta University Campus as well as at DLH's premises the following day and also participated in a business round table debate at the Chamber of Commerce. Australian High Commissioner Jane Lambert also attended this event, as well as a tour of the Argotti Botanical Gardens.

*Prof. Molesworth and his family at the Red Tower, Mellieħa*

Courtesy visits were also arranged for Prof. Molesworth to President Coleiro Preca as well as Environment Minister Leo Brincat. The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary team of Albert Mamo, Simone Mizzi, Maria Grazia Cassar, Ann Gingell Littlejohn, Cettina Caruana Curran and Pat Salomone are to be thanked and congratulated for the impeccable organisation of this prestigious visit.

In October, art exhibitions by Stephen Spiteri and Ian Camilleri were held at St Agatha's Tower and Wignacourt Tower respectively.

The presentation of the prestigious DLH Awards for Architectural Heritage was held on 25<sup>th</sup> November. There were a good number of very high quality entries in respect of a variety of projects and, again, the judges did not have an easy task. The winners were announced by Maria Grazia Cassar, chairman of the panel of judges, and were presented with their awards by architect Richard England. Thanks go to the judging panel, Professor Conrad Thake, Antonio Mollicone and Joanna Spiteri Staines.

On 27<sup>th</sup> November, the President of Rotary International and senior officers of Rotary Club Malta visited Sarria Church for a presentation given by Dott. Santo Guido on the restoration carried out to date on the Mattia Preti paintings. This was also the official launch of the restoration of the painting of Santa Rosalia by the Rotary Club Malta and the Palermo District Rotary Club.

December saw two further important events as part of our anniversary celebrations. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> we were treated to a vocal recital by mezzo-soprano Hadar Halevy, accompanied by pianist Charlene Farrugia, in the Tapestry Chamber of the Grand Masters Palace, kindly made available by President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca who also attended the event. This was followed by a reception at the Palace and our thanks go to Cettina Caruana Curran, Pat Salomone and their helpers for organising this event.

Finally, on 19 December, Pat Salomone organised the popular annual Christmas concert by the Enkor Choir at Our Lady of Victory Church which was, as usual, well attended.

### Lectures

Several very interesting, informative and high profile lectures were given during the year in the Judge Caruana Curran Hall. We are grateful to all the lecturers supporting DLH by giving their time to share their experience and knowledge to raise the profile of Malta's cultural heritage.

### Conclusion

I must conclude by first of all thanking most sincerely all our loyal, hardworking and dedicated volunteers who selflessly give up so much of their time to maintain and keep open our properties. A very big thank you also goes to Joe Busietta, Prof. George Camilleri, Albert Calleja and Joe Chetcuti for their work in keeping DLH's records and files up to date and to Joe Azzopardi, who produces *Vigilo* magazine with the help of Judy Falzon and Council member Ann Gingell Littlejohn. Finally, special thanks go in particular to our hardworking office staff Rosanne Zerafa and Anne Marie Navarro as well as their volunteer helpers Karen Galea and Rina Mamo for their patience and commitment.

*opposite:  
Santa Maria Tower,  
Comino*

## *Din l-Art Helwa* ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016 RESOLUTIONS



### **Saving the Countryside**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held on 27th February 2016 that the government be urged to take firm action to protect the countryside and refrain from allowing it to be used for further development projects as though it has no value. The government must move away from treating the countryside as a cheap resource to be developed. It must understand that it is a valuable and vulnerable resource to be protected from exploitation and speculation. In the last 40 years we have lost much of our countryside to poor development and inappropriate building. Protecting the countryside seeks to ensure the health and well-being of the nation; to prevent the further loss of natural heritage and biodiversity; to safeguard the important economic role of the countryside; and to fulfil Malta's legal obligations under both national and European legislation. A public survey carried out in 2015 showed that 97% of the Maltese population believes that the countryside needs to be protected more.

### **Designation and Management of Nature Parks**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held on 27th February 2016 that the government be urged to designate and extend territory for nature parks in Malta, and that a holistic management programme, backed by appropriate stringent legislation, resources, education and enforcement measures, be established to effectively protect the remaining natural areas. Considerable progress has been made in the conservation and management of Malta's built heritage, but there has been less progress in the management of its natural heritage. Protected areas have been designated (mostly *Natura 2000* sites) yet many are still unmanaged and subject to serious development pressures. A public survey carried out in 2015 showed that 88% of the population believe that Malta should have more protected nature sites.

### **The Protection of Vernacular Architecture**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held on 27th February 2016 that the government be urged to take steps to protect Urban Conservation Areas and historic buildings by ensuring that protection is also extended to simple vernacular old buildings which constitute the urban fabric of all Malta's historical villages and towns. In the past year, numerous development applications were approved allowing the destruction of such buildings, described as 'dilapidated'. This encourages speculators to speed up the deterioration of the fabric of old buildings in order to justify their demolition. Dilapidation should not be used as an excuse for demolition but should be penalised severely. The destruction of simple vernacular buildings depletes our heritage.

### **The Restriction of Petrol Stations in ODZ Areas**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held on Saturday 27th February 2016 that petrol stations relocated to 'Outside Development Zones' be kept to the strict minimum. Where these are deemed to be absolutely necessary, planning permission should not allow for ancillary services that increase the footprint of the service station. Their design, moreover, should be as unobtrusive as possible, harmonising with the surroundings and avoiding large canopies, which create a negative visual impact.



## *Din l-Art Helwa*

## Where were we during the previous legislations?

*Stanley Farrugia Randon*

*Din l-Art Helwa Council Member*

I invite all those who ask: “Where were you during the previous legislations?” to read this sequence of events and judge for yourselves.

It is true that *Din l-Art Helwa* is normally associated with the restoration of historical buildings or monuments (with environmental issues normally the domain of other non-governmental organisations) but its watchdog role continues to grow as our natural environment continues to be eaten away while environmental conscience continues to increase among our members and the general public. The points mentioned below are only the major ones. For more, I invite you to read past editions of our magazine *Vigilo*. Quotes below are mostly taken from this magazine. If, by the end of the article, you still ask the above question, then where were you in the previous protests? Join us and help continue our mission, whoever is in government.

*Din l-Art Helwa* was founded in 1965, a year after independence, when the government at the time was encouraging a rapid growth in all industries. DLH condemned the over-development of many areas such as Ghajn Żejtuna, Kordin, Sliema, many valleys and the coastline. We were often accused of being a threat to the development of an ‘independent Malta’ and in the meantime, the Excelsior Hotel (1965), intruding on the line of the Valletta/Floriana fortifications, and the Dolmen Hotel, enveloping a prehistoric temple, were built and are still with us.

In 1967, DLH organised a public lecture at the Manoel Theatre to ask the government to ‘stop the destruction of our island heritage’ and to reprimand the various Ministries that were threatening ‘to destroy most of our beauty spots’.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Temporary Provision Schemes, including mapping the outlines of village cores, started being compiled and in 1990, the Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands was published. DLH welcomed the Development Planning Act of 1992 which resulted in the setting-up of the Planning Authority. Certain key documents such as the *Guidelines for Development within UCAs* (1995) and the first Local Plans began to appear.

However, many controversial projects followed such as the Manoel Island and Tigné project, the Cottonera Waterfront Project, Chambray, St James Cavalier, buildings adjacent to Fort St Elmo and various tuna penning sites. These all led to protests from DLH and we regularly pointed out that “regulations are not up to standard and enforcement is generally weak or even non-existent”. In 1995, DLH forcefully protested against the proposed Gozo airstrip. Official letters of protests were sent in conjunction with five other NGOs.

A heritage protection sub-committee of DLH was only established in the year 2000 and meetings with the Planning Authority and letters in newspapers were the order of the day.

DLH also welcomed The Cultural Heritage Act of 2002 but abuses due to political influence continued to occur. Pleas were sent to all the political parties prior to elections to include the need to protect our natural environment in their campaigns and election manifestos.

Following the vandalism at Mnajdra Temple on 13 April 2001, DLH, together with other NGOs, took to the streets in a public march in Valletta. We protested that the government had to take more care of our historical patrimony. In 2003, we also condemned political attitudes which were not taking seriously “the paramount challenge we face of creating a sustainable policy to halt the rampant construction development and land abuse of the last 40 years... We must drive home to our politicians – of all parties – that these are issues that matter to us, their constituents”.

The proposed developments at Ramla l-Hamra prompted a national ‘Save Gozo’ rally in Valletta in 2007. An application before Mepa to develop a large area of ecologically and historically sensitive land at Ta’ Ċenċ led DLH to launch a national petition entitled the *Save Ta’ Ċenċ Campaign* and within just a month 7,000 signatures were collected. This petition was also addressed to the EU Commissioner for the Environment and the President of the European Parliament.

The proposed developments at Ramla l-Hamra and Hondoq ir-Rummien in Gozo led us to protest by organising campaigns along with other NGOs. The proposed golf course at Ix-Xagħra l-Hamra in the scenic northwest of Malta was strongly opposed by DLH, which demanded that the area be converted into a nature park. Eventually the Majjistral Nature and History Park was established by Act of Parliament in 2007.

In 2006, another national protest was organised to generate awareness regarding the state of Malta’s environment, prompted by the government’s gratuitous plans to extend Malta’s development zones – the infamous ‘Rationalisation Scheme’, which brought an additional 2,000 square metres within the development zones. The government, however, arrogantly went ahead with its plans despite overwhelming public concern at what was being proposed. The consequences are there for all to see.

In 2008, Mepa received a proposal for the re-development of Mistra Village which involved allowing buildings of 11 storeys on a ridge which was designated by the same Authority as an ‘Area of High Landscape Value’. DLH objected to this proposal again when, in 2013, the final application came before Mepa’s main Board for formal approval. However, although we put forward strong objections and joined in a protest march by environmental NGOs in Valletta at the end of 2013, the Planning Authority still found in favour of the developers. Our placards proclaimed the following: ‘Mistra – Shame of two governments’.

In June 2015, DLH, together with a number of other NGOs, participated in another national protest in Valletta that urged the government to protect our natural environment which was again under threat following proposals for a change in legislation permitting more development in Outside Development Zones. Again, ignoring all dissenting voices, Mepa approved the shameful ‘Rural Policy and Design Guidance’ that has already led to the submission of a large number of out-of-scale development proposals on pristine land.

*Din l-Art Helwa* not only protests but sets examples by restoring properties. We have saved 42 monuments and sites and are involved in the running of the Majjistral Nature and History Park. Help us continue our mission and let politicians never forget that we environmentalists also have a vote.

# Din l-Art Helwa News

*Patricia Salomone*

### Visit by the Iubilantes group

Iubilantes, a voluntary group from Como, Italy, who were awarded the Europa Prize for Dedication to Cultural Heritage in 2014, were drawn to visit Malta and Gozo to experience the countryside and the walks it offers. In January – braving the storms of the New Year – they visited Dwejra Tower, together with volunteers Nigel Brittain and Joe Attard. Iubilantes’ work focuses on the restoration of ancient pilgrim footpaths and trails between Como in Northern Italy and Switzerland, helping to recreate the links between communities and protecting the landscape and accessibility.

*The Iubilantes group during their visit to Dwejra Tower*



*Ms Androulla Vassilou with DLH volunteers*

### Ms Androulla Vassilou visits Msida Bastion Garden of Rest

Ms Androulla Vassilou, former EU Commissioner for Culture, Youth and Sport, visited the Msida Bastion Historic Garden where she met *Din l-Art Helwa* volunteers and enjoyed hearing about the challenging project to save and restore the site and its funerary memorials for which DLH was awarded the Europa Nostra Silver Medal in 2002.

### Spring Fête at Msida Bastion Historic Garden

On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April, the volunteers at the Msida Bastion Historic Garden organized their yearly Spring Fête. Notwithstanding the fact that this Winter was far from generous with rainfall, the garden was looking well-cared for and as beautiful as ever. Members of the Historical Re-enactment Group of Malta strolled about the garden wearing a selection of military and civilian attire from the early 1800s. Birds of prey which were on show attracted much attention. Sales of cakes, bric-a-brac and books always help to fund and maintain this historic site which is one of *Din l-Art Helwa*’s most visited sites.



**Unlike other historic sites, Msida Bastion Historic Garden is a living entity requiring constant care. If you can spare a few hours a week to help maintain this historical gem in its pristine condition please contact the DLH office on 21225952/21220358 from Monday to Friday between 8.30a.m. - 13.30p.m. or email us on [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org)**

*Two snapshots of this year’s Spring Fête*



## Open Day at Torri Mamo

The open day at Torri Mamo on the 29<sup>th</sup> May was yet another successful event during which there was a good turn out by the general public. During this activity visitors had the possibility of exploring the building's interior and also interact with historical interpreters from Compagnia San Michele who, dressed in early 17<sup>th</sup> century attire, animated the tower through living history displays and talks.

This was the second event Compagnia San Michele organized in collaboration with *Din l-Art Helwa*, the first being at Bir Miftuħ. The main objective of such events is to give life to historical sites within their proper historical context. These events not only make the general public more aware of the site itself but also serve as a showcase in which *Din l-Art Helwa* and Compagnia San Michele are able to show the fruits of the hard work that goes on behind the scenes.



*Members of the Compagnia San Michele at various moments during the open day at Torri Mamo*



## Tours of *Din l-Art Helwa* heritage sites

By general request, regular tours of sites and properties managed by *Din l-Art Helwa* are being organized to offer sponsors, members, friends and supporters a unique opportunity to experience the built heritage and the environmental sites which are under the custodianship of DLH and to raise funds from donations collected from the participants. Executive Council member Ian Camilleri has generously offered to organise and conduct these tours with the help of the wardens of the various sites.

In general, tours are held on Saturdays and start and finish at Msida Bastions Historic Garden. Participation is against a €10 donation which covers transport costs and light refreshments.

The first tour was held on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March with visits of the Delimara Lighthouse and Torri Mamo. The second tour took place on 7<sup>th</sup> May and consisted of a heritage trail starting from Sarria Church, proceeding through the Mall Gardens in Floriana and was concluded at Our Lady of Victory Church and Museum.

The third tour took place on 18<sup>th</sup> June. Participants visited the Red Tower and Natura 2000 site at Mellieħa enjoying the splendid views from the roof of the Red Tower spanning the Gozo and Comino channel, the Santa Maria tower on Comino and the White tower at Marfa. The Natura 2000 ranger guided the group across the Nature Reserve where they were also shown the ancient Roman beehives only a few metres off the track.



*Participants from the third tour on the roof of the Red Tower*

**For further details about upcoming tours and excursions please keep in touch with our office (21220358), or look up our website [www.dinlarthelwa.org](http://www.dinlarthelwa.org) and Facebook page.**

## The Din l-Art Helwa Awards for Architectural Heritage Retrospective Exhibition 2005 – 2015

This annual competition for projects involving the preservation and enhancing of our architectural heritage, was initiated by former *Din l-Art Helwa* President Martin Scicluna, with the support of the Kamra tal-Periti. As part of *Din l-Art Helwa*'s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, it was thought fitting to have a retrospective photographic exhibition of all the winners from the first in 2005 up to the 2015 edition. In all there were 54 beautiful photographs, which were displayed according to the edition and category.

The exhibition was held in the foyer of the Parliament of Malta, under the patronage of the Hon. Dr Anglu Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Hon. Farrugia inaugurated the exhibition on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May, and it ran until the 12<sup>th</sup> May. *Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to him and wishes to thank also the Director of the House of Representatives, Mr Pierre Mallia, for his help in the organisation of this exhibition.

A special thanks is due to all who helped in the setting up of this prestigious event, and the volunteers who manned the exhibition. Thanks also goes to Tonio Casapinta who generously contributed towards the display panels and lighting.



*Two views of the exhibition panels*



*The Hon. Dr Anglu Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar, during the inauguration ceremony*

### ***Din l-Art Helwa* headquarters façade undergoes restoration**

The Malta Industrial Parks Ltd is supporting *Din l-Art Helwa* with a generous donation which will enable us to restore the façade of our headquarters in Melita Street. Mr Tony Zahra, Chairman of the Malta Industrial Parks Ltd visited *Din l-Art Helwa* and was welcomed by *Din l-Art Helwa* Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar and Vice President Simone Mizzi. Ms Cassar expressed her thanks to Mr Zahra on behalf of the organisation and said this support was most timely as the restoration of the extensive façade enabled *Din l-Art Helwa* to carry out one of the main objectives of its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year. Mr Zahra said Malta Industrial Parks was happy to contribute to the work so that this prestigious corner of Valletta received the upgrade it deserved during *Din l-Art Helwa*'s Golden Anniversary and before 2018, the year Valletta was to be European Capital of Culture. Formerly owned by the Manoel Foundation, and described by Victor Denaro in his book, *The Houses of Valletta* as 'La Maison de la Peintresse', the premises were occupied after WW2 by the Malta Relief Fund. Since 1967 the building is the centre for *Din l-Art Helwa*'s activities and frequented by heritage lovers and members of the organisation.



*Mr Tony Zahra, Chairman of Malta Industrial Parks Ltd with Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa, Maria Grazia Cassar, and Vice President Simone Mizzi*





*Dr José Herrera, newly appointed Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development, signs the visitors book at the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest during a meeting with Din l-Art Helwa. With him are Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar and DLH Council member Dr Petra Caruana Dingli.*

**Ta' Xutu Tower at Wied iż-Żurrieq restoration update**

On 29 February 2016, officials of the MIA Foundation, sponsors of the restoration project for the Ta' Xutu Tower at Wied iż-Żurrieq met with Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar to view progress and plan the next phase of the work at the Tower. Together they plan to rehabilitate the immediate area around the tower and to restore its natural and ecological features so as to render it more attractive and safer in terms of accessibility. Present for the meeting was ecologist Jeffrey Sciberras and Perit Ruben Paul Borg, entrusted with designing the project prior to its presentation to the Ministries of the Environment and of Planning. Ta' Xutu Tower is situated within a sensitive Natura 2000 site and is subject to stringent conservation rules.

*Jeffrey Sciberras, Maria Grazia Cassar, Kevin-James Fenech, Secretary of the MIA Foundation, Perit Ruben Paul Borg, and Frederick Mifsud Bonnici, Chairman of the MIA Foundation*



*Seaward wall of the Ta' Xutu Tower*

## AN APPEAL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Dear Members and Friends of *Din l-Art Helwa*. We now look after 19 historic sites in guardianship or trust and we very much need more hands to work. We are looking for volunteers to help us in several areas:

- 1) With the summer season upon us, we need to bolster our Gozo and Comino team with new recruits. For logistical reasons, this would be particularly practical for those living in Gozo or in the north of Malta. Maltese speakers are needed and anybody interested in helping is requested to talk to Carolyn Clements on 9905 1866.
- 2) Because of an increase in the workload, our offices in Valletta need volunteers to help Rosanne Zerafa and Anne Marie Navarro with clerical work, answering the telephone, various odd jobs and errands.
- 3) Other volunteers are needed everywhere, so do please get in touch if you are willing to help.

Please email [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org) or telephone 2122 0358 or 2122 5952 and speak to Rosanne.



# 20th Edition of the Bir Miftuħ International Music Festival

*Patricia Salomone*

The Bir Miftuħ International Music Festival has firmly established itself as one of the highlights in the music calendar of the Maltese Islands. This year, the Festival is in its 20th edition. This anniversary was marked by the presentation of a bouquet of flowers to Ms Cettina Caruana Curran who for the greater part of these years has put her heart and soul into the organization of this yearly event.

On introducing the first concert which was sponsored by the Italian Embassy and Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Patricia Salomone thanked H. E. Ambassador G. Umberto De Vito and Dott. Salvatore Schirmo for bringing to Malta Young Acordionist, Pietro Roffi to entertain the Bir Miftuħ audience. She stressed the fact that it was indeed significant that the first concert 20 years ago had been sponsored by their predecessors.

The talented young accordionist presented an eclectic programme of music which he entitled – Solo Voyage – a musical voyage through time which began with the notes of Vivaldi’s Winter and took the audience through time, and various composers, up to Astor Piazzolla and to the dramatic *Gernika* of 1937 by Spanish composer Gorka Hermosa, a piece which had the audience absolutely mesmerized.

The Embassy of France through H.E. Ambassador Mme. Beatrice Le Fraper Du Hellen together with the Alliance Française de Malte – Méditerranée’ Director Chev. David Busuttill were the sponsors for the duo Gjorgji Cincievski on double bass and Charlene Farrugia on piano, who charmed the audience with music from the end of the 19th and the early 20th century, mostly by French composers.



*Simone Mizzi presenting a bouquet of flowers to Ms Cettina Caruana Curran – photo Daniel Cilia*

This second concert was to be executed by harpist Esmeralda Galea, who, due to unforeseen circumstances, was unable to perform and was very kindly replaced by pianist Charlene Farrugia.

A dedication was made by Patricia Salomone, at the opening of the concert to Prof. Salvino Busuttill who was a keen supporter of the Bir Miftuħ Festival and founder member of *Din l-Art Helwa* and whose recent demise saddened all present.

Unfortunately, the third and final concert that was to be sponsored by the Embassy of Israel and H.E. Ambassador Mr. Oren David had to be cancelled due to unforeseen events. The performance by Liat Cohen on guitar was much awaited. *Din l-Art Helwa* is refunding the unused tickets. Anyone who has not been refunded is kindly requested to contact the office on 21225952 / 21220358 from Monday to Friday between 8.30a.m. - 13.30p.m. or email us on [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org).



*Pietro Roffi – photo Joseph Chetcuti*

*The concert sponsored by the Italian Embassy and Istituto Italiano di Cultura. photo Daniel Cilia*



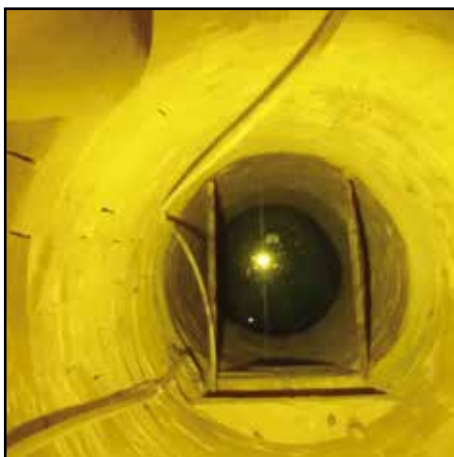
# Wignacourt Tower's Latest Surprise

*Martin Vella*  
Warden Wignacourt Tower



Wignacourt Tower has been under the guardianship of *Din l-Art Helwa* since 1970. It has subsequently been restored twice – first in 1975, with restorations on both the internal and external walls, and then in 2015. It seems, however, that the tower is always ready to reveal some hidden features of which we have previously been unaware. During the last restoration in 2015, the drawbridge guide wheels (*photo 1*) were rediscovered, hidden behind the stone cladding, above the original entrance door to the tower. The well shaft, blocked at ground level by stone slabs (*xriek*) for an unknown number of decades, was also cleared. Now visitors can see the entire depth of the well-shaft, including the bell-shaped cistern (*photo 2*).

*photo 1 - the drawbridge guide wheels*



*photo 2 - the bell-shaped cistern*

The latest surprise first arrived at our head office via email on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February. Mr Max Farrugia contacted us, saying that he was in possession of the original key (*muftieħ*) to the entrance door, located at first floor level, of the tower main elevation. Very generously, Mr Farrugia wished to donate this latch key to DLH, as the present guardians of the tower. The door in question is the original 17th century door to the tower and at first we were rather sceptical about this information, but decided to investigate the matter.

Mr Farrugia was invited to bring the *muftieħ* to the Tower to check whether it fitted into the key hole and if it matched the door's thickness. These two characteristics, if matched, would have provided ample proof that the *muftieħ* could be the original one. To our complete amazement, the *muftieħ* fitted the lock perfectly.



*The red deal door after cleaning*

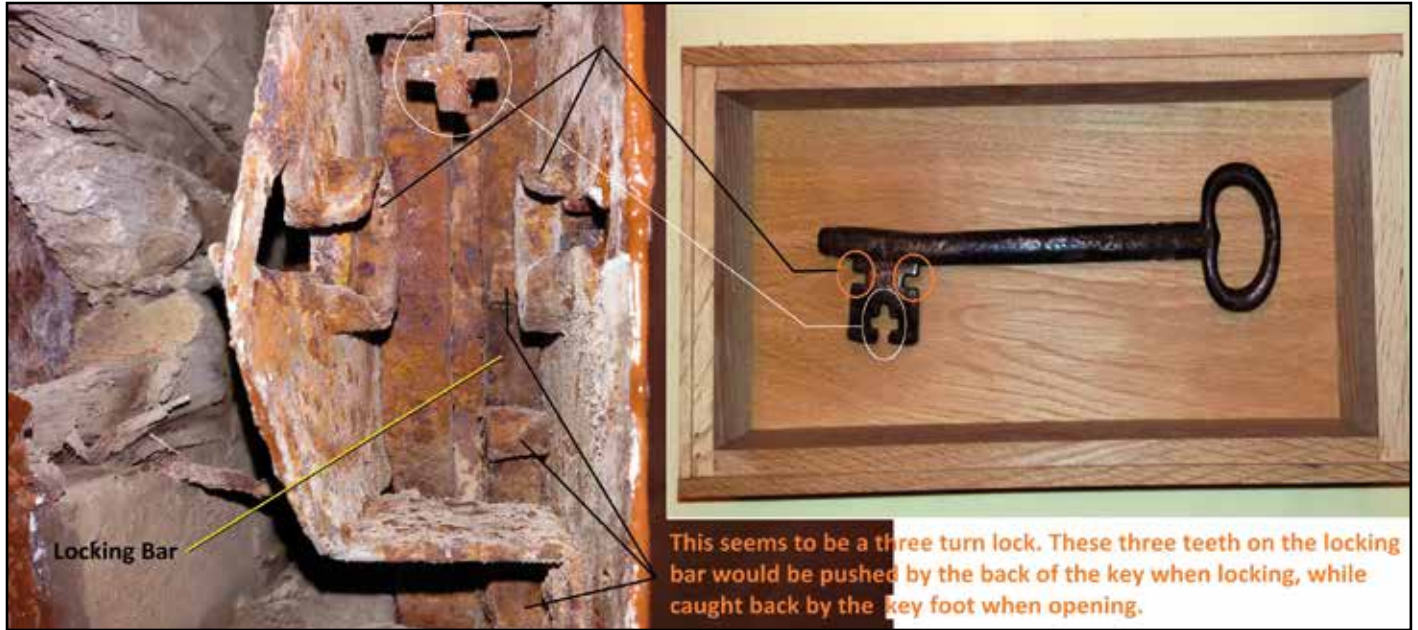


photo 3 - Photographs of the lock's internal mechanism compared to the muftieħ's physical dimensions and security features

When we asked Mr Farrugia how such a unique object had come into his possession, he told us that he had noticed it on display on the stall of a hawker at a Valletta Sunday flea market in the early 1990s. It was enclosed in a presentation box, together with other smaller keys. An accompanying note just said that the set of keys belonged to Wignacourt Tower. For this reason, the hawker increased the asking price for the set of keys, seeing that Mr Farrugia, a keen lover of Maltese heritage, was determined to purchase them.

It is thought that the Post and Telephone Department, the occupants of the tower from 1937 to 1963, had decided to keep the *muftieħ* when they handed over the premises, considering it of no use to future occupants, as the stairway leading to the door had been demolished in the early 1960s. It is not known how the *muftieħ* ended up in the possession of the hawker.

The authentication of the *muftieħ* did not end with Mr Farrugia's visit to the tower. Photographs of the lock's internal mechanism were taken and compared to the *muftieħ*'s physical dimensions and security features (photo 3). It was noted that the security features perfectly matched those of the *muftieħ* and it was also discovered that the lock had a three-turn locking mechanism. These observations further confirmed the authenticity of the *muftieħ*. The option of restoring the jammed door lock – which is still affixed to the door by 17th century nails – was evaluated. Removing these nails to free the lock from the door would definitely cause some damage to the door's woodwork. This negative impact outweighed the benefit of having an operational lock that would be operated only on a few special occasions and, considering that there is sufficient evidence to prove the authenticity of the *muftieħ*, it was decided to leave the lock in its present state.

The *muftieħ* was presented to *Din l-Art Helwa* by Mr Farrugia at an event organised by St Paul's Bay Local Council on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2016 (photo 4). Those attending the ceremony included St Paul's Bay Mayor Graziella Galea, DLH Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar, Stanley Farrugia Randon, Pat Salomone and Tower Warden Martin Vella. To mark the occasion, the tower was opened free-of-charge to members of the public, and DLH volunteers at the event to escort visitors counted over 700 adults and 150 children.

The *muftieħ* has now taken pride-of-place just behind the original door to the tower. It can be seen by visitors to what was Malta's first coastal tower, 1610, which proudly holds the unique and prestigious honour of still having in place its original wooden entrance door, complete with its *muftieħ*.

photo 4 - The *muftieħ* being presented to Din l-Art Helwa Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar by Max Farrugia



# Internations Fund Raising and Networking Lecture at Our Lady of Victory Church

*Patricia Salomone*



*An attentive and tightly packed audience*



*Simone Mizzi and Patricia Salomone introducing the lecture at OLV*

Our enthusiastic volunteer, Francesco Rossano, has taken the initiative of introducing *Din l-Art Helwa* to Internations, a new group of foreign potential friends and members now residing on our islands. He keeps them informed of our events on Facebook so they can be involved in the most relevant cultural activities we organise and also as they may wish to become active members of our organization.

During our first meeting with them, held on March 4<sup>th</sup>, we felt it was ideal to inform these new friends as to who and what *Din l-Art Helwa* is and what it has achieved in the last 50 years. We also felt that nobody better than the founder's daughter, Simone Mizzi, could tell the story with so personal a touch.

Very aptly, the *Din l-Art Helwa* Judge Maurice Caruana Curran Hall was chosen as the first venue for these meetings. This gave the audience the chance to see our head office and learn about the history of the headquarters of the organisation, a beautiful 17C palazzo, formerly known as La Maison de la Peintresse.

A second meeting was held on 29<sup>th</sup> April, at Our Lady of Victory Church having as theme 'The Challenge and Privilege of saving Our Lady of Victory Church'. This talk was also delivered by Simone Mizzi, and was illustrated through a power point presentation giving detailed information of the history of Valletta's oldest church and the images of the painstaking work by so many people participating in its regeneration.

On both occasions, Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar welcomed the audience and explained the activities that volunteers can take up to contribute to the organization's work.

Patricia Salomone acted as master of ceremonies and, with the assistance of Rosanne Zerafa and Mario Sciberras, refreshments were served providing an opportunity for people of different nationalities to meet, exchange opinions and 'Make new friends'.

*Simone Mizzi illustrates the painting of the Nativity of the Virgin*



*Maria Grazia Cassar thanks the audience and the organisers*



## More Restoration Takes Off at Our Lady of Victory Church

*Simone Mizzi*

Another phase in the restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church is about to commence. There has been just a brief respite from restoration work after the 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2016, the day Lisa Shekede and Stephen Rickerby, Senior Conservators from the Courtauld Institute of Art, put down their tools for the very last time after having worked for sixteen years to bring new life to Alessio Erardi's ceiling hidden behind a wooden planked floor.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> April, the team from Giuseppe Mantella Restauri picked up where they themselves left off in May 2015 to continue work on the left perimeter wall of the church and the altar dedicated to St John the Evangelist. Its painting depicts St John on the island of Patmos writing the Book of Revelations. In the top left hand corner of the painting is the figure of the Woman of the Apocalypse referred to in Revelations. The eagle, symbol of St John Evangelist, crowns the stone altar which was embellished by a confraternity in 1736.

As was the case with the two altars already restored, dedicated to St Philip Neri and to St John of God, the altar to St John the Evangelist has been inappropriately painted with some six layers of paint, while the original gilding is hidden behind centuries of grime. The Alfred Mizzi Foundation, in the largest funding project ever made to a single entity, has again generously agreed to sponsor the restoration of the two remaining altars and niches while PwC Malta continue to fund the work to reveal any murals or decorative schemes on the perimeter walls of the church.

*This last tall tower enabling conservation of the Alessio Erardi ceiling paintings at Victory Church was taken down on 28 March 2016, the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Foundation of Valletta*

*The altar to St John Evangelist, next in line for restoration thanks to the support of the Alfred Mizzi Foundation*





*Works in progress on  
the St John the  
Evangelist altar*



### 18C organ loft to be restored

The beautiful 18C organ loft is to be restored with the generous assistance of Dr John Vassallo and Dr Marianne Noll, and their family. Consisting of 40 carved wooden and gilt balusters supported by heavily decorated stone corbels, which fortunately still retain their original gilding, the organ loft balcony is recorded as having been built around 1732 during the reign of Grand Master Perellos who ordered that the first church of Valletta be adorned with a gallery where music could be played and sung.

Work on the 18C organ continues, thanks to the great generosity of the Eden Leisure Group. The work is complex and long and will be completed by organ restorer, Robert Buhagiar, at the end of 2017 or by January 2018 in time for the V18 Celebrations.

*below:*

*The beautifully  
decorated organ loft  
still carries its  
original gilding.*







**Choir stalls to be restored**

*bottom right:*

*Farsons Group officials with DLH Council members during the visit to Our Lady of Victory Church*

*Simonds Farsons Cisk Chairman Mr Louis Farrugia presenting the donation to Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar*

The 18<sup>th</sup> C carved wooden choir stalls at Our Lady of Victory Church are to be restored thanks to a generous donation from Simonds Farsons Cisk Plc and Farrugia Investments Ltd. This was announced by Simonds Farsons Cisk Chairman Mr Louis Farrugia who together with other officials of the Farsons Group visited the church to see the restoration programme which is now at an advanced stage. They were welcomed by Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar and other Council members. Vice President Simone Mizzi, who is overseeing the restoration project, explained that the choir stalls were in a most neglected state and had suffered damage from insect infestations and damp due to their close proximity to the fortified walls of the neighbouring St James Cavalier. One of the peculiarities of Our Lady of Victory Church is the fact that its apse was enlarged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to allow space for choir stalls to be installed behind the main altar. This required the building to be extended inward into the fortified walls of St James Cavalier. The restoration of the choir stalls will also provide a unique opportunity for studies to be carried out and to investigate the way this extension was built. The state of the wall abutting the cavalier will also be assessed. The Farsons Group through its Foundation have also supported the restoration of the church and helped to establish its Treasures of the Sacristy Museum.



## HSBC Foundation celebrates the full splendour of Erardi on Valletta's anniversary

As Valletta marked 450 years on March 28 since the laying of its foundation stone, the HSBC Malta Foundation and *Din I-Art Helwa* celebrated the successful conclusion of the complex conservation of the monumental Baroque ceiling paintings at the Church of Our Lady of Victory, the first building and first church in Valletta.

Tradition has it that the foundation stone of the capital city lies within the precincts of the church, which is now again ready to provide the visitor the opportunity to reconnect with this iconic, artistic and spiritual representation of Malta's heritage after many years of painstaking conservation came to a close last week. Conservators Lisa Shekede and Steven Rickerby from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, were in Malta recently to put the finishing touches to the unique ceiling paintings by the Maltese Baroque artist Alessio Erardi which depict episodes from the life of the Blessed Virgin.

Since 2012, the HSBC Malta Foundation has donated a total of €400,000 to save these monumental works of art, the last tranche of which went towards the installation of specialised lighting that highlights the intricacies of Erardi's work.



*HSBC Malta CEO Andrew Beane, Din I-Art Helwa Executive President Maria Grazia Cassar and Stephen Rickerby & Lisa Shekede, Senior Conservators, Courtauld Institute of Art, talk about the challenges that went into saving the splendour of Our Lady of Victory church and its unique Erardi vault paintings*

## Open letter to the friend of Our Lady of Victory Church

*Dear friends of Our Lady of Victory Church, friends of Din I-Art Helwa and Associates,*

*The following link leads to the 3 minute video clip immortalizing the moment His Grace the Archbishop turned on the lights to reveal the magnificent Erardi ceiling at Our Lady of Victory Church on the 9 December 2015:*

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PE0ZXtRsS2k>**

*The clip is extracted from the video, produced by Din I-Art Helwa, of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass of Thanksgiving celebrated by His Grace at Our Lady of Victory Church.*

*This is also a moment to thank you all again for your wonderful support without which such a project would not now be on the downhill run. 24 March 2016 was the last day at work on the Erardi ceiling paintings by the Conservators from the Courtauld Institute, Lisa and Steve, who many of you know personally, after many years of challenging work made possible as you know by the HSBC Malta Foundation. We are going to miss Lisa and Steve, but they will be back working on other projects in Malta elsewhere I am sure. On Wednesday 29 March OLV was open again for 'business as usual'.*

*Later on in April work commenced once more on the last two remaining altars and their elaborate niches with renewed support from the Alfred Mizzi Foundation. On the perimeter walls on the left side of the church we hope to find more of the exciting murals which are being revealed thanks to the support of PwC Malta. We will continue on the small museum which will house many interesting objects and works of art we found during our travels through the church cupboards, with the joint support of so many of you. The organ is being restored too as we write with a new sponsorship from the Eden Leisure Group. What we have left to turn our energy towards are the choir stalls, the belfry and of course the glorious bells which date back to the time of the Grand Masters.*

*With best regards,*

*Simone Mizzi  
Din I-Art Helwa*

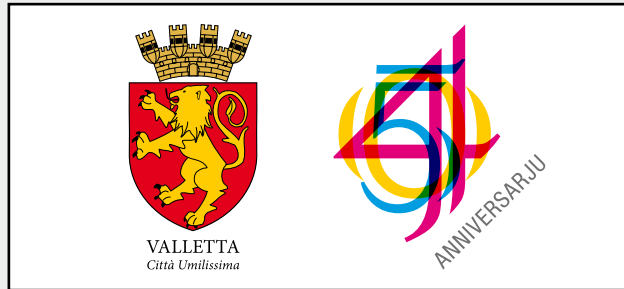


### 450th Anniversary of the foundation of Valletta

To mark the 450th anniversary of the foundation of Valletta, *Din l-Art Helwa* held a harp and piano recital at Our Lady of Victory Church, made possible through the generosity of DLH life member and benefactor Heribert Grünert. Acclaimed harpist Silke Aichhorn and renowned pianist Sofia Narmania delighted a packed church with a programme of music carefully selected by them to reflect the beautiful surroundings. The instruments were kindly loaned by the Manoel Theatre and the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra.



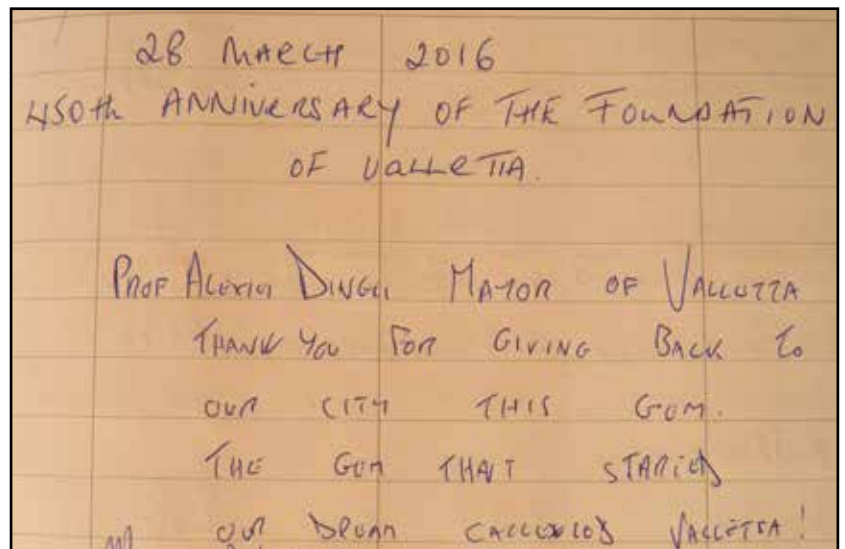
*Mrs Gonzi, Chairperson of HSBC Malta Foundation with DLH benefactor Heribert Grünert and Simone Mizzi*



*The Harp and Piano 450th anniversary concert*



*Wreaths laid by Valletta entities are placed against the wall of Our Lady of Victory Church below the commemorative slab that marks the laying of the first stone of Valletta on the 28 March 1566*



*The Mayor of Valletta, Prof. Alexiei Dingli's message in the Victory book at Our Lady of Victory Church on the 28 March 2016. 'Thank you for giving back to our city this gem, the gem that started our dream called Valletta'*



Overshadowed by and partially subsumed into the massive walls of St James Cavalier, Valletta's modestly proportioned first church gives little indication of its singular historical importance or of the treasures concealed within. Until very recently, the significance of the church had been all but forgotten and its fabric neglected. By the 1950s, its vaulted roof – with Alessio Erardi's masterpiece of Baroque painting – was leaking in several places and shedding fragments of decaying limestone ashlar and mortar, its painting partly obliterated and defaced by bands of salts efflorescence and a darkened varnish.

In 1962 the then Curator of Fine Arts opined that the vault painting was “not worth restoring”, and it seemed destined to ruin and oblivion. It is nothing short of a miracle, therefore, that in 2015 – the year in which *Din l-Art Helwa* celebrated its 50th anniversary – we were also able to celebrate the restoration of this most important church, and to appreciate its magnificent vault painting for the first time in living memory (plate 1)

Although renowned for being the first building in the magnificent new city of Valletta, the church's fortunes during its first century-and-a-half are largely shrouded in obscurity. However, this modest building retained a special significance for the Order throughout its rule, demonstrated by the numerous lavish embellishments, improvements to the fabric of the building and enlargements by which it was transformed during the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A final distinction, bestowed only six years before the island capitulated to Napoleon, was the interment in the church of the heart of the celebrated ally of the Order, Venetian Grand Admiral Angelo Emo, in 1792.

The first of these embellishments was initiated by Grand Master Perellos who, in 1716, commissioned Rome-trained Alessio Erardi, the son of established Maltese artist Stefano Erardi, with the painting of the vaulted roof. The result was a *tour de force* in the darkly opulent classic style of Roman Baroque, confidently executed in a single year with the probable assistance of Cristofano de Lucia for the gilded decoration on the ribs (plate 2).

***Quasi aurora consurgens:***

is a phrase derived from the 10<sup>th</sup> line of the sixth section of the *Song of Songs* which in reference to Our Lady reads:  
“Who is she that comes forth as the dawn”.

## *Quasi aurora*

# The conservation of the in the Church of O

*Stephen Rickerby*  
Senior Conservators, Courtauld

*Left - Plate 3: damage from rainwater infiltration and salts wrought havoc on the painting in the past. Here, on the Immaculate Conception, salts formed an impenetrable white veil across the surface of the painting (copyright: Courtauld Institute).*

*Right - Plate 1: view of the central part of Alessio Erardi's vault painting at Our Lady of Victory, after completion of its recent conservation and cleaning. The vault had not been seen in its entirety for almost 15 years (copyright: Courtauld Institute).*



*a consurgens*

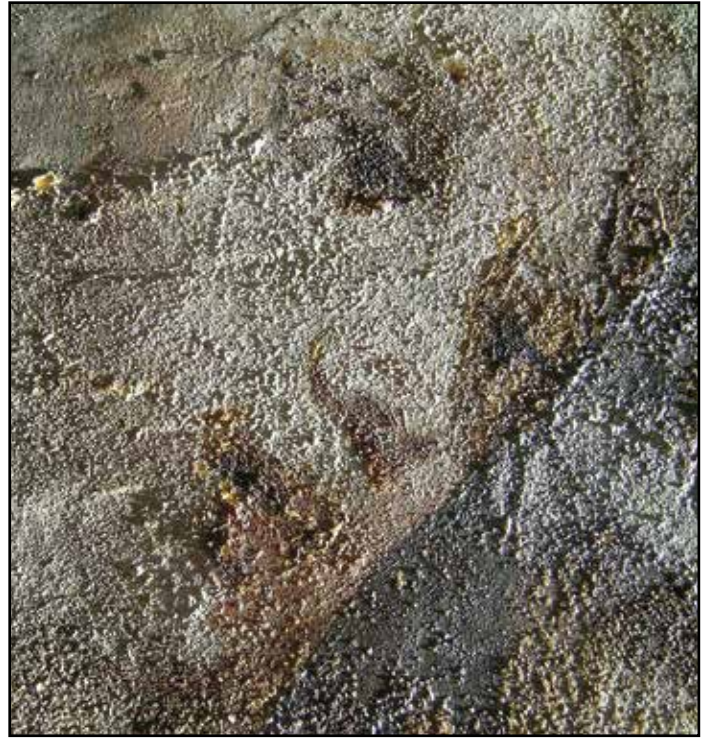
the Erardi vault painting  
our Lady of Victory

by & Lisa Shekede  
Courtauld Institute of Art, London



*Left - Plate 2: above the main scenes depicting episodes from the Life of the Virgin, fictive architecture and oculi are populated with angels and putti. The vault is a tour de force of Alessi Erardi's mature, Roman-inspired, Baroque style (copyright: Courtauld Institute).*

*Right - Plate 5: the salts problems were made worse by the application of a varnish, probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, this darkened, further obscuring the painting and trapped the salts behind it (copyright: Courtauld Institute).*



*Top - Plate 4: in this detail of a figure from the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the destructive capacity of the salts had reduced the painting to a very vulnerable condition (copyright: Courtauld Institute).*

Erardi skilfully adapted his scheme to the uneven spacing of the four-bay vault: two fictive bronze allegorical figures representing *Victory on land* and *Victory at sea*, alluding to military and naval triumphs of the Order, are depicted in the narrowest bay, while a Marian cycle occupies the three remaining bays. The intimate *Annunciation* and the *Visitation* scenes are paired in the narrowest of these, while the widest bay is reserved for the more complex scenes of the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, and the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*. Scenes depicting the *Immaculate Conception* and the *Assumption of the Virgin* adorn the remaining bay. When the structure was extended in the 1750s, the modest decoration of the additional vault bays was executed in a manner respectful of Erardi's original concept and tonality.

The sad decline of the church following the expulsion of the Knights of St John is a largely undocumented story, but it must have swiftly fallen into neglect. Rainwater seeped through cracks in its unrepaired roof, bringing with it salts that crystallised beneath the paint layer, weakening the stone support and splitting the oil film into a filigree of fine cracks, causing widespread flaking and loss.



Salt deposits gradually formed impenetrable white veils across the surface of the painting, hiding it from view (plates 3 and 4).

Problems were compounded by the application (probably in the 19th century) of an oil-resin varnish to disguise the increasingly shabby condition of the painting, without addressing the causes of deterioration. The varnish darkened, further obscuring the painting, and as it deteriorated it became increasingly acidic and insoluble (plate 5). Two further interventions – abortive restoration attempts in the *Annunciation* and *Presentation* bays in the 1980s and 1990s – not only once more failed to address the causes of deterioration, but resorted to the use of harsh, damaging chemicals followed by extensive repainting and re-varnishing in an attempt to disguise the disastrous results.

The reversal in this downward trajectory began in 2004, when the Courtauld Institute of Art's Conservation of Wall Painting Department (University of London) was invited by the Valletta Rehabilitation Project (VRP), under the directorship of Dr Ray Bondin, to take on the daunting task of conserving the badly deteriorated painting. The Institute's involvement began with an ambitious, multifaceted preliminary phase of research, which drew on the expertise of renowned conservation scientists from Europe and the US. The causes and mechanisms of deterioration were established and documented, and an analysis was conducted into the materials and techniques constituting the original technology, the components of the restoration varnish and the nature and distribution of salts. The degradation of the restoration varnish – and how it could be safely removed without damaging the painting – required specialist research, and this was the subject of a MA dissertation at the Courtauld Institute.

The data obtained during this phase provided the scientific foundation for developing the most effective treatment methods and materials. Because the condition of the vault was among the worst that could be encountered – combining multiple types of deterioration and damage – full-scale treatment was necessarily a lengthy undertaking. Even before the innovative treatment programme could fully proceed, a further period of intensive trials and fine-tuning was required. The complexity of the problems, and the specialised nature of the conservation work, demanded a high level of expertise, and this was maintained throughout the programme by a team of conservators from the Courtauld Institute (plate 6).

All this required the immense commitment of all those involved in the project. Indeed, at times the fate of Erardi's painting hung in the balance. Between 2009 and 2012, work on the vault was stalled when funding was withdrawn. It was only with *Din l-Art Helwa's* heroic efforts that work on the vault was resumed and brought to a successful conclusion by the spring of 2015.



Plate 6: Courtauld conservators at work on the vault (copyright: Courtauld Institute).

The once-denigrated vault painting at Our Lady of Victory, for so long obscured by salts and the degraded restoration varnish, can now be seen and admired once more. Overcoming the complex and seemingly intractable deterioration and cleaning issues to achieve this fortunate result required a level of scientific research unprecedented in Malta, and this approach sets a standard for treating other Baroque monumental painting schemes with similar problems. Areas of the painting where spalling stone and flaking paint had occurred in the past have been stabilised and neutrally toned, but the authenticity of the vault painting has not been impaired by deceptive reintegration or reconstruction, so the surviving original work can be appreciated on its own merits (plates 7 and 8). This is particularly significant, as the vault scheme of the Victory Church is the only large-scale work by Alessio Erardi to have survived in anything like its original state.

In recent years, Alessio's reputation has been eclipsed by that of his father, Stefano, but the newly revealed vault scheme clearly demonstrates that the latter's relatively static and conservative output hardly compares with the astonishing mastery of light and shade demonstrated by his son, and the dynamism and drama of his compositions. As intended by Grand Masters Perellos and Pinto, the first church of Valletta, and the first conventual church of the Knights of St John in the capital of their own creation, is once more crowned in glory – an outcome of which *Din l-Art Helwa* can be justifiably proud.

Plates 7-8: the results of the conservation and cleaning have been transformative, as can be seen in these two images showing before and after treatment.



## Two documents pertaining to Our Lady of Victory Church at the National Library

*Joe Azzopardi*

Our Lady of Victory Church, on which construction began in 1566, was certainly the first church and possibly the first building to be erected in Valletta. The church is dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin – celebrated on 8 September – under the title of ‘Our Lady of Victory’, in thanksgiving for the lifting of the Great Siege perpetrated by the invading Turkish fleet of Suleiman the Magnificent on this day in 1565.

Grand Master Jean Parisot de Valette (1557-1568) was buried in the crypt of the church, becoming the first person to be buried in the city he founded.<sup>1</sup> When the Order of St John officially moved from Birgu to Valletta on 18 March 1571, Our Lady of Victory became the Conventual Church of the Knights until the construction of St John’s Co-Cathedral was completed in 1577. On 16 July 1617, Our Lady of Victory was declared the parish church of the Order.<sup>2</sup>

The church was originally much smaller than the current one and contained only three altars. The two lateral ones were dedicated to St John the Baptist, the patron saint of the Order, and St Paul, the principal patron saint of Malta.<sup>3</sup> The church was enlarged in 1699 to its present design, comprising five altars – four lateral and the central main altar – and an apse. The design of the enlarged church is attributed to Lorenzo Gafà (1639-1703).<sup>4</sup> Physical proof of this enlargement is evident from the different sized and shaped masonry elements making up the vault. Those pertaining to the original structure are square-shaped, while those of the additional section are rectangular.

Although comprising many artefacts of considerable artistic quality, the most outstanding decorative element of Our Lady of Victory is certainly the painted vault. This can certainly be considered the most important decorated ceiling in Valletta after that of St John’s Co-Cathedral. The vault decoration consists of six very finely executed scenes from the life of the Virgin set within an ephemeral architectural arrangement similar to that depicted by Mattia Preti at St John’s, by which it was evidently greatly influenced. These are located in bays divided by narrow ribs accommodating representations of angels, *putti* and coats of arms.

The few published sources available all agree that the vault was decorated during the reign of Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful (1697-1720) mainly due to the fact that it prominently features two pictorial representations of his coat of arms. However, the lack of documentary evidence has led to confusion in the attribution of the frescos by the few authors who have written about Our Lady of Victory Church. Achille Ferris attributes them to Enrico Reynaud<sup>5</sup> while R. Bonnici Cali attributes them partly to Alessio Erardi and partly to Enrico Reynaud.<sup>6</sup> R. Bonnici Cali’s *The Church of Our Lady of Victory*, published in 1966, is the standard reference book for all those who, in the past few decades, have referred to the church in their writings. However, the booklet contains no references leading to secure documentary evidence from the same periods in which the church was built and decorated.

This lack of documentary material and published research, and the severely compromised state of preservation of the mural paintings, has led to their neglect by scholars, notwithstanding their high artistic quality and importance. The fact that the vault was covered from view between 1995 and 2015 contributed further to their being ignored. This has finally been remedied by the conclusion of the complex restoration project spearheaded by *Din l-Art Helwa*, with the restoration of the paintings being carried out by experts from the Courtauld Institute of Art, thanks to generous sponsorship.

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*Detail of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin by Alessio Erardi*

*Pre WWII image of Our Lady of Victory Church*



### Documents pertaining to Our Lady of Victory Church

In the course of a lecture by Dr Theresa Vella, document NLM, AOM 1952-1953, conserved at the National Library of Malta, was brought to the attention of the author. This document includes an inventory of churches under the administration of the Order. The *repertorio* (index) of the National Library describes AOM 1952-1953 as “*Due manoscritti divisi in quarto libri*” (two manuscripts divided into four volumes). The fourth volume is entitled “*Relazione, o sia Descrizione delle Maggior Chiesa Conventuale di San Giovanni Battista, e dell’ altre Chiese, Cappelle, ed Oratori della Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana*”<sup>7</sup> (“Description of the Conventual Church of St John the Baptist, and of the other churches, chapels and oratories of the Sacred Order of the Knights of Jerusalem.”)

The document itself is not dated, but it contains a list of Priors of the Conventual Church up to 1758 so it can be assumed that it dates from the late 1750s or the early 1760s. The entry pertaining to Our Lady of Victory Church, indexed as chapter XXV, carries a short description of the building and its contents, including a rather long list of reliquaries.

Entry VII in the same chapter states that “*Nell’ anno 1716 L’limo [Illustrissimo] Gran Maestro Fra’ Raimondo de Perellos fece dipingere a proprie spese da Alessio Erardi il soffitto di detta Parrocchiale Chiesa, ingrandita poi nell’anno 1757 a spese del Vendo Bali di Maiorca Fra Gerolamo de Montolieu come si dirà in appresso*”<sup>8</sup> (“In the year 1716, the most illustrious Grand Master Fra’ Ramon Perellos commissioned the painting at his own expense by Alessio Erardi of the ceiling of the said parish church, later enlarged in 1757 at the expense of the Venerable Bali of Majorca Fra Girolamo de Montolieu as will be related later.”) The document confirms that the frescos were commissioned by Grand Master Perellos and, possibly more importantly, that they were executed by Alessio Erardi.

Entry XIX in the same chapter gives further details regarding the vault, stating: “*Il Vendo [Venerando] Bali di Maiorca Fra Girolamo de Montolieu, dopo aver a sue spese ingrandito la detta Parrocchiale Chiesa, e fatto anche il coro, fondò il Matutino, Messa cantata e Laudi [lodi] della notte di Natale, e li tre Matutini e Laudi di Giovedì, Venerdì, e Sabato Santo, come si ricava da alcuna [taluna] iscrizione in marmo collocata nella sopradetta sagrestia.*”<sup>9</sup> (“The Venerable Bali of Majorca Fra Girolamo de Montolieu, after having at his expense enlarged the said parish church, and commissioned the choir, established the Matins, Mass and Lauds of Christmas Night, and the three Matins and Lauds of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, as is also shown in a marble inscription located in the aforementioned sacristy.”) The inscription referred to in the document can still be seen in the sacristy of the church.

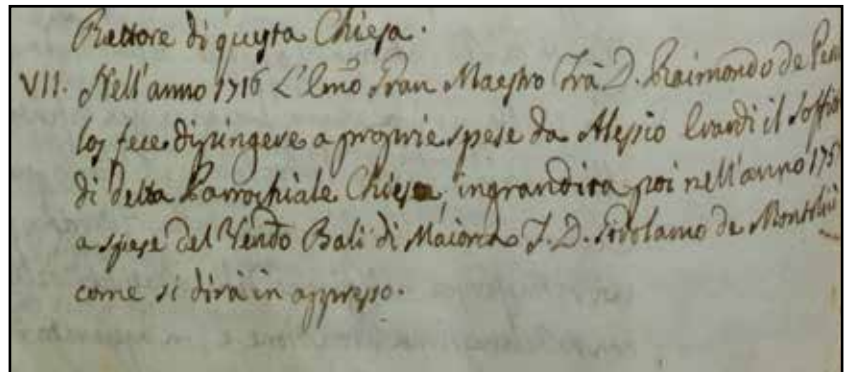
The pictorial decoration was executed between 1716 and 1717, with the assistance of the young Enrico Reynaud (1692-1764) who was probably brought in to complete the work after Erardi was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the nunnery convent church of St Ursola, also by Grand Master Perellos, in 1717.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the minor decorative details on the vault might be the work of Cristofano de Lucia, who had already assisted Erardi in the decoration of the ceiling of the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Valletta towards the end of 1711. There he contributed “*la pittura del ornamento*” (the painting of the ornamental detailing) comprising floral patterns, festoons and possibly the coat of arms of Grand Master Perellos.<sup>11</sup>

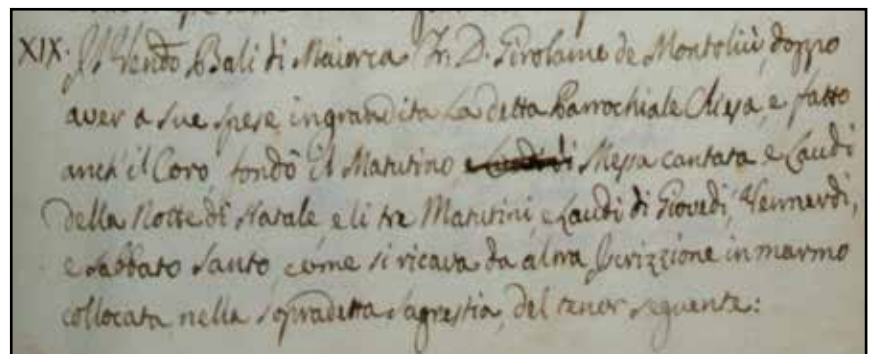
### The 1757 enlargement

The document referred to above gives a clear indication that the church was further enlarged in 1757 by the addition of a choir. However, no information is given regarding the cost involved or who was commissioned to decorate the resulting enlarged vault.

Once again, the first evidence comes from a physical study of the vault. At a closer inspection it appears that the paintings of the area over the choir and those over the organ end of the church, abutting the façade, are by a different hand than the central ones, and understandably so, because Alessio Erardi died in 1727<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the façade end of the vault features the coat of arms of Grand Masters Pinto



Entry VII - NLM, AOM 1953



Entry XIX - NLM, AOM 1953



The inscription in the sacristy



(1741-1773) and de Valette, while those of Fra Girolamo de Montolieu can be seen over the organ balcony. Therefore the natural conclusion is that the church was enlarged at both ends with the façade also being replaced.

Another interesting fact that can be observed on site is that while the church proper abuts the walls of the St James Cavalier, the choir actually extends *into* the fabric of these walls. This is not only further proof that the church was enlarged in this direction but also raises the possibility that some form of authorisation would have been obtained, thus generating some additional documentary evidence pertaining to the church.

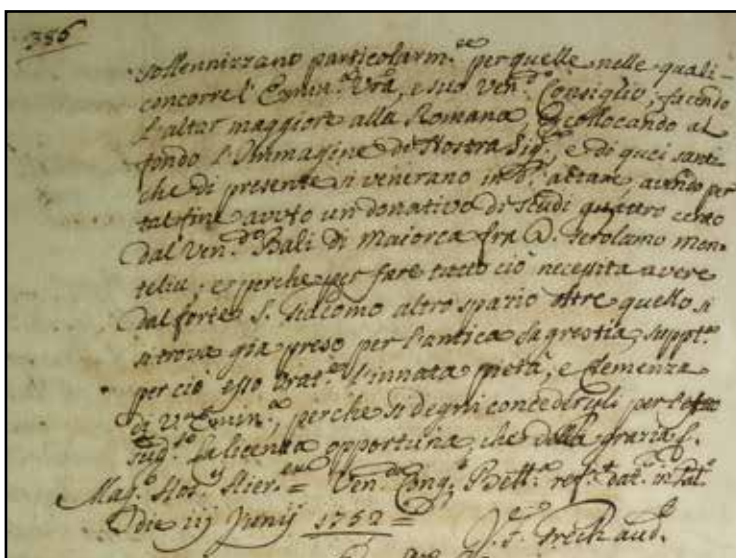
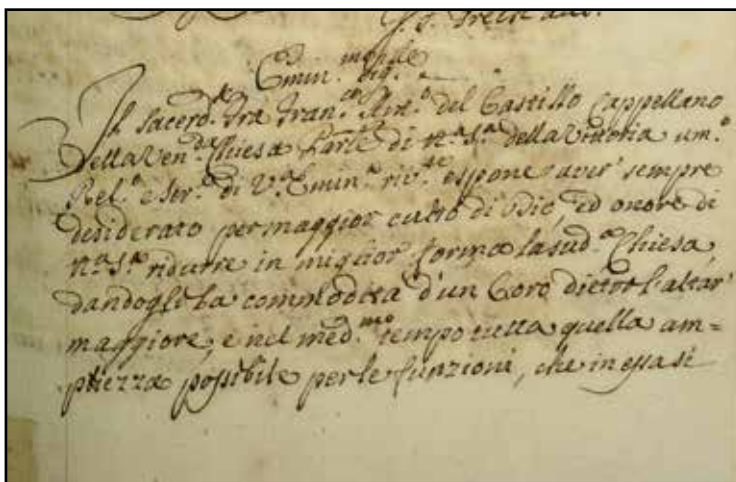
Further research in the *repertorio* of the National Library revealed that volumes NLM, AOM 1016-1023 consist of *suppliche* (petitions) made to the *Congregazione di Guerra* (Congregation of War) between 1690 and 1798. This was the Order's official body for the administration of war-related issues, including the upkeep of fortifications. Of these, volume 1020 contains petitions made between 1744 and 1763.

Within this volume, a relevant petition was identified in folios 385 and 386. In this petition, dated 22 June 1752, the rector of Our Lady of Victory Church, Fra Francisco Antonio del Castillo, petitioned the *Congregazione della Guerra* to be able to further enlarge the church within the walls of St James Cavalier, part of which was already taken up by the sacristy. Fra del Castillo justified his request by stating that such an enlargement would provide the space needed to accommodate dignitaries when official ceremonies were held in the church. In addition, the main altar would stand in isolation – as was the Roman style of the time (*alla Romana*) – and a choir could be added. At this point, Del Castillo states that the extra space is necessary “*particolarmente per quali concorre l'eminenza vostra e suo venerabile consiglio.*”<sup>13</sup> (“particularly for those [occasions] in which your Eminence and your venerable Council participate.”). From this wording it would seem that the petition was originally addressed directly to Grand Master Pinto, who subsequently referred it to the *Congregazione della Guerra*.

In the same petition, Del Castillo goes on to say: “*avendo per tal fine avuto un donativo di scudi quattro cento dal Ven.do [Venerando] Bali di Maiorca Fra Gerolamo Montelieu*”<sup>14</sup> (“having obtained for this purpose a donation of 400 scudi from the Venerable Bailiff of Majorca Fra Gerolamo Montolieu”).

Physical manifestations of this generous offer are the beautifully inlaid marble coat-of-arms within the high altar of the church and the one depicted prominently over the organ balcony. Unfortunately, the document gives no details regarding who was commissioned to carry out the work and the decoration of the extended vault. Experts are of the opinion that it could have been Enrico Reynaud, Erardi's original principle assistant on the project.<sup>15</sup>

The two documents referred to above provide reliable documentary evidence in respect of Our Lady of Victory Church. NLM, AOM 1953 provides a documented attribution to Alessio Erardi for the scenes of the Life of the Virgin on the vault, and identifies Grand Master Perellos as the patron who commissioned the work. The petition in folios 385 and 386 of NLM, AOM 1020 confirms that the church was enlarged in, or after, 1752 and identifies the Bailiff of Majorca, Fra Gerolamo de Montolieu, as the patron who commissioned these works and Chaplain Francisco Antonio del Castillo as the person who inspired the project.



NLM, AOM 1020, *Suppliche* 1743 – 1763, folios 385 and 386

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- 5 Ferres, A. 1866. *Descrizione delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*. Malta.
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# Ta' Braxia Cemetery

## a historic site struggling to survive

Dr Andy Welsh and Chev. Charles Gatt  
(Respectively President and Executive Director of *The Friends of Ta' Braxia*)

Ta' Braxia cemetery was designed by Luigi Emanuele Galizia, who was the Works Department's architect, in 1856. He was 25 and it was his first commission. He subsequently designed many fine projects in Malta, including the Addolorata and Turkish Cemeteries. He also designed a very fine fountain for Ta' Braxia Cemetery, but this now requires extensive restoration.

The cemetery has been progressively enlarged over the years and now accommodates 5,000 burials. It occupies the entire available area and there is no space for any more graves. A few interments do still take place, such as in family vaults on the lower sections of the cemetery. Originally, ownership of graves was by 'Right of Sepulture', whereby the dead are left undisturbed – until the Day of Judgment. An exception to this was Charles MacIver, founder of the Cunard Line, who regularly holidayed in Sliema Palace and who was reinterred in Liverpool. Grave owners can now obtain full deeds of ownership.

The beautiful and unique High Gothic chapel in the centre of Ta' Braxia Cemetery was commissioned by Lord Stanmore in memory of his wife Rachel, who died in 1887. She is buried behind the altar. The building, which was consecrated in 1893, was designed by the London architect John Loughborough Pearson.

The area of Ta' Braxia was originally much larger, as it would be, comprising open ground in front of the Floriana Bastions to allow a free field of fire and to deny shelter to any approaching force. The meaning of the word 'Braxia' or 'Bracia' is the subject of debate but it seems to us to convey the same sense as the old English word 'brake' which means, appropriately, open ground. Ta' Braxia was not the first cemetery in the area, as in 1831 Sir Moses Montefiore, a Jewish financier, prevailed upon the Government to grant a strip of land to the Jewish community for a cemetery, and this adjoins the main cemetery. At one time there was also a football ground at the side of the cemetery, but this no longer exists.

Ta' Braxia itself was commissioned at the time of the Crimean War, in 1856, as the existing burial grounds and cemeteries available for non-Catholics, and in particular the Msida Bastion, had reached full capacity. The new cemetery was to be available to those of all faiths and was to be managed by a statutory body, the 'Ta' Braxia Committee', which was funded by a yearly vote, and a house was built for a resident caretaker. Ownership of the ground was passed to the Maltese Government between the wars – 'The Harper Award' – and from then on Catholics sought graves. In fact, a wide range of Christian denominations and other religions are represented.

From 1987 to 1999, *Din l-Art Helwa* carried out a painstaking and successful restoration of the Msida Bastion Cemetery which, like Ta' Braxia, contains the graves of people important in Maltese and overseas history. The conclusion of the restoration of Msida Bastion was marked the following year at a ceremony attended by Fiona Reynolds, then Director of the English National Trust, and Prince Hendrik of Denmark, President of *Europa Nostra*, the European National Trust, which awarded the project the coveted silver medal. The Msida Bastion was leased to *Din l-Art Helwa*, which keeps it in show condition. It is open to the public on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings and on the first Sunday of every month.

It was logical to follow a similar project with the restoration of Ta' Braxia cemetery. The site had suffered three WWII bombs and was very run down. *Din l-Art Helwa* agreed a joint project of work with the Health Department, as represented by the Ta' Braxia Committee which was still functioning under the chairmanship of then Chief Government Medical Officer Dr A. Vassallo, with Director of Health Dr Ray Busuttill and John Attard Kingswell on his staff. Matters started well enough, but soon after the Health Department was reorganised, Dr Vassallo retired and was not replaced as such, and Dr Busuttill was given wider responsibilities. The Committee no longer sat and the Ta' Braxia 'vote' was significantly reduced. A project that had been in hand to repair the chapel was dropped and the position of caretaker, made vacant by the death of John Mizzi, was not continued as the government was unable to recover possession of the house.

*Din l-Art Helwa* founded the 'Friends of Ta' Braxia' to provide continuity of care and to supervise restoration work, raise funds and act as an additional focal point for relatives. Friends subscribe a yearly sum and others give donations, and through these resources and help from the elsewhere, the majority of the war damage has been corrected, tombs have been re-laid and a great deal of repair to the monuments has been achieved, although more remains to be done.





*The Memorial Chapel  
in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.  
Photo courtesy of the  
Superintendence of  
Cultural Heritage*

First published in  
The Malta  
Independent  
on Sunday  
1 November 2015

*opposite:  
Andy Welsh (left)  
and  
Charles Gatt*

Over the years, the Friends, using available funds, have installed toilets and a workshop and set up an office, laid on water and electricity, replace broken cathedral glass windows in the chapel, repaired walls, gates and stonework, researched much information, recorded the inscriptions on the graves and produced visitors' guides. The adjacent Jewish cemetery was dug out, researched and restored.

The Friends deal with many enquiries from descendants of those buried in the cemetery, locating the relevant grave and taking the people to visit, often arranging for headstones or other work. Sometimes this is an easy matter, as we have many records, but sometimes widespread war damage means an almost forensic search. Several regular events are held, such as the visits by the Russian Ambassador and his staff on Russia's National Days, which centre on the grave of General de Breze (the diplomatic advisor to the last Tsar) and the tombs of the Princesses Poutiatine. All Souls Day, other religious services and The Friends Annual General Meetings are held in the Memorial Chapel.

The cemetery is one of Malta's historic sites, a visitor attraction in itself, even if one disregards the respect due to those interred there, many of whom have played important roles in Malta's development. If it could be brought back to a decent condition it could be one of our major attractions. This article is written in the hope that it may attract more national attention and also that more individuals and organisations can come and give a hand.

We are always very ready to talk to anyone interested and show people around. ([anwelsh@go.net.mt](mailto:anwelsh@go.net.mt), [cagatt@go.net.mt](mailto:cagatt@go.net.mt)).

This is not to say that we have not had generous help in the past. We should mention with grateful thanks the many organisations which have given assistance, both financial and physical, including HSBC, the Ramblers, the Russian community, the Royal Marines and the Gollcher Foundation. Invaluable help has also been received from various individuals, and mention must be made in particular of Alan Keighley, an eminent historian who wrote and researched the visitors' guides.

The Health Department has helped where it could, although constrained by budgetary and other difficulties. Security staff now regularly ensure that the cemetery is open to the public throughout the week and perform other duties. However, mention must be made of their ex-employee Karmenu Baldachino, alas long-retired, but who, while he was with us, was a tower of strength.

The Cemetery covers a wide area, and not only includes many beautiful and important monuments, but interesting flora and fauna. There are cedars, pines, palms, olives, almonds, pomegranates, judas trees, and many shrubs: pittosporums, bougainvilleas, lantanas – it would take up too much space to list them all. We have lizards and skinks – and, until recently, a swarm of bees were building their hive behind a memorial plaque. However, the gardening of such a big site has always presented problems. The Friends are deputed to look after the gardening of the older sections, which cover two-thirds of the site, and is paid for out of the Vote, and government staff – or occasionally private contractors – are deputed to handle the lower part which is still used for burials. Sadly, this does not always work, as the security staff cannot do this work on a regular basis, and the subvention from the vote is inadequate and generally much delayed.

The result is that the cemetery often appears unkempt to visitors – particularly after a rainy period. We can only regret this and say that we are endeavouring to improve. A large tree was blown down in the storms in December 2014 and blocks one of the pathways, fortunately not affecting any of the monuments, but another is leaning precariously and if it collapses will no doubt damage several tombs. We are repeatedly being told that its removal is awaiting Mepa approval. Likewise the lightning conductor of the chapel is hanging free, the result of a botched copper theft also in December 2014: one hesitates to imagine what damage might be done if lightning were to strike the dome. The chapel itself is in urgent need of repairs, as the timbers in the lower roof are decaying, rendering the lower tiles unsafe. Restoration to the stonework is also urgently needed.

Ta' Braxia Cemetery is truly a historic gem. It is steeped in history, being the resting place of hundreds of notable personages of various nationalities and it deserved better attention and funding. If kept in a more respectable condition, the cemetery could easily be included in the Malta list of must-see sites for visiting tourists. The reader can understand that the few Friends of Ta' Braxia Association volunteers have their hands full and are struggling – but struggling with a very beautiful and rewarding project that will be of great value to Malta. There are things that can be done and the Friends volunteers will endeavour to do them.

# Lost Muxrabija Location Identified by Vigilo Readers

Dear Sir;

In two weeks we will start our 33rd stay in Malta – and every time in more than the last 25 years we have been surprised to see something new.

Last year our interest was related to the muxrabija windows, after reading a notice by the local council of Għasri promoting their beautiful one.

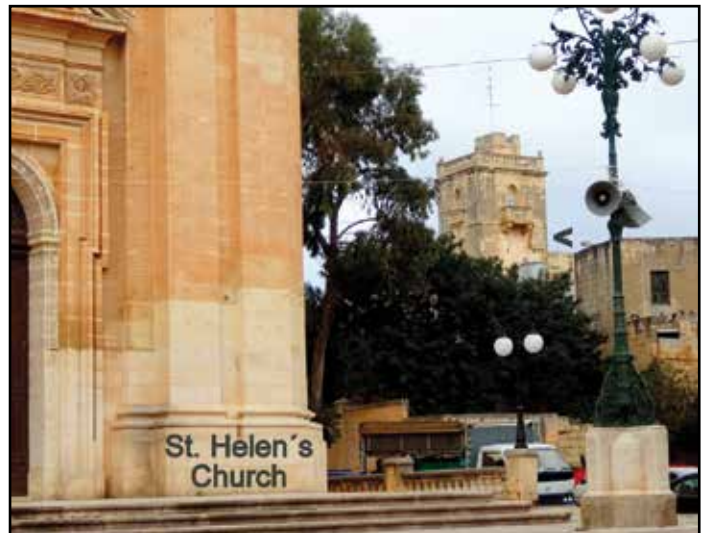
In March and November 2015 we saw a lot of them (with the help of Robert Galea's descriptive gazetteer) and we are delighted to have now found your detailed description of this really rare feature in Vigilo of April and October 2012.

We read that the one in Birkirkara would be classed among the lost muxrabijiet, also in Robert Galea's gazetteer, but it is not lost – just not visible from the mentioned address. Just in case you didn't see it, it is on a tower belonging to the house mentioned, but is only visible from the back – Triq Mike Pulis. The best view of it is from the steps in front of St Helen's church.

If you know the Birkirkara muxrabija, please forget this email. We don't want to appear to 'know better' but are just so happy that it still exists and we believe that someone who wrote such a factual article would himself be interested in the described feature.

With best regards,  
Yours sincerely

Christian and Bettina Launer



The lost Birkirkara muxrabija.  
Photos - Christian and Bettina Launer

**Editor's note:** We received Mr & Mrs Launer's email some weeks ago and trust they enjoyed their 33rd visit to Malta! And they are quite right – the elusive Birkirkara muxrabija is, indeed, where they describe. I am both grateful and indebted to them.

Extract from **A Survey of the Maltese Muxrabijiet (2nd part)**,  
by Joe Azzopardi published in Vigilo No 42 (October 2012)

## “Lost muxrabijiet”

“Carol J. Jaccarini published a photograph in 1998 showing a stone *muxrabija* attached to a corner property in Triq Santu r-Rokku, Birkirkara. It was in the form of an elongated hood over which was a rectangular feature apparently issuing from the string course that marks the internal sub-division of two different floors. Just below the *muxrabija* is a vertical spy hole some 25 cm in height. The lower part of the *muxrabija* consisted of a rounded feature composed of three stone blocks and included four square spy holes. Over this was the vertical body of the hood, the external part of which was made up of sheets of masonry measuring some 55x20cm and approximately 1cm thick. The lower two also included a pair of square spy holes. The house to which the *muxrabija* was attached is purported to have been the residence of Vincenzo Borg (known as Brared) (1777-1837)”.

(JACCARINI, C.J. 1998. *Ir-Razzett – The Maltese Farmhouse*. Malta)

# Heritage and Environment Protection Report

## ODZ land at Żonqor

In December 2015, *Din l-Art Helwa* questioned the transfer of Żonqor Point to the Sadeen Group. This transfer of ODZ land for the purpose of building an educational establishment was forging ahead, without due consideration being given to the alternative sites proposed.

Previously, on 2 November, a meeting of the Permanent Committee for Environment and Development Planning was convened to discuss the Mepa *Preliminary Alternative Sites Evaluation Report* on the numerous alternative sites proposed by the Maltese public. At this meeting, alternatives were put forward by those present, including DLH, as well as proposals that had not been seriously considered in the unscientific, and sometimes misrepresented, results.

DLH said that the public deserved to be taken seriously, at least by the publication of a follow-up on this *Preliminary Alternative Sites Evaluation Report*, before the transfer of land became a *fait accompli*. The online site-selection public consultation, the parliamentary committee meeting, and the Mepa report in August could all be considered a sham.

## Nature Park at tal-Inwadar

We welcome the initiative to set up a management structure for the Inwadar Park at Żonqor which was designated in the Local Plan of 2006. It is also positive that additional areas have been incorporated within the park boundaries.

It is not surprising that this area has been selected for this initiative, in the wake of the huge controversy that still surrounds the unnecessary use of ODZ land just adjacent to the park area for the development of an educational establishment.

## The development of ODZ land at Ta' Ċenċ will continue the relentless destruction of the countryside

DLH is extremely concerned by the renewed proposal to build 15 villas outside the development zone on the plateau near Mgarr ix-Xini at Ta' Ċenċ in Gozo. This proposal is completely unacceptable and should be thrown out by the Planning Authority. It goes directly against all current planning policies that relate to this area.

The Local Plan limits development on this plateau to the existing buildings and does not allow further development in the area. This was specifically clarified in a letter to the Mepa Board in 2006 by then government Minister George Pullicino – who had approved the Local Plans – which letter was endorsed by then Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi.

The Rural Policy and Design Guidance, approved by the government in 2014, does not contemplate the development of new residences outside development zones.

Finally, the new Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED) of 2015, which has now replaced the Structure Plan, states that the location of new residences should be limited to within urban areas, and that rural areas must not be “exploited by uses which are not legitimate or necessary”.

The government has already ignored its own SPED with the transfer of a large portion of land at Żonqor at Marsascula for the development of an educational establishment, on land identified by the Planning Authority against its own policies. Granting permission to build private villas in an ODZ area near Mgarr ix-Xini at Ta' Ċenċ would continue the relentless destruction of the countryside.

The SPED clearly states that further land take-up in rural areas should be considered as a last resort and only “where it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development”. There is absolutely nothing sustainable about building more ODZ villas on the Ta' Ċenċ peninsula.

DLH urges the authorities to refuse the renewed proposal to build 15 villas on the plateau near Mgarr ix-Xini at Ta' Ċenċ in Gozo, as well as an interpretation centre and other structures outside the development zone. This proposal is completely unacceptable and should be thrown out by the Planning Authority.

In 2006, a petition raised by DLH against proposed development at Ta' Ċenċ was signed by 10,000 people. This was presented to Parliament by two Members of Parliament, one from the then Opposition benches, who is today Home Affairs Minister, and one from the government of the time.

Ta' Ċenċ is an area of high landscape value and high ecological sensitivity, and is included in the EU Natura 2000 network of protected areas. The proposed development will create unacceptable levels of disturbance to the site, including ancillary development such as extensions to roads and increased lighting and traffic. The visuals submitted show that the development has a negative visual impact from most of the angles and approaches to the site.

The current owner bought the land at a price that reflected the zoning of the entire plateau as ODZ. By allowing the requested development, the authorities will be allowing pure speculation. Such drastic alterations of zoning allow speculators to manipulate the valuation system to their sole benefit.

It is established practice that development applications are to be decided by the Board on laws and policies currently in force at the time when it takes its decision on the application. The proposal makes reference to the Structure Plan, which is, however, no longer in force and has been replaced by the SPED.

## *Din l-Art Helwa* welcomes passage of Public Domain Act

DLH had strongly recommended the approval by Parliament of the Public Domain Bill put forward by Dr Jason Azzopardi, Dr Ryan Callus and Dr Marthese Portelli. It had welcomed the opportunity given to the public, including NGOs, to recommend state-owned property and land that could be classified as public domain, as distinct from public property. This was seen to empower the public to put forward proposals that tracts of land become parks.

At 1,346 people per square kilometre, Malta has the highest density of population in the EU. DLH now welcomes the enactment of the Public Domain Act in May and considers that, stemming from the passage of this law, it will provide guaranteed open spaces as a green lung for the ever-increasing density of the Maltese Islands.



*Il-Kantra area at Ta' Ċenċ*

## The Future of Nature Parks in Malta

*Martin Galea*

*Din l-Art Helwa Council Member*

Malta is a beautiful country. It is a small country and it is also one of the most populous countries in the world. This makes what we have all the more precious.

Our countryside is quite spectacular in its variety. From tilled fields and lush valleys to harsh plains or *xaghri*, the countryside changes and develops with surprising rapidity. It is home to a variety of plant and animal species, some indigenous to these small islands. And yet, all is under threat: a cheap resource for property speculators who see the price of land within development zones as too expensive and look at cheaper alternatives in protected areas or outside development zones.

Country houses, swimming pools, quarries, schools, universities and agritourism are all potentially permissible developments in areas designated as Outside Development Zones (ODZ). There is a veritable onslaught, and the authority responsible for planning is not proving up to the task where the tone at the top is definitely not in favour of the environment. But development is not the only threat: illegal dumping, the illegal closure of public footpaths, structures erected on public land for hunting and trapping and off-roading are all ever-present.

Take a walk in the countryside and you will encounter many examples within minutes. And yet we promote our countryside for winter and off-peak tourism as one of the key attractions. A quick flick through adverts or magazines promoting Malta and the countryside features prominently. It is a key economic resource which we have not recognised – or at least given an economic value to.

Apart from being a resource, we also need it for ourselves – to get away – for a walk in the country, a picnic, a bike ride. Our countryside is somewhere to relax and clear our minds, a spiritual revival in our crowded, traffic-ridden island – perchance a walk in Dingli, Gebel Ciantar, Bahrija or Fomm ir-Rih – and it is imperative that we take urgent action to protect it.

The Today Public Policy Institute (TPPI) think tank and *Din l-Art Helwa* have published a discussion paper entitled ‘The Future of Nature Parks in Malta’.



*Ta' Ċenċ*

*Bottom left:  
ODZ Villa*

*Giving the term “greenhouse”  
a new meaning*



Malta's credentials are very poor in the area of conservation. The Majjistral Park was set up in 2007, and over 30 Natura 2000 sites have been designated. Some areas are being conserved, but there is no hierarchy, no system and no vision – just ad hoc regulations issued for each site. The need for a proper system of national parks to actively look after our countryside is all the more important since we now have European commitments for our Natura 2000 sites that make up some 13% of the land area. These sites are precious habitats for important fauna and flora of the Maltese Islands.

The discussion paper looks at a number of issues: the organisational structure, the planning legislation that would apply to the national parks and the all-important funding, as well as measures to actively look after the areas to be protected. The report is concerned with the structures rather than identifying the areas per se. The newly formed Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) is the obvious choice as the regulator, setting the regulatory framework around which the parks would be managed.

The discussion paper proposes that the regulator would delegate the supervisory tasks to a managing agency, which the authors have called Natura Malta. This agency would oversee and largely fund the site managers who would look after the different sites. The individual protected sites could be managed by individuals, local councils, environmental NGOs or even companies. These site managers could apply for funds to assist them and would manage the sites under the terms of a management agreement signed with Natura Malta. This would ensure that the site managers carry out their tasks in accordance with the management plan.

Proper governance arrangements should be in place to control finance and work procedures, as well as to monitor progress against the management plan. Areas would be designated as 'park areas' by the regulator, and these would include areas of high scenic value, important habitats and Natura 2000 sites.

The issue of funding is important. Clearly, there are not sufficient funding opportunities available for all the areas to be conserved by fund-raising or commercial activities. State assistance, as is normally the case the world over, is required. In Malta's case, the amount is within the country's financial reach. Indeed, it is important to do so to protect the economic gains currently earned from our natural heritage.

Jurisdiction over planning regulations is always an issue, and in Malta it is a very thorny, political and contentious area. In England, no new structure has been set up to regulate planning issues within areas designated as parks. Instead, the Sandford Principle is applied: "National parks can do much to reconcile public enjoyment with the preservation of natural beauty by good planning and management and the main emphasis must be to continue on this wherever possible. But, even so, there will be situations where the two purposes are irreconcilable. Where this happens priority must be given to the preservation of natural beauty" (Lord Sandford, 1974).

Malta needs to protect its countryside – this report shows one way in which we can.

First published in *The Times of Malta*  
on 13th April 2016

*From prime agricultural land to industrial zone*



*Eating away at the flesh of Malta*



## Fauna and Flora at Majjistral Park

Alex Casha

*Naturalist (Majjistral Nature and History Park)*

One of Malta's most beautiful places can be found in the northwest of the island, an area of 2.5 square kilometres that forms the Majjistral Nature and History Park. It is a place that is still relatively wild, with an expanse of rocky plateau and a coastline of cliffs and boulder scree. In this expanse of land, along with features of archaeological and historical interest, thrives a variety of wild species of fauna and flora.

### Birds

One of the special features of the park is the large number – and variety – of birds. Twelve species can be found nesting here and during the breeding season these birds are more in evidence with their song. The melodious notes of the blue rock thrush (*merill*), Malta's national bird, can be heard echoing all along the cliffs. The merill nests mainly in fissures in the cliffs and is fairly easy to see.

The same cannot be said of the yelkouan shearwater (*garnija*), a secretive bird that also nests along the coastal area of the park. These birds come to the breeding area only during the nesting season and in the darkness of the night. During the day they can be seen flying over the sea searching for food and at sunset, they gather in flocks (called 'rafts') and settle over the sea before flying back to their nests.

The corn bunting (*durrajsa*), one of Malta's scarcest breeding birds, can also be found nesting in the park and the male bird can often be heard singing from a prominent perch. This bird makes its nest on the ground, so is very susceptible to predators and is also easily disturbed!

The spectacled warbler (*bufula hamra*) is another scarce species found at Majjistral. During the breeding season, the male sings from the top of shrubs and calls out in alarm at any hint of danger. The nest is made in low shrubs in open areas.

Two other interesting breeding species are the short-toed lark (*bilbla*) and the tawny pipit (*bilblun*). Both are migratory species and both nest on the ground. The short-toed lark's presence is often noticed when it sings as it flies over its territory. The tawny pipit is a recent addition to Malta's breeding list and one of the first nests in Malta was actually discovered by birdwatchers in Majjistral Park. Once the nesting season is over, both species will migrate back to Africa, to spend the winter there.

During the migrating seasons of spring and autumn, several species of birds can be recorded at the park. These include both large and small birds, some of which are just seen flying over while others are observed on the ground. One typical migratory species is the wheat ear (*kuda*), a bird of open spaces, which is regularly seen in the park. Different species of birds can also be observed in the winter months and one of the most familiar – that is seen in the park and elsewhere in the Maltese countryside at this time of year – is the robin (*pitirross*).



*Merill - Blue Rock Thrush. Photo by Alex Casha*

*Bufula Hamra - Spectacled Warbler. Photo by AronTanti*





**Flora**

Over 450 species of wild plants have been recorded in the park, of which the most interesting are the 12 that are endemic. Two of these are orchids – the Maltese pyramidal orchid (*orkida piramidali ta' Malta*) and the Maltese spider orchid (*brimba ta' Malta*) – can be easily spotted while walking in the park during their flowering season in early spring.

Also flowering in the spring is the Maltese sea chamomile (*bebuna tal-baħar*). If you look carefully, you can see the yellow and white flowers of these small aromatic plants, which grow low over the ground in the coastal part of the park in spring.

One of the common shrubs found in the park is the Maltese shrubby kidney vetch (*ħatba s-sewda ta' Malta*) – an important component of the park's garigue habitat. During the flowering season in the early spring, this shrub is covered with small yellow flowers.

Apart from the endemic species, several native plants can be seen in the park and a variety of different flowers can be seen, mainly in the spring. On the garigue plateau you will find shrubs such as Mediterranean thyme (*sagħtar*), yellow germander (*borghom*), Mediterranean heath (*erika*), honeysuckle (*qarn il-mogħża*) and wolfbane (*sigra tal-ħarir*). Bulbous species, such as the beautiful large star of Bethlehem (*ħalib it-tajr kbir*) with its large, showy white flowers, are also part of the garigue's flora.

The coastal area also boasts an array of wild plants, some of them typical of cliffs and clay slopes. Among these rare and localised wild plants is fagonia (*fagonja*), a creeping plant with small, spiny-tipped leaves, that produces violet flowers in spring. The esparto grass (*ħalfa*) grows on the clay slopes, binding the clay and preventing its erosion.

**Fauna**

The list of fauna in the Majjistral includes some of the least observed species such as the weasel (*ballotra*), which has been seen in daylight on a few occasions. The hedgehog (*qanfud*) is another mammal, but it is nocturnal and rarely seen during the day. Rabbits are common, and their presence is often revealed by their burrows or their droppings. Reptiles rely on warm weather to be active and the Western black whip snake (*serp iswed*) and the Moorish gecko (*wiżgħa tal-kampanja*) are perhaps the two of the species most likely to be seen in the park.

Chameleons are also being recorded more frequently, basking on a branch in the sun, waiting for insects to feed on. And among the most notable insects in the park are butterflies, including the swallowtail. This large, yellowish butterfly lays its eggs on fennel (*buzbież*) or fringed rue (*fejġel*), two plants that are also found in the park.

It is impossible in this article to describe all the flora and fauna of Majjistral Park. To learn more, we welcome you to visit the Majjistral Visitor Centre – where there are information panels and also a documentary about Majjistral Park – and, of course, the park itself.



*Orkida Piramidali ta' Malta - Maltese Pyramidal Orchid. Photo by Annalise Falzon*

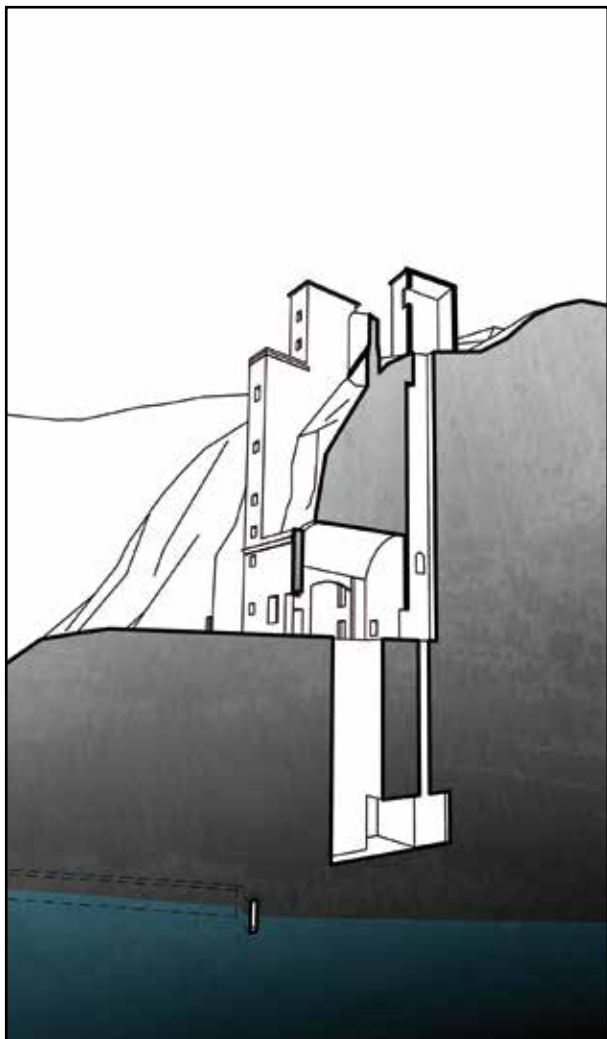


*Bebuna tal-Baħar - Maltese Sea Chamomile. Photo Majjistral Park*



# Mgarr ix-Xini Pumping Station

*Mario Pace*



In 1886, the Lieut. Governor of Malta Walter Hely-Hutchinson instructed engineer Osbert Chadwick to carry out a survey into the water supply in Gozo. At that time, Gozo was entirely dependent on rainwater, perched aquifer abstraction and water originating from natural springs. However, up until then there was no evidence of a great scarcity of water. Chadwick remarked that, because of the geomorphology beneath them, the villages around Mgarr ix-Xini depended solely on rainwater collected in tanks. He also reported that a number of springs in the vicinity of Ghajnsielem were flowing into the sea near Mgarr Harbour.

Based on his experience in Malta, particularly after the great success of the pumping station in Wied il-Kbir in Malta, Chadwick felt confident of the presence of an abundant storage of good quality water beneath the deep valley of Mgarr ix-Xini. Moreover, the abundant vegetation, carob trees, figs and vines led him to believe that water was present relatively close to the surface of the valley bed. Any water obtained from this

*The pumping station in the 1920s*

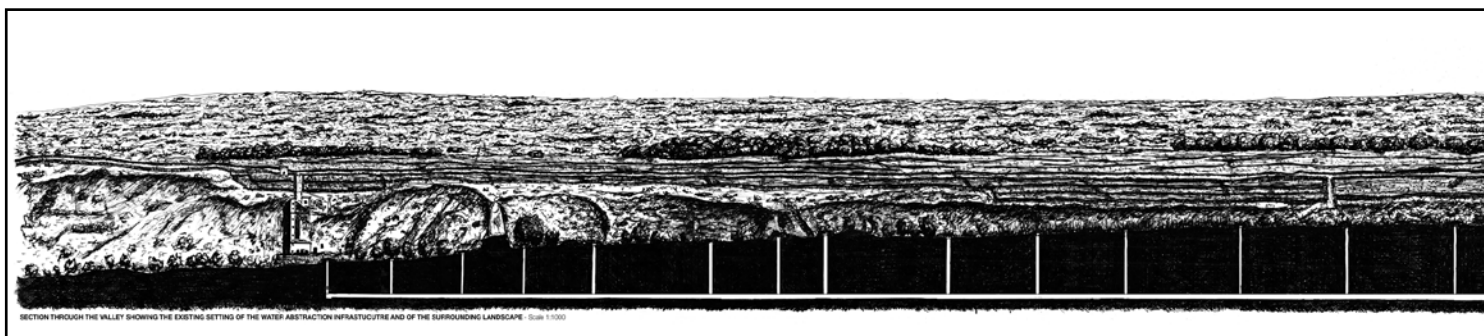
*top left:*

*Section through the pumping station*

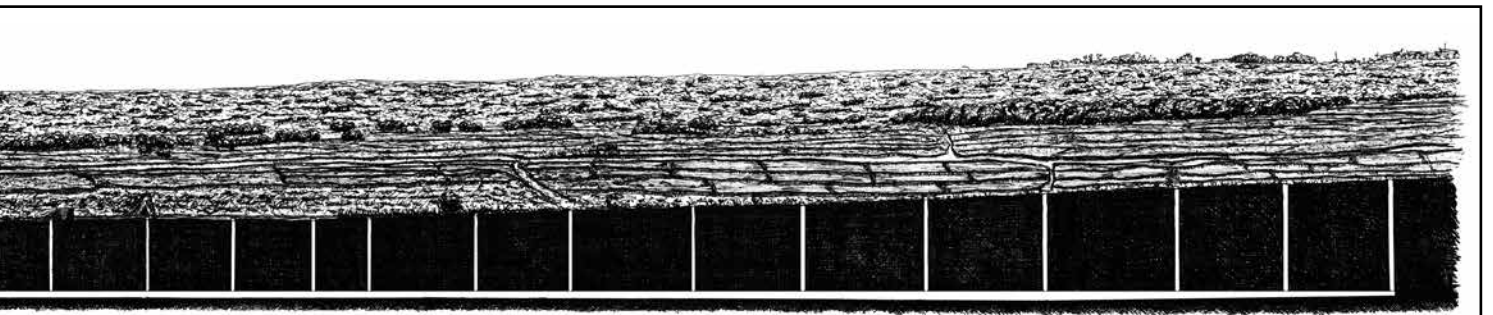
*opposite:*

*The pumping station in its current state*

*Section through the valley showing the existing setting of the water abstraction infrastructure and of the surrounding landscape - scale 1:1000*



SECTION THROUGH THE VALLEY SHOWING THE EXISTING SETTING OF THE WATER ABSTRACTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND OF THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE - Scale 1:1000



source could be advantageously used in the neighbouring villages of Sannat, Xewkija, and Munxar.

However, rainfall in the winter of 1887 was well below average and, as a consequence, there was a severe shortage of water in the following dry summer months. The government was obliged to cart water to Sannat, Xewkija and Gharb to supply the quantity absolutely necessary to quench the thirst of the inhabitants (Schinas, 1888).

As a result of this urgent situation, an immediate counter-measure was required. Consequently, in January 1888, resident engineer G.C. Schinas proposed a project in which water from the springs in Ghajnsielem would be pumped to Victoria, Xewkija, Sannat, Munxar and Gharb. This proposal was chosen over Chadwick's as it had the advantage of being based on data already collected without incurring the delay involved in the trials required in the Mgarr ix-Xini project. It must be understood that until the nature of the rock and the quality of the water had been tested – by manually sinking deep shafts into the ground – there was no way of knowing whether the site would be appropriate for the construction of a pumping station.

So Chadwick's idea was dropped because there was no guarantee that the investment would yield any direct benefits – in other words, his project was seen as a gamble. However, almost a decade later – in 1897 – the supply from the springs in Ghajnsielem was proving to be increasingly insufficient. Hoping for a similar success to that which had crowned the operations in Wied il-Kbir, Chadwick again proposed that shafts be dug in the valley of Mgarr ix-Xini in order to determine whether water was existent in both sufficient quantity and quality to justify the building of a pumping station. Evidently, his aspirations were fulfilled.

Due to the geomorphological features of the site, this project would entail a major undertaking – considering the limited means available at that time. The trial shafts that were dug to assess the quality of water were connected by a series of mines or galleries, at the level of the water table. These mines would, in turn, direct the flow of water into a pit from where it could be pumped into high-level reservoirs so it could be distributed by gravity for domestic consumption.

Considering the relatively premature advancements in technology at that time, the pump had to be operated by a coal-powered steam engine and, thus, an interdependent infrastructure had to be erected. This consisted of a system of chambers excavated into the south valley cliff. These chambers were in turn connected to the pit receiving water from the mines and to the Ta' Gruwa road through a number of stairwells, a ramp, a coal chute and a shaft for lowering bulky items. Two further shafts were excavated: one, which was connected to a chimney, was used to extract the engine exhaust, while the other was used in conjunction with the chute to lower coal into a storage bunker.

A bridge was erected to act as a support for a pipeline that spanned the valley and went up the sheer side of the valley through an excavated tunnel. This tunnel led to a reservoir in Nadur (one of the highest hills



*The tunnel which used to host the pipeline to the Nadur Reservoir*

All illustrations provided  
by the author

*The underground pit  
hosting the pump*





*Part of the original pipe work on the bed of the valley*

on the island) and a secondary pipeline supplied water to another reservoir at Ta' Ċenċ. Between 1925 and 1927, a secondary 600,000 gallon steam engine was installed to ensure a continuity of supply (a secondary chamber had to be excavated to house this boiler). The underground galleries were also extended by 170 feet to enable the extraction of larger quantities of water (Water and Electricity Office, 1928). More than 20 years later, in around 1949, the boiler plant was replaced by two electrically-driven Harland pumps.

By this time, the station had also been augmented by a Ruston diesel engine. It was also around the same time that a five-million-gallon reservoir was erected at Ta' Ċenċ. This reservoir provided, on its own, twice the storage that was available before its construction (Water and Electricity Department, 1950).

About 10 years later, a new pumping station was erected in the area known as Is-Sabbara in Xewkija. This station was connected to the same system of galleries from which the Mġarr ix-Xini station extracted its water. Before long it proved uneconomical to run the two stations when extraction could be centralised at the Sabbara station. The problem was that part of the water in the galleries flowed towards the Mġarr ix-Xini station while the rest flowed towards the Sabbara station. As a result, in 1960 it was proposed that the galleries be deepened by an average of two-and-a-half feet so that all the underground water could flow towards the newly-constructed station (Water Works Office, 1960).

This deepening of the galleries also allowed for an increased natural flow of pore-water (water occupying the spaces between sediment particles) – due to the increase in the overall surface area of the galleries and a higher pore-water pressure head. It was also believed that the increase in electrical consumption required by the Sabbara station to cope with the larger volume of pumped water was less than half the labour costs saved by the closing down of the Mġarr ix-Xini station.

The proposal was eventually accepted and therefore the services of the last two engine drivers and two mates (who operated the Mġarr ix-Xini station) were no longer required and the building was abandoned. To this day the station remains deserted, but its presence is a reminder of the struggles and ingenuity of our ancestors in their attempt to provide themselves with a suitable supply of water.

Slightly amended version of an article first published in *The Times of Malta* on 15 March 2015

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Sannat Local Council and R.A. & Sons Ltd for providing the funding required for the research. Other people who have directly contributed to this work include Paul Curmi, Dr George Azzopardi, Joseph Bezzina, Ing. Charles Camilleri, Dr Ing. Paul Micallef, Brian Restall, Marie Frans Lemonsu, Dick Nelson Boonstoppel, Lesley Norton, Roger Elliott, Andrew Formosa, Jonathan Xerri, Anthony Grech, John Cremona, William Moran, Robert Pace, Julian Vassallo, Andrea Zerafa, Samuel Bonello, James Dingli, Nick Vella Muscat, and many others whose contribution was helpful in less obvious ways.

*The pumping station in its current state*



# MUŻA - The New National-Community Art Museum for Malta

*Sandro Debono - MUŻA Project Lead (Heritage Malta)*

Over the next weeks and months, works of art will be moving into temporary storage as the building currently the seat of the National Museum of Fine Arts on South street will close immediately after this year's edition of *Notte Bianca* (2016). Works of art will be eventually transferred to Auberge d'Italie once conservation and restoration works are completed according to schedule. The project is now in full swing and conservation works on the collection proceed in earnest. Conservation works on the main facade of the Auberge d'Italie are also at an advanced stage and outreach initiatives preparing the community for the MUŻA experience also underway. This article shall present a broad review of the MUŻA project, its various facets, stages and initiatives as the project moves forward to be completed in time when Valletta will be European Capital of Culture in 2018.

## Project Values

MUŻA is the new national museum of art in Malta and flagship project for Valletta 2018 European capital of culture title. The chosen name also stands for the project's vision and the key values which it enshrines, recently also recognised by the Network of European Museums Organisations (NEMO) as 'overlapping ... with the values NEMO promotes' and which the project 'even supersedes'.<sup>1</sup> MUŻA is an acronym for *Mużew Nazzjonal tal-Arti* (Maltese for National Museum of Art). It also refers to the muses, the mythological figures from classical antiquity inspiring creativity and, to all intents and purposes, the etymology of the word 'museum'. MUŻA is also the Maltese word for inspiration.

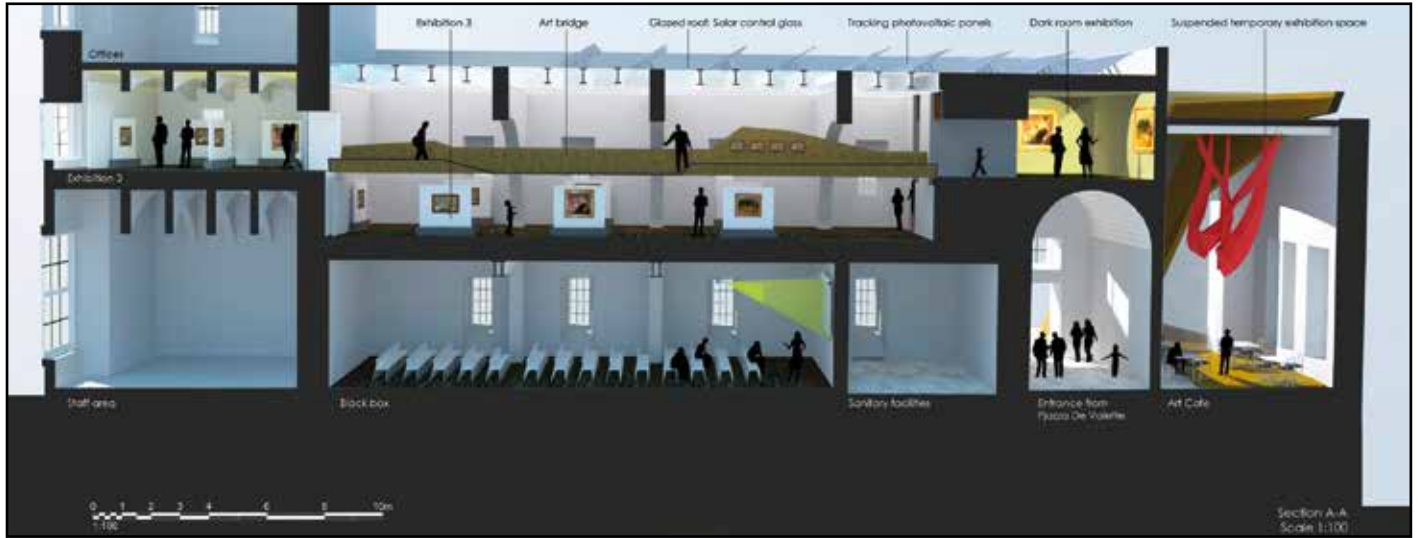
MUŻA is much more than the physical project happening at Auberge d'Italie and the three values which MUŻA stands for are the point of departure for both project and vision. Indeed, each value stands for a specific objective with a corresponding tangible and measurable course of action to pursue. MUŻA is not an entirely new museum institution. The historic collection which it seeks to present, brought together as from the 1920s, is the project's point of departure. Admittedly, this collection has been developed over time thanks to specific curatorial initiatives and opportunities arising from time to time which occasionally also landed the collection with high-profile acquisitions. Indeed, this is undoubtedly an art collection with a past that has to be acknowledged but which has ignored or left out important developments. One of the first initiatives undertaken by the MUŻA project in response to this need concerned a thorough review of the stories which the collection presented and which were clearly leaning much more towards the Baroque. MUŻA shall, in fact, have a much more balanced narrative and will present works previously not on display for varied reasons.



*Auberge d'Italie. MUŻA's seat*

*Detail of marble escutcheons and trophies undergoing conservation*





*Artwork illustrating a section showing the internal layout of MUŻA*

Rethinking the National Museum of Fine Arts into MUŻA is, indeed, a major challenge. In a sense, this can be compared to the study of the etymological source and roots of words in literature studies in order to determine meaning and significance. Muses is the etymological root of the word museum and like the museum institution, the ‘muses’ have come to mean different things over time. A clear understanding of these various permutations over time can help us revisit the art museum model that Malta needs, pin down the core values of this new art museum institution and develop new ways and means how these can be fostered, communicated and celebrated. Achieving this challenge was and still is no mean feat. Intensive research on various aspects of the MUŻA project has been underway for months, if not years. Besides research about the collection, the project has also spearheaded research about interpretation methods and best practices which have been or shall be developed specifically for Malta’s unique context. These measures and initiatives seek to address the particular needs of Maltese audiences to engage with art collections.

All illustrations provided by the author

The MUŻA project has also spearheaded collaboration initiatives in developing contents and experience. A broad consultation process was undertaken at the initial stages of the project followed by a series of focus groups which brought together a broad spectrum of expertise, not exclusively connected to art history. Indeed, the focus group methodology was intentionally chosen to empower discussion and inclusion. Participants were chosen jointly with the focus group chair who would generally be an external expert. The MUŻA team would not participate in the discussion but would only take notes of the discussion as it would unfold. Indeed, these focus groups can be recognised as the seed of both project and vision which can be summarised in a simple equation: MUŻA equals art and discussion. In this way, and thanks to the broad participatory experience which the project has already spearheaded, MUŻA seeks to promote social inclusion and broad participation through direct engagement with the community. In this way, MUŻA aspires to remain true to its name ... the Maltese word for inspiration.

*One of the focus groups*



**The MUŻA Project at the Auberge d’Italie**  
 The Auberge d’Italie as the new seat for MUŻA is the prime objective. The site is, indeed, of great significance given that it stands for the history of museums in Malta. In 1925 the Valletta Museum, later known as the National Museum, was set up at Auberge d’Italie. The Fine Arts Section, later to become the National Museum of Fine Arts, was also then established here. Indeed what was once a section within a bigger museum shall now become MUŻA.  
 The complex site project is being undertaken in collaboration with a multinational team working jointly and in collaboration with Heritage Malta expertise. The team includes Maltese architects,

engineers and Irish museum designers specialised in museum design. The winning proposal, presented in response to an international competition, was chosen from a total of eighteen submissions. Additional expertise has also been purposely roped in as required in response to security needs and lighting design. The team also includes Heritage Malta in-house expertise directly engaged in project management, concept development, gallery design and interpretation.

MUZA at Auberge d'Italie shall be an open, accessible and user-friendly museum. It shall respect the historic fabric of the building previously modified in the early 1920s to serve the purpose of a museum and seek ways and means how to find a lost equilibrium between the various structural developments happening over time. The point of departure is the building and finding ways and means how this can function as a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum. Proposed works include the reinstatement of the original staircase of the historic Auberge and the introduction of access facilities including both passenger and goods lifts.

MUZA shall also be a self-sustainable, energy efficient institution recognised as a potential best practice for the retrofitting of historic buildings. It shall aspire to have a zero-carbon footprint and adopt policies promoting significant energy cost savings through carefully developed sustainable measures. These measures, most of which concern the design, layout and narrative of display, are varied. Passive conservation measures shall be purposely developed from a clear understanding of the building including in-built air ducts. Priority shall be given to the use of natural resources including natural lighting to illuminate the building besides the introduction of intelligent lighting systems that shall lower light levels when gallery spaces are not in use. The new museum institution shall also generate energy through natural resources including the installation of solar photovoltaic panels. These energy efficient conservation values shall also concern materials used in the construction of the new museum so as to address sustainability throughout the project development phase.

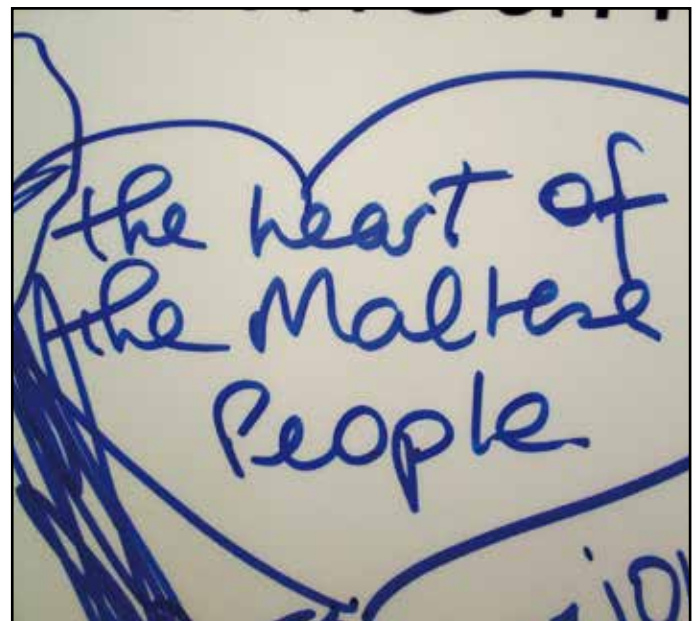


*This page:  
Members of the public  
contributing ideas  
on the MUZA  
comments board*

*opposite:  
MUZA outreach to  
Valletta's residents.  
Board showing  
comments by the  
members of the public  
about works in the  
collection*

The building shall be accessible through Pjazza de Valette and Merchants Street. Both access points lead MUZA's various publics into the main courtyard of the building which shall be, to all intents and purposes, a public space aspiring to become the beating heart of the new museum institution. What are generally referred to as museum ancillary facilities, including the museum cafeteria, bookshop and tourist information office, shall be located at ground floor level. Temporary exhibitions shall have a purposely designated space which can also serve the purpose of a conference venue and other high-profile events. The galleries shall be located at ground and first floor levels and shall showcase a narrative of themes and related objects inspired by four stories namely Mediterranean, Europe, Empire and The Artist. The top floor shall become the museum's resource centre housing the study collection, back-of-house facilities, the museum library and archives as well as conference facilities available on demand.

The focus rests undoubtedly with the museum galleries presenting the four stories which MUZA shall seek to present. Each story is split up into themes and sub-topics specifically developed thanks







to the broad consultation process undertaken over the past months. Indeed, each gallery space has been designed with a specific purpose and educational objective in mind. Some galleries shall have technology as a feature in its own right but this is just a means to an end, a tool to present stories and help the various MUŻA publics understand the object in its various facets. The backbone to the narrative of themes and related objects on display is the Gallery Learning Outcome method, first developed by the University of Leicester, United Kingdom. In theory, each gallery has been designed with a clear educational purpose and a purposely developed strategy listing objectives and focus areas. Rather than being a space where to display objects, each gallery presents a narrative of themes and related objects thanks to clearly defined objectives concerning skills, knowledge, expected change in attitude and practical applications of acquired knowledge. This is one of the very first instances when this interpretative methodology, developed by the Leicester School of Museum Studies, is being used in Malta.

#### Moving Forward ...

Shaping the new museum's identity, scripting narratives that can inspire and developing strategies to communicate them have been the main initiatives undertaken over the past year. The long term commitment for MUŻA concerns internationalisation. MUŻA has already been the subject of lectures at the Macdonald Institute for Archaeological Research (Cambridge), the Leicester School of Museum Studies and Goldsmiths University (London). Last October, some of the projects and initiatives which MUŻA is spearheading were also presented at the Valletta 2018 conference 'Cultural Mapping: Debating Places and Spaces' and a few months before, Heritage Malta announced that the Network of European Museums Organisations (NEMO) shall be holding its annual conference at MUŻA in late 2018. In January, the project was also presented at San Gervasio (Bari) in a purposely convened conference promoting knowledge transfer between the Valletta 2018 European Capital of Culture Project and Matera 2019. NEMO has already given due recognition to MUŻA which, according to the international network, enshrines values that are 'overlapping ... with the values NEMO promotes' and which the project 'even supersedes'. Indeed, this is a most fitting recognition of all the efforts being put into this project promoting innovation within Malta's museum sector in 2018, now also designated as the European Year for Cultural Heritage.

#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.ne-mo.org/news/article/topic/cultural-creativity/nemo/nemos-annual-conference-2018-set-to-take-place-in-malta/376.html> – Accessed on 20.09.2015)

# Mastru Karm Debono's little known works of art in Attard

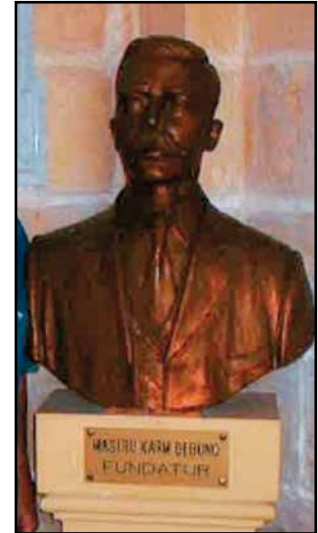
*Roderick Bovington*

An important part of our national art heritage in the area of decorative and commemorative paintings, previously unsung in our national art annals, is the contribution of a little known master craftsman from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that is still awaiting appraisal by our art critics.

Mastru<sup>1</sup> Karm Debono who, in his lifetime, was a great benefactor to his native parish of Attard, has left a number of fine examples to posterity. Some of the most prominent of these are preserved on the ceiling and walls of the northern sacristy of the parish church, for all to see.

In this once somnolent village (now a thriving urban hub), there are other fine pieces by Mastru Karm, still awaiting professional appraisal. One example – well-maintained by its owners – covers the entire ceiling of the entrance hall of the house directly opposite the church.

In addition, there are said to be examples of the work of this painter in the following locations: Villa Barbaro on the High Street; Villa Bologna and Villa Apap Bologna on Lija Street; De Piro House on Mosta Road; the large house opposite the Police Station at 8 High Street; the club house of Kazin La Stella Levantina (*Tas-Sej*) and who knows where else?



*Bust of Mastru Karm*

*Details from the hallway vault of the Mifsud House  
opposite H'Attard Parish Church*



I would like to bring this matter to the attention of those concerned with preserving our national heritage in order that it may receive their attention.

According to the village historian Carmel Mallia,<sup>2</sup> in addition to the above locations, Mastru Karm Debono's work can also be seen in various churches, villas, private residences and other premises of distinction in Birgu, Żebbuġ, Safi, Marsa, Żabbar, Bormla, L-Isla, St Julian's and Valletta (it is said that the Manoel Theatre is included). Also in Valletta the Royal Hotel is known to have commissioned his services extensively.



*This page:  
Details from the sacristy ceiling of  
H'Attard Parish Church*

All images are supplied  
by the author

**Note:**

<sup>1</sup> The title 'Mastru' in the Maltese of yesteryear inferred the English equivalent of a master craftsman of the highest calibre, a distinction that has been earned in the same way as a doctorate today and which remains with the bearer's full name in all formal references.

**Reference:**

<sup>2</sup> MALLIA, C. *H'Attard – Erba' Mitt Sena Parroċċa 1575-1975*. Malta.

## Heritage Publications Reviews

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

*Din l-Art Helwa*  
133 Melita Street  
Valletta

### Maltese Architecture 1900 – 1970

Author – Mark G. Muscat

Published by – Fondazzjoni

Patrimonju Malti

ISBN – 978-99909-3-206-5

*Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi*



*The Lyceum in Victoria, Gozo,  
designed by J.G. Huntingford  
(photo - DOI)*

We Maltese have a strange attitude towards architectural heritage. I remember discussing with a friend, who is a few decades older than me, the architectural heritage aspects of various buildings. When we came to one that was designed in the sixties, all the parameters and arguments applied to the earlier buildings were suddenly abandoned. The notion that this particular building was built in his lifetime, that he had actually seen it being constructed, overrode any valid argument I might conceive of to define it as architectural heritage.

Buildings can so strongly characterise our surroundings and inhabit our consciousness that we find it hard to elaborate the thought of them not having been always there. Maybe as a result of this we find it difficult to apply similar criteria to buildings that have been built in our own lifetime.

And yet, if we think about it, architectural heritage is – or should be – something in continuous creation. Creating a building, particularly on an island the size of Malta, takes up so much in resources that it should be conceived as a lasting, collective inheritance. At a time when the great majority of buildings we see rising around us are, quite frankly, ugly, ill-proportioned, ill-suited to their surroundings and subsequently depressing to look at, we seem to have abandoned the notion that a building can, from inception, be a work of art.

Mark Muscat's in-depth look at some of the buildings that were designed and built during the first three-quarters of the past century is a welcome call to attention to the issues above. His beautifully illustrated volume brings to our attention the sensual curves of Art Nouveau, the watershed of Futurism, the brutality of fascist inspiration, the total break with the past of the Modernists and the coming into being of what was, unfortunately, a short, though rather felicitous, period of truly Maltese architectural manifestation, with the inescapable juncture represented by Richard England with his re-elaboration of vernacular structures.

We experience many of the buildings featured in the book as 'in-your-face', 'up close and personal' scenarios of our childhood and adult lives. In the minds of many, they are primarily objects with a function rather than works of art and, in some cases, works of extreme beauty, as presented in this volume. I think this is the main factor which makes this book so grippingly engaging. Over and over again it provides moments in which one looks at a photograph, then looks at it again and only then realises that the magnificently proportioned detail being presented, or the sensual curve which tempts a caress from the reader, belongs to a building we pass, or even actually work in every day, in complete oblivion.

I was particularly taken by the section dealing with Modernist architecture, being reminded that, as I have often considered, the style is so perfectly adapted to a symbiotic existence with the sharp light that characterises our islands – a light which brings out the best in Modernist buildings, allowing them to obtain a life of their own and become perfectly integrated with the spaces and surroundings they occupy.

The author identifies influences and inspirations but also explores the aspirations of architectural undertakings that were conceived and born both as functional architectural machines and as veritable works of art. He manages to achieve the most difficult of tasks – that of making us see with a fresh eye what we are used to simply looking at through the veil of familiarity and the preconceptions of limiting cultural criteria.



**Melita Historica**

VOL. XVI No.1

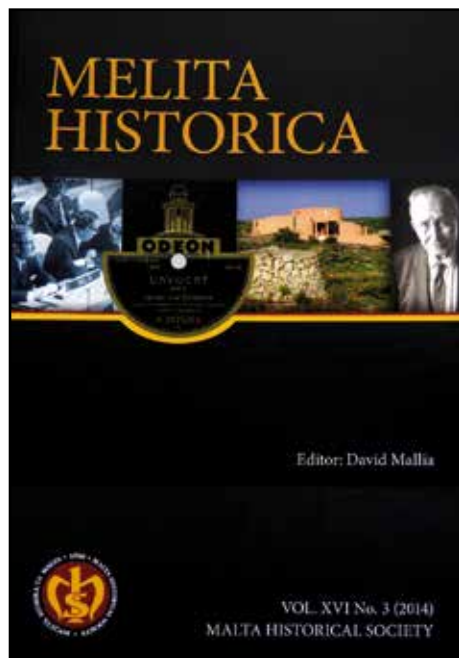
The Proceedings of History Week 2014

Editor – David Mallia

Published by – Book Distributors Ltd

ISBN – 1021-6952

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



The 2015 edition of *Melita Historica*, the journal of the Malta Historical Society, presents the reader with a collection of 14 very interesting contributions on a wide variety of subjects. The pages preceding these contributions are dedicated to the memory of Professor Godfrey Wettinger, who passed away on 22 May 2015. Prof. Wettinger, who was a founder-member of the Malta Historical Society and a former editor of *Melita Historica*, is the author of a number of fundamental texts on Maltese history and tutored and encouraged generations of university history students. He is fondly remembered by the present editor, David Mallia, as a mentor, guide and inspiration.

The subjects touched upon in the various contributions vary from archives to music to food, from archaeology to architecture to medicine, from sociology to political history. This edition, like those which preceded it, is a veritable cornucopia of information. Furthermore, the exhaustive footnotes offer additional possibilities and inspiration for further research into both the subjects being discussed and others yet to be conceived.

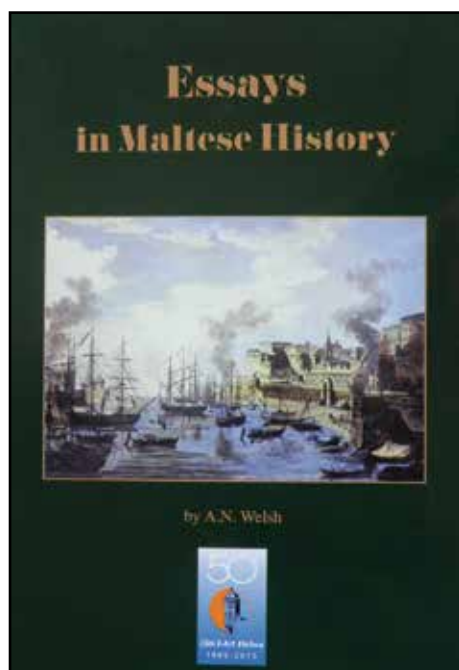
True to its nature as a historical society journal, *Melita Historica* sits at the centre of a web that connects seemingly unrelated subjects and hints at what might be discovered through research into a given subject in a particular direction, or within a particular context. The journal is a bucket lowered into the well of history which not only surfaces full of fresh and thirst-quenching information but also causes ripples and generates an alluring echo of what might still lay beneath.

The basic requirement for good historical research is well kept and – most importantly – well-organised records. In his contribution entitled *Libraries and Archives: surviving, striving and thriving*, Charles J. Farrugia, Malta's National Archivist, takes a look at the long and troubled gestation period leading to the birth of a National Archives for Malta. He illustrates initiatives taken by the British, such as the establishment of the 'Records Room' in 1851 to collect books and documents of the Order of St John and of the suppressed *Università*. He also delves into the reticence and foot-dragging of the post-independence governments and the impetus-generating conference entitled *Maltese History: What Future?* organised by the University of Malta up to the creation of the National Archives in 1990.

Another very interesting contribution by Michael Fenech, former chairman of St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, investigates Maltese artists' laboured struggle towards modernity in the visual arts. He briefly discusses various aspects of this struggle, outlining its geo-political nature and historical and cultural context. The effects of Malta's geographical reality of isolation, its political reality as a colony and the impact of a generally conservative Catholic country that characterised the outlook of Maltese artists up to 1964 are also considered.

Michael Fenech also discusses the time-honoured tradition of incomprehension and distrust on the part of the establishment towards new art movements which, in the local context, found its most relevant testimonial in the antagonism towards the Modern Art Group, formed in the post-WWII period. His paper is concluded with the establishment of Modernism as a subject of academic research towards the end of the last century.

Once again, *Melita Historica* will not disappoint all those who will reach out and engross themselves in its almost 200 pages packed with facts, interpretations, observations, evocations and tantalising new possibilities for further investigations into our history.

**Essays in Maltese History**

Author – Alexander N. Welsh

Published by – The author

ISBN – 978-99957-31-04-5

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi

This publication presents a very personal collection of writings about various themes which, over a number of years, have captured the interest of the author. Dr Welsh has a self-declared interest in antiquity, historical research, restoration and collecting and his multi-faceted personality is eloquently reflected in this book. What also comes across strongly from the pages is his unremitting love for Malta and its history, and his commitment towards doing his part to save its heritage.

Dr Welsh has dedicated much of his retirement years to preserving the heritage of his adopted country. Shortly after moving to Malta in 1989 he joined *Din l-Art Helwa* and spearheaded the complex, and often labour intensive, conservation project undertaken at the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest.

Not satisfied with having ensured a future for this unique heritage site, and rich in experience after so many years of work there, he then also undertook the coordination of the restoration of the much larger Ta' Braxia Cemetery – work that continues to this day. Both burial grounds have, naturally, found their way into the pages of this publication.

The prehistoric, ancient and mediaeval periods account for a considerable portion of the publication, revealing an interest in the less obviously manifest aspects of our cultural heritage. The articles are accompanied by interesting illustrations that help focus the attention on elements that could easily be overlooked by a less attentive eye than that of the author.



*Bir Miftuh Church*

### Heritage Saved

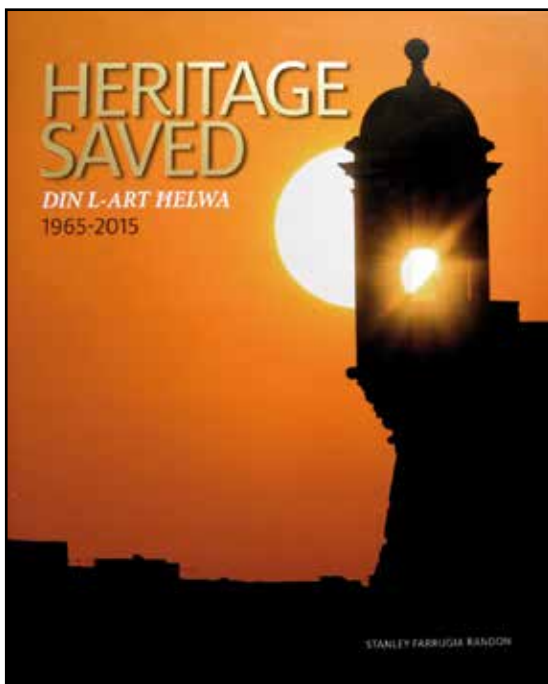
Din l-Art Helwa 1965 - 2015

Author – Stanley Farrugia Randon

Published by – *Din l-Art Helwa*

ISBN – 978-99957-52-132

Reviewed by *Joe Azzopardi*



Yet another aspect which is well represented in the book is Dr Welsh's concern with secondary churches. He presents three interesting sketches regarding the history of Bir Miftuh Church, St Catherine's Church in Żejtun (also known as San Girgor) and The Church of Our Lady of Mercy in Qormi. These present the reader with a fresh look at these little known structures which are often closed to the public but which house a wealth of interesting features. At the other end of the architectural and historic spectrum of ecclesiastical architecture is St Paul's Anglican Cathedral which is also covered in a very informative chapter.

Readers of this publication are certainly bound to find interesting material that is presented in a fresh and enjoyable style. They will be carried from one historical period to another through the illustration of different subjects and the description of different locations and many will be prompted to go and see with fresh eyes the places and features brought to their attention by the author. They will be tracing the steps of Andy Welsh all over the Maltese Islands which ultimately bind him to our small but immensely rich country.

This publication, ably written and put together by Stanley Farrugia Randon, will surely be one of the most lasting testaments to the achievements of *Din l-Art Helwa* in its first 50 years. Even just a quick look at the illustrations will serve as a reminder of the immensity of the undertakings of this NGO which, against great odds – possibly greater today than they were when it came into being – has strived to save and safeguard elements of the national heritage which might have been lost, had it not been for its timely intervention.

A closer look will reveal the determined programme that was implemented to save sites which would not otherwise have caught the attention of potential sponsors, and would have simply been left to their fate. Such are the tucked away out-of-sight chapels of Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuh, although development has caught up with the latter in the form of the Malta International Airport, the towers of Ghallis and Sopus (Gozo) and also smaller items such as the sundial in Hal Ghaxaq and the statue of St Roche in Birkirkara.

Long before it became common knowledge, DLH understood that saving the great prehistoric temples, the palaces of Valletta and Mdina, the mighty bastions surrounding Grand Harbour and the stately homes such as San Anton Palace and Villa Francia was not enough to ensure that the true and multi-faceted Maltese cultural heritage endured. Malta's built heritage is also – and possibly even more authentically – represented in the myriad of small monuments, the likes of which DLH has spent the past 50 years endeavouring to protect.

With the passage of time, the ambitions of DLH grew in proportion to the accumulation of experience and reputation consequent to the success of its undertakings. This is reflected in the monumental work carried out on the Red Tower in Mellieħa and the logistical tour-de-force represented by the restoration of the Santa Marija Tower on Comino.

DLH's reputation also grew internationally with the awarding of a Silver Medal of Honour by Europa Nostra for the restoration of Msida Bastion Historic Garden. The time was ripe for the undertaking of more technically challenging restorations such as those of Antonio Sciortino's bronze monument commemorating the Great Siege, the nine monuments in different media in The Mall Garden in Floriana and the Mattia Preti canvases adorning Sarria Church, also in Floriana. The climax of this heritage restoration crusade was reached with the unveiling – after being hidden from view for 20 years – of the restored vault paintings by Alessio Erardi at Our Lady of Victory Church last year.

The author has found a balance between the information supplied, which is ample and extremely interesting, and the visual aspect, which is arresting and at times spellbinding. This book is a joy to the eye as much as it is to the mind. It is hoped that, like DLH itself, it may foster in both present and future generations a love of our heritage and a determination to safeguard that same heritage against the many threats caused to it by neglect, insensitive development, and often absent safeguards. May it help encourage awareness of the beauty, richness and uniqueness of our heritage in all those who have elements of this heritage in their ownership or under their tutelage and be a beacon showing the way towards a future that is solidly rooted in the testimonials of the past.

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