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DIN L-ART HELWA

National Trust of Malta

# VIGILO



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

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

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



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# VIGILO

## SPECIAL ARTICLES

**21**  
**Restoring Malta's Pauline Heritage**  
by James Licari & Joe Azzopardi

**26**  
**A Survey of the Maltese Muxrabijiet**  
by Joe Azzopardi

**34**  
**Lower Fort St Elmo and The Mortar Shells Fountain**  
by Denis A Darmanin

**38**  
**The Malta Aviation Museum Foundation**  
by Joe Galea Debono

**42**  
**Protecting Modernist Architecture**  
by Matthew Vella

**44**  
**Wirt iż-Żejtun**  
by Ruben Abela



Detail of sculptural decoration from the chapel of Fort Manoel before restoration

**46**  
**The Socio-Economic and Environmental Suitability of Industrial Animal Farming in Malta**  
by John Portelli



Polygonal hood *muxrabija* in Marsascala

**02** **Manoel Island: An Opportunity to Show They Care**  
by Simone Mizzi

**04** **Secretary General's AGM 2012 Report**  
by George Camilleri

**08** **AGM 2012 Resolutions**

**09** **The Good and the Sad**  
by Simone Mizzi

**11** **Delimara Lighthouse Restoration**  
by Stanley Farrugia Randon

**12** **Inaugural Event for the Restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church**

**13** **The Victory Team**

**14** **Din l-Art Helwa News**

**50** **Publications Reviews**

**53** **Corporate Members**

# C O N T E N T S



### FRONT COVER

The restored figure of the Archangel Gabriel from the vaulted ceiling of Our Lady of Victory Church



### BACK COVER

The allegory of Victory from the vaulted ceiling of Our Lady of Victory Church



## Manoel Island: An Opportunity to Show They Care

*Simone Mizzi*

*Executive President of Din l-Art Ħelwa*

Location is key to success in most businesses that offer a service to people, and where property development is concerned, this is even more the case. The richest landowner in Malta is the government and this places a serious onus on our leaders to use Malta's assets wisely. It is easy to trade Malta's finest locations – such as those overlooking Valletta from Sliema, around Fort St Angelo, at Spinola and Manoel Island, with its scenic Lazaretto and Fort Manoel, while the fate of White Rocks and Hondoq ir-Rummien is still in the balance.

Exploiting our beauty spots in the name of progress leads to speculation, is a bad example to private land owners and borders on irresponsibility, as it can use the best of Malta with little or no respect for the future except for the planning gains imposed. It must also be said that if the contractual demands placed by government on developers were not so steep they would not brief their architects to build so high, so deep, so squat and so dense and we would now not be shedding tears over the offensive view of Tigné Point from Valletta, or from anywhere else for that matter. If developers, on the other hand, were not so grasping, as to build on every square inch of land, then a balance would be found that equates to that elusive word “sustainability”. To those of us working in the environmental field, this means finding the right balance in the management of national assets so that they are maintained to their current standard or are enhanced, with the purpose of allowing for their future enjoyment.

Development uses land – green areas – and demolishes gardens and exquisite buildings. It blocks our views of the sea, exploits heritage sites, dwarfs our baroque churches, dams our valleys, flattens our ridges and seals off precious light. It destroys everything that makes Malta the pleasant island it is. Development decisions on the part of our planners are always a compromise with the environment. Little by little, we lose land, we lose sea, we lose views, we lose light and we lose good visual ambience. Speculation builds with brute force, with no respect for any of these assets and in the end it is always the environment that loses and sustainability that is placed on the back burner. Once an asset is used, it is gone for ever. There is, therefore, a big responsibility on those who determine the use of space, whether national or private. Such responsibility is central to the Draft Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development to which the public are invited to contribute.

Foreigners often question why we have so many buildings unfinished and why they are so shabby. Fortunately for our old buildings, the new Urban Regeneration Scheme can help improve this situation. For the rest, the only sustainability given to us by our new built heritage lies in its shocking ordinariness. It has given us buildings so ungracious – and in some cases of such poor quality – that they will all have to be rebuilt very shortly, giving work to the builders of the future. Most of the time, there is no respite when walking or driving through the maze of new building, not even that offered by a single tree. If we care about our uniqueness, we will stop the island fading into crass mediocrity.

View of the magnificently restored *Piazza*  
at Fort Manoel





Built only for people looking out

So, if solutions are to be found so that previous planning errors are not compounded – as may be the case with Manoel Island – the government must be brave enough to confront its errors. The new board at Mepa, since its reform, has shown sensitivity. If there is a board to look for a solution, I am confident it would be this one. I believe it has recognised that we cannot afford to destroy the country’s assets and allow the country’s historic value to fall into more mediocrity.

The Lazaretto still awaiting restoration

*Din l-Art Helwa* has always been of the opinion that Manoel Island should not be turned into a high density development and was against the project as approved by Mepa. While not entering into the commercial merits of the proposal put forward recently by the Midi chairman, there may be an opportunity now to ensure that this sizeable tract of land be turned into a heritage park, with Fort Manoel as its focus, with trees, gardens, public spaces for recreation and, possibly, limited sporting facilities. The importance of having such space for public leisure cannot be underestimated within such a densely populated area.

We hope that any new scheme for Manoel Island, if approved, will not destroy Lazaretto’s panoramic appeal with adjacent or overhead modern buildings, nor bury Fort Manoel and its splendid restoration. We also hope that any new development can set good modern architectural parameters that are recognisable as solely Maltese. This is a huge challenge for today’s decision-makers. I want our leaders and planners to prove they can and want to do better. Manoel Island gives them a chance to prove that they care.



# Secretary General's AGM 2012 Report

**George Camilleri**

*Secretary General of Din l-Art Helwa*

The year 2011 was a most active and busy one, full of challenges and opportunities. Four new members have been appointed to the Council – Michael Bonello, Josie Ellul Mercer, Judge Joe Galea Debono and Pat Salomone – and we welcome them and their contribution to the work of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

George Camilleri took over as Secretary-General from Ian Camilleri, who remains on the Council and the Executive Team. DLH is most grateful to Ian for continuing to give of his time, despite his heavy work commitments. Josie Ellul Mercer has been appointed to the role of Properties Division Manager. Josie is invaluable to DLH and is on the road all day, seeing to our properties. We thank him wholeheartedly for his great sense of commitment. Following the appointment of Simone Mizzi as Executive President, the position of Communications Officer has been ably filled by Pat Salomone. We are grateful to Pat for taking up this responsibility and for obtaining great coverage for DLH in the last two months, as well as organising some major events.

Charles Gatt has retired as Warden of Bir Miftuħ Church and his 10 years in the role is greatly appreciated. He still remains active with DLH through the Friends of Ta' Braxia, together with Dr Andy Welsh and Major Anthony Camilleri. We thank Lt Col. George Attard Manche for volunteering to replace Charles as Warden. We would also like to congratulate the Friends of Ta' Braxia for reaching their 10th anniversary in April 2011 and for their sterling work in the maintenance of this cemetery.

Simone Mizzi has been appointed to the National Committee of Guarantee, taking up the post vacated by Dr Petra Bianchi, a post the DLH Executive President has held since the Cultural Heritage Act came into effect in 2002.

2011 was the European Year of the Volunteer and DLH celebrated its volunteers in a series of events at each property, culminating in our annual party at which we were joined by the Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Environment Dr Mario de Marco. Dr de Marco thanked our volunteers personally for the strength of their commitment to heritage.

## Properties

2011 will be remembered as the year DLH was entrusted with the care of Our Lady of Victory Church, Valletta's first church, which is in dire need of restoration. On 8 September, the announcement was made at the church when a Holy Mass was also celebrated. On 13 October, the guardianship deed was signed by Simone Mizzi as Executive President and the writer as Secretary-General, with Dr Anthony Pace, Superintendent of Cultural Heritage, and was subsequently approved by Parliament. We are happy to announce that conservation work by the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, is recommencing shortly on the vaulted ceiling paintings. We are also very pleased that these paintings will be the subject of a Master of Science degree course at the University's Department of Built Heritage under the guidance of Prof. JoAnn Cassar. DLH has been very busy approaching potential sponsors for support as over €2 million is required for the restoration of the whole church and its annexe.

The devolution to the Heritage Parks Federation (of which DLH forms a part) of the Ghajn Tuffieħa Barracks was signed by Parliamentary Secretary (now Minister) of Small Businesses and Land Jason Azzopardi. The barracks now form part of the Majjistral Nature and History Park and will be used as a Visitor and Recreation Centre. We thank Council Member Martin Galea for his commitment

to this project. We have applied to the Government to renew our Guardianship Deeds for our existing properties as these are due to expire in February 2013.

## Restoration

The restoration of our properties continues to be foremost in our activities. We are pleased to report that work on St Anthony's Battery in Qala is in its final stage. Our thanks go to Lt Col. Eric Parnis for having overseen this arduous and challenging task.

Conservation work on the Delimara Lighthouse canopy and metalwork has occupied our restoration team over the last few months and we hope it will be concluded when good weather sets in.

A new conservation programme for the frescoes at Bir Miftuħ, sponsored by Malta International Airport plc, has been completed by Giuseppe Mantella Restauri. We have also begun the restoration of Mattia Preti's painting of St Sebastian at the Sarrja Church in Floriana, also with the assistance of MIA plc. Later this year the painting will be restored in the airport's departure lounge. This restoration forms part of DLH's contribution to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mattia Preti's birth that will be marked next year. We are grateful to MIA for their continued support.

A conservation programme for the "Nine Monuments" in the Maglio Gardens in Floriana was launched in June 2011 and we are grateful to Fimbank Plc. for their generous sponsorship of this project which commemorates nine important personages who contributed socially to Malta in the 19th and 20th century.

The roof membrane of Hal Millieri Chapel has been renewed, and we also carried out re-pointing of the walls. We are pleased to report that the condition of the frescoes remains unchanged. The work on Delimara Lighthouse, Bir Miftuħ, the Maglio Gardens and Hal Millieri is being co-ordinated by Council member Maria Grazia Cassar.

Regular work continues at the Red Tower, Comino Tower and at all the sites we hold in guardianship, when necessary.

## Valued Sponsors

DLH would like to thank the following sponsors who continue to make our work possible:

Leading insurer GasanMamo Ltd for coming forward to underwrite the costly restoration of the canopy and metal work of Delimara Lighthouse and Transport Malta that continues to support the work on the lighthouse;

HSBC Malta Foundation for the sponsorship of the conservation project of the Żejtun Roman Villa being carried out together with the University of Malta, Department of Built Heritage;

The Malta Tourism Authority for their role in a new restoration project at Wignacourt Tower, which is being made possible through a €100,000 grant from the European Regional Development Funds. This is a great achievement and we thank the Ministry of Tourism for making this possible; mindful that it was the National Tourism Organisation of Malta that financed the first restoration.

DLH has received financing in the form of a grant for €24,000 as part of the Eco-Gozo Action Plan for a project to install interpretation panels and audio-visual equipment for DLH properties in Gozo and Comino, plus the heritage DVD *A Tale of Two Towers* telling the story of the Comino and Dwejra fortifications. The project was completed in December thanks to the unrelenting

drive of Carolyn Clements. The 26-minute DVD is to be shown in our properties and distributed for educational purposes. It was shot on location in Gozo and Comino with absolutely stunning photography. It is for sale at €10, with DLH members benefiting from a €2 discount, and the sale proceeds will go towards further restoration of these properties. Copies can be bought at the entrance of each tower. The DVD was launched at the Gozo Ministry on 20 January.

Simone Mizzi secured a page for DLH and Wignacourt Tower in *It-Teżori tagħna l-Maltin* and its website, a treasure trove publication on Malta's cultural heritage sites, published by Miranda Publishers. A total of 55,000 copies will be distributed freely to all school children who are invited to donate towards the restoration of what is the oldest tower still standing in Malta. DLH was invited to be present at the launch, which took place in the presence of Education Minister Dolores Cristina on 20 January.

### Communications

We congratulate Joe Azzopardi, editor of our newsletters and of *Vigilo*, for seeing *Vigilo* successfully through its 40th edition, for which we received many compliments. We thank Joe for his continued commitment and Judy Falzon, who continues to proofread.

We had a number of lead articles in the media in 2011, with five *Talking Points* on topical issues. Some 102 press releases have been issued – almost two a week – and we thank Simone Mizzi for having staunchly combined this duty with that of Executive President until Pat Salomone came to our aid. Articles on environmental affairs were also published in leading newspapers: *The fate of the traditional fisherman*, *Fish facts – it is time to wake up* written by George Camilleri and *Tuna Wars* by Martin Galea.

Our views on the National Environment Policy draft were also given attention in the printed media and indeed were instrumental in the compiling of the policy by the government. *L-Anzjani*, the publication of the General Workers Union, featured *Cultural Memory* with Simone Mizzi. The Church of OLV and our Executive President also featured in the high profile *Circle* magazine, making it to the front cover on 5 February.

Several TV interviews were given, the main ones with Simone Mizzi on *Cultural Memory* on Super One, on *Ghawdex u lil hinn min minnha (Gozo and Beyond)*, regarding several of our properties, Maria Grazia Cassar on Meander regarding OLV, while the launch of Eco Gozo with Gozo Minister Giovanna Debono at Xlendi made national news on all the local television stations. I continue to work on updating our website and Lucio Mule Stagno keeps us fashionably present on Facebook. We also thank Joe Chetcuti for being present at our events and supplying us with photographs.

### Publications

DLH is very grateful to Victor Rizzo for having produced the 11th in our popular walking guide series, *Qormi – Four walks through a historic city*, written and photographed by Dr Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas. The guide was launched by Qormi Local Council on

13 January. Victor also produced our splendid 2012 calendar, based on the historic Msida Bastion Garden, its monuments and flowers, with beautiful photographs by Simon Coombs. Also produced were two greeting cards featuring OLV. All three publications were partly sponsored by Best Print Co. Ltd and are available from our offices, properties and Heritage Corner.

### Environment

DLH was active on the environmental scene, attending several consultation meetings with Mepa on the draft National Environmental Policy and with the EU Enforcement Director. On environmental protection we continue to file objections, in particular against high profile developments that go against our views, such as those at Tigné Point. We have also filed formal objections with Mepa against several Outside Development Zone (ODZ) projects, specifically against the proposed development of a Lidl supermarket in an ODZ site in Xewkija, against a private development in Gharb, against a project at Villa Alhambra, Sliema, against a project to construct parking sheds, a workshop and a washing area for trucks at Tat-Tunnara in Mellieħa, against the sanctioning of illegal structures at Ta' Baldu, Rabat, against the building of parking areas in two ODZs in Gozo – under the Cittadella and at Ta' Pinu – and against the relocation of a petrol station in Mgarr (Malta) and many others.

Sarria Church, featuring some of the paintings to be restored, during a lecture delivered by Giuseppe Mantella



We are making successful headway in our joint efforts with other environmental groups supporting Nadur farmers in attempts to halt the development of a cemetery that has damaged freshwater springs used for centuries to irrigate terraced citrus orchards below Nadur. Another joint environmental NGO initiative was an action calling on Mepa to refuse an application by Qala Creek developers for a swimming lagoon. This was successful in bringing about the recommendation for the refusal of the project from the Environmental Protection Unit at Mepa.

A joint action was launched by DLH and five other NGOs against the illegal building development at Armier.

DLH has successfully urged the government to draw up regulations to protect swordfish from over-fishing and a recent restriction was introduced to limit the size of juvenile catch.

We continue to campaign that no high-rise development be considered until a government policy on high rise is created.

In July, the Climate Change Adaptation Committee of which DLH is a member presented the final version of a report to Minister George Pullicino. In November, DLH was nominated by the same minister to form part of the new Climate Change Consultative Council. DLH responded to requests by consultants to comment on the offshore Sikka l-Bajda and the Bahrija Wied Rini wind farms.

### Events

In March 2011, we organised *Fished Out*, a well-attended conference at the Intercontinental Hotel to debate the state of the world's fisheries, in particular those related to the Mediterranean and to Malta. We continue to work on the Fish4Tomorrow campaign together with our partner NGOs Nature Trust Malta, Sharklab Malta, Greenhouse and Get Up Stand Up, and in fact one of our resolutions focuses on the subject of fish stocks. The conference was sponsored by the Intercontinental Hotel and Medserv.

The annual Spring Fete at Msida Bastion Historic Garden was again a record and raised more than €3,000. Our thanks go to the leading lights of this event, Mary Aldred and Albert Calleja, as well as to all those who gave their time and helped on the many stalls.

The Cappella Sanctae Caterinae Male Choir held a wonderful concert at Bir Miftuh in April, which was attended by some 50 people. The 15th Bir Miftuh International Music Festival, ably organised by Cettina Caruana Curran, Edward Xuereb, Charles Gatt and the DLH office staff, was its usual success. Three concerts were held and we thank our loyal sponsors – the Italian Embassy and Italian Cultural Institute, the French Embassy and *Alliance Française*, and the German Embassy – for their continued support.

The annual DLH dinner was held on 29 July at San Anton Palace under the patronage of President George Abela. Speaker of the House of Representatives Michael Frendo and ambassadors honoured us with their presence and the evening was a great success. Our congratulations go to Cettina Caruana Curran for organising it all with such aplomb,



Volunteers taking a break during a clean up at Comino Battery  
Photo: Carolyn Clements

to Rosemarie Stagno Navarra for obtaining the prizes and to Maureen Gatt for conducting the successful raffle.

The Airs and Arias Musical Soiree and Heritage Art Exhibition was held at Kempinski San Lawrenz Hotel in Gozo on 31 July. During the evening, a specially commissioned painting of Xlendi Tower, donated by Henry Alamango, was auctioned. The event was an unqualified cultural and financial success and our thanks and congratulations are due to Carolyn Clements and her hard working Gozo crew.

Three cheese-and-wine evenings were organised for the volunteers at the Red Tower, Wignacourt Tower and Gozo/Comino properties to thank them for their dedication and the hard work to keep these properties open for the public to enjoy.

Executive President Simone Mizzi and Wignacourt Tower Warden Stanley Farrugia Randon were special guests of the Malta Tourism Authority at the opening of St Paul's Bay promenade by Minister Mario de Marco. We are still hoping for sponsorship from the MTA for the façade of Wignacourt Tower.

Following the success of last year's Restoration Camp, DLH renewed the collaboration with *Union Rempart* and hosted nine French volunteers, together with Maltese volunteers, from 10 to 17 September. The camp was again held at Tal-Hniena Church, Qrendi. Maria Grazia Cassar and Cathy Farrugia organised workshops under the supervision of Frank Chetchuti and James Licari, who are both senior restorers with Heritage Malta specialising in '*deffun*' a local waterproofing technology – and plastering, as well as pointing methods using traditional materials. Again it was a great success and we thank Maria Grazia and Cathy for their dedication to what has now become an established annual event.

opposite:  
Dr Alexander Welsh and Charles Gatt, DLH's driving force behind the Ta' Braxia Restoration Project



The Frugal Architecture Symposium organised by Architect-ural Project received sponsorship via DLH from the Maltese-US Charities Foundation chairman Chev. Joe Micallef. We are grateful to Chev. Joe Micallef for becoming the first personal benefactor of the Church of OLV. DLH, in collaboration with the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, organised a symposium on 28 September to focus attention on the Alessio Erardi ceiling paintings at the Church of OLV, Valletta, and their conservation. Our lecture hall was simply packed.

The winners of the 5th Annual Marine Photography competition were announced during *Notte Bianca* on 1 October, when our headquarters were open to the public. Our thanks go to Stanley Farrugia Randon and Joe Chetcuti for their usual enthusiasm in organising this event. The autumn fund-raising concert and dinner took place on 12 November in the grand hall of St John's Cavalier, kindly made available to DLH by the Embassy to Malta of the Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of Malta and its Ambassador Umberto di Capua. A string and vocal recital was given by the String Quartet Anon with the special participation of soprano Myriam Cauchi. Our thanks go to the sponsors of the evening, Farsons Group of Companies and Bank of Valletta, to Mark England for his donation of a painting for the silent auction and again to Cettina for organising this event to perfection.

Mary Aldred and her volunteers organised a Christmas Fair at the Msida Bastion Historic Garden on 3 and 4 December. This family event provided DLH with much needed income for the costly maintenance of this spectacular garden. The garden has also been the recipient of a replica Victoria Cross for the third recipient of the Victoria Cross buried in Malta, Charles A. McCorrie. Donated to us by the Victoria Cross Society in Melbourne, Australia, we are looking for sponsorship to erect a memorial to this brave soldier.

Martin Scicluna and Maria Grazia Cassar participated with the Chamber of Architects in the organisation of the 7th DLH Annual Architectural Heritage Awards. This year, diplomas were awarded to architect Aaron Abela for his restoration of Villa Aspinal in Tarxien and architect Chris Briffa for the highly imaginative restoration, rehabilitation and re-use of the public conveniences in Strait Street, Valletta.

Our cycle of monthly lectures was as successful as ever, and our thanks go to John Saré for organising them.

### Networking

We continued to be very busy lobbying and influencing current thoughts on leading heritage and environmental issues. DLH paid courtesy visits to Valletta mayor Dr Alexiei Dingli, and to Minister George Pullicino when the latter was presented with our request for measures to be taken to protect swordfish. We discussed the future of Foresta 2000 and the involvement of the Resources and Rural Affairs Ministry in the Delimara Fort and Lighthouse areas in view of the infrastructural necessities and security of the area.

In June, DLH council members attended the environmental NGO session hosted by Minister Mario de Marco to discuss the topics of over-development, abuse of the countryside and air pollution.

We had a very interesting presentation from architect Ray Demicoli for Council members regarding the St Elmo project, for which we made our submissions to Mepa. We are happy to say that this project, as well as that for St Angelo, will be proceeding as soon as the government has funding.

Council members paid a visit to Minister Mario de Marco to brief him on the historical background of the Barriera Wharf and Liesse area, in view of a planned development of the present fish market area by the Grand Harbour Regeneration Committee. Recently, architect Ray Demicoli also involved DLH in his project for the redesign of the House of Four Winds and we hope to have

been able to influence the design so that it fits into the context of the Valletta Bastions.

We have established closer links with the Malta Historical Society and this has proved fruitful as we have a wider outreach through the mutual use of our email databases.

Martin Scicluna continues to represent DLH at the International National Trusts Congress and on Europa Nostra, while Council Member Prof. Luciano Mule Stagno is participating in monthly conference calls with the International National Trusts Organisation.

DLH featured very prominently as a most active NGO in the State of the Cultural Heritage Report 2010 and in fact has been asked to participate again in the production of a 2012 report. In October, Maria Grazia Cassar attended the International Youth Forum, representing DLH in conjunction with the University of Malta's Department of Built Heritage, where she ably presented the work of our organisation in connection with youth programmes. In November, Maria Grazia also attended the National Cultural Forum which focussed on information networking and accessibility.

### Administration

We must not forget to thank our office staff, led by Rosemarie Stagno Navarra and Anne Marie Navarro, together with our Heritage Corner volunteers Sophie Woltz, Margit Waas, George Camilleri, Joe Busietta, Jenny Welsh, Karen Galea, Silvia Mule Stagno, Joe Chetcuti and Romina Farrugia Randon, while John Gafa and Annie Tabone continue to provide maintenance and cleaning support to all our properties. Prof. George Camilleri continues with his task of sorting out the DLH archives and we thank him for this great work.

I wish to close by thanking our very busy Executive President Simone Mizzi for her overwhelming drive and enthusiasm and all our loyal Council members and hard working executive team.



*Din l-Art Helwa*  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2012**  
**RESOLUTIONS**

**RESOLUTION 1:  
POLITICAL UNITY ON HERITAGE AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on 25 February 2012 that, while welcoming the good progress which has been made in the last four years in addressing the environmental deficit, all political parties are urged to remain unsparing in their commitment to enforce planning and environmental laws in the future and actively to resist any inclination to influence public voting intentions by making any detrimental commitments during any future electoral campaign, specifically as they affect such infringements as the illegal occupation of land by the boathouse township of Armier and elsewhere, the uncontrolled extraction of the islands' precious aquifer water through illegal boreholes, and the hunting and trapping regulations.

**QBIL POLITIKU FUQ KONTROVERSJI  
KULTURALI U AMBJENTALI**

B'rizoluzzjoni waqt il-Laqqgħa Ġenerali Annwali ta' Din l-Art Helwa, f'133 Triq Melita Valletta fil-25 ta' Frar 2012, Din l-Art Helwa taċċetta li sar haġna progress biex jitjeb l-ambjent. Madankollu nheggu l-partiti politiċi biex ma' jarawx biss li jiġbdu l-voti lejhom u jwegħdu affarjiet waqt kampanja elettorali li jmorru kontra l-liġijiet tal-ambjent u l-ippjanar, b'mod speċjali meta jitkellmu fuq l-okkupazzjoni illegali ta' art pubblika bħall-Armier u postijiet oħra, kif ukoll fuq il 'boreholes' illegali, u r-regolamenti tal-kaċċa u l-insib.

**RESOLUTION 2:  
THE EFFECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on 25 February 2012 that, given the mounting scientific evidence about the severe impact of climate change and global warming and its likely threat to Malta's rich cultural heritage, early action should be taken to mitigate and adapt to its effects by drawing up a climate change risk assessment of Malta's cultural heritage sites and monuments, focusing on a comprehensive programme of adaptation and protective conservation measures to safeguard our principal historic sites. In the light of the risk assessment, we urge the adoption of a Management Plan as the basis for the future implementation of effective preventive or adaptive measures in response to actual or expected climate changes or their effects, with a view to harnessing them to the long-term benefit of our cultural heritage.

**EFFETTI TA' TIBDIL FIL-KLIMA**

B'rizoluzzjoni waqt il-Laqqgħa Ġenerali Annwali ta' Din l-Art Helwa, f'133 Triq Melita Valletta fil-25 ta' Frar 2012, Din l-Art Helwa thegġegħ biex isir sħarriġ fuq l-effetti tat-tibdil fil-klima fuq il-monumenti u s-siti ta' Wirt Kulturali biex b'hekk jitwettqu miżuri biex jiġu protetti dawn is-siti storiċi. Dan għaliex hemm evidenza xjentifika li t-tibdil fil-klima tista' tagħmel ħsara lil dawn il-postijiet. Fid-dawl ta' dan l-istudju, inheggu li jsir Pjan biex jitwettqu miżuri effettivi biex jiġu evitati dawn l-effetti ħżiena u b'hekk insalvaw il-wirt kulturali ta' pajjiżna.

**RESOLUTION 3:  
ALTERNATIVE ENERGY**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on 25 February 2012 that a greater effort be made to promote energy efficiency and educate the general public on the advantages and proper use of renewable energy. It is further resolved that aggressive measures be taken to promote a wider adoption of renewable energy generation and energy efficiency measures in homes and in business.

**ENERĠIJA ALTERNATTIVA**

B'rizoluzzjoni waqt il-Laqqgħa Ġenerali Annwali ta' Din l-Art Helwa, f'133 Triq Melita Valletta fil-25 ta' Frar 2012, Din l-Art Helwa thegġegħ il-gvern biex jeduka aktar il-poplu dwar il-vantaġġi ta' enerġija nadifa u rinnovabbli, u li jittieħdu aktar miżuri biex aktar nies jużaw apparat li jiġġenera enerġija fid-djar u l-postijiet tax-xogħol.

**RESOLUTION 4:  
MARINE FOOD STOCKS**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on 25 February 2012 that, in view of the grave decline in fish stocks and the possible extinction of certain species of fish that have in part been caused by over consumption, all efforts are to be made to promote and nurture a culture of sustainable eating with regard to fish stocks and to generate awareness within the local consumer market by giving the local population the knowledge and awareness with which to choose responsibly whilst simultaneously protecting the local fisherman. Furthermore, *Din l-Art Helwa* urges government to establish incentives and communication to increase the catch and sale of less popular fish.

**RIŻORSI TAL-IKEL MILL-BAHAR**

B'rizoluzzjoni waqt il-Laqqgħa Ġenerali Annwali ta' Din l-Art Helwa, f'133 Triq Melita Valletta fil-25 ta' Frar 2012, Din l-Art Helwa temmen li għandha ssir kampanja mill-Gvern, għaqdiet Governattivi u l-Kooperattivi tas-Sajjieda biex il-poplu jkun jista' jixtri l-ħut b'risponsabbiltà u ma jibqax jixtri speċi ta' ħut li qegħdin jonqsu, kif ukoll biex jibqa' jgħin s-sajjied tradizzjonali. Il-Gvern għandu jwettaq inċentivi biex jiżdied il-qbid u l-bejgħ ta' ħut anqas popolari.

**RESOLUTION 5:  
QUALITY OF THE MALTESE LANGUAGE**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on 25 February 2012 that, given the vital cultural importance of the Maltese language to the identity, history and national heritage of Malta, and the deplorable standards of spoken Maltese being heard daily, especially on television and radio and other public media, we urge the government to launch a national campaign to safeguard the correct use of the Maltese language and to halt its shocking decline.

**HARSJEN TAL-ILSIEN MALTI**

B'rizoluzzjoni waqt il-Laqqgħa Ġenerali Annwali ta' Din l-Art Helwa, f'133 Triq Melita Valletta fil-25 ta' Frar 2012, Din l-Art Helwa thegġegħ il-gvern u entitajiet oħra biex issir kampanja nazzjonali biex intejbu l-livell tal-lingwa Maltija għaliex dan il-livell qiegħed jonqos speċjalment fuq programmi televiżivi u tar-radju. L-Ilsien Malti huwa ta' importanza kbira għall-kultura, storja u identita' tagħna.

# The Good and the Sad

Simone Mizzi

Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa

**Good things *do* happen – we make them happen**  
*Din l-Art Helwa* continues to save many of Malta's fabulous landmarks and artistic works that are essential to our historic and natural heritage by salvaging them from neglect or from the developer's axe. We are currently involved with some extraordinary projects: the devolution of 17 British-period barracks at Ghajn Tuffieha within the Majjistral National Park Scheme, the challenge of restoring Delimara Lighthouse, which is now at its most exciting phase, with its canopy undergoing conservation thanks to a most generous sponsorship from GasanMamo Insurance, work on Qala Point's Battery almost completed, a new phase of restoration of Wignacourt Tower, which has finally found a financial champion in the Malta Tourism Authority and so much great work done in Gozo on interpretation.

Conservation projects such as those of the nine monuments at Maglio Gardens, through a terrific sponsorship by Fimbank Plc., and *St Sebastian* by Mattia Preti from Sarria Church actually restored at Malta International Airport in full view of the public, thanks to MIA who have sponsored the project, are but a few. However, it is mind-boggling how so much can be done by so few and with so little. And now, of course, we have the extraordinary privilege of working to save the Church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta. By the time this goes to print we will have identified our most valued partners. You will find our National Appeal leaflet in this edition of *Vigilo*. Please pass it to your friends as we still need considerably more funding.

## Let me continue to dwell on the good: much is promised

February was an unusually satisfying month for our natural and built environment. European funds have been promised by our inexhaustible and hard-working Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Environment Dr Mario de Marco, for Forts St Elmo and St Angelo. The National Environmental Policy was also launched, indicating that €2 billion is being dedicated to environmental upgrades by 2020. This comprehensive document, if embraced by all, and if implemented in its excellent detail, should put an end to the environmental deficit, and we are proud that DLH was able to contribute to its formulation. It literally deals with all aspects of environmental management, from natural resources, to enforcement. Here is a quick recap of matters about which we have lobbied:

The new Urban Regeneration Scheme, just launched, is aimed at the restoration and rehabilitation of scheduled buildings which we welcome wholeheartedly (although we hope it can be extended beyond Urban Conservation Areas and scheduled buildings). The compulsory renovation of dilapidated façades is one of the things that will be introduced. The long-awaited high-rise policy is promised by 2012, but a cautious approach to tall

Address delivered  
 by  
 Simone Mizzi  
 at the  
*Din l-Art Helwa*  
 AGM 2012

buildings is being adopted until it becomes a reality. We hope this will be sooner rather than later! Sadly, conspicuous by its omission is any intention to relocate aquaculture developments away from our best coastal waters. At the time of going to press, a draft National Aquaculture Strategy has been launched, upon which DLH will comment in due course. The niggling issues of hunting and trapping and the illegal occupation of land are not mentioned, but we do wish the Enforcement Unit of Mepa the reinforcements it has been promised within the policy, and that it be fully operational by the end of the year.

## Step change: two small words, but a giant leap for Malta's visual environment

There has been one quantum leap forward about which I am particularly excited, and that is in the promise to prioritise improved urban quality and design where a "step change" is needed – to quote from the National Environment Policy. Now beauty, like taste, cannot be disputed, and I am no arbiter of style, but I feel the serious degradation of our visual environment entitles me to speak my mind on an issue I hold close to my heart, which is the protection of the beauty of Malta and its reinstatement where it has been lost.

For those of us insisting on "aesthetics" – a word that is unfavourable 'planning speak' on the grounds that it curbs creativity – the promise of a *step change in urban design*, together with the intention to protect the landscape, finally signifies that recognition of the urgent need to halt the 'uglification' of Malta has finally come – better late than never, of course.

I hope that these reflections can therefore serve to reinforce this recognition and may *step change* shake everybody's recognition of the deterioration of our daily surroundings, those valuable assets which, whether man-made or natural, give us our quality of life. This policy is enlightened and all-embracing, but it is only a first plan. Determined action now needs to be taken to prevent further loss of the islands' scenic

The cementification of  
 our valleys continues



qualities, our traditionally pleasant streetscapes, historic town centres, imposing fortifications and our views. These make up that extraordinary Maltese cultural landscape that is our legacy and are the assets that have made our islands one of the most unique and privileged places in which to live. They give us our own identity and sense of place. Appropriately, but perhaps also ironically, the policy is beautifully illustrated by images of old traditional Malta and of natural spaces that are still unspoilt, leaving little question that these visual assets are pivotal to a good quality environment, our singular and most valuable resource that is a basic human need.

Sadly, a combination of forces, mainly chaotic unplanned growth and a lack of awareness of the importance of retaining good cultural landscape by our leaders and planners, has resulted in the loss of a great part.

### The new built heritage

The unbridled building binge of the last few decades has given us what I call Malta's "new built heritage". The sights that fill our eyes as we go about our daily life mainly consist of unfinished or empty showrooms, endless rows of metal-fronted garages with overlying apartments, incredible colour schemes, neglected buildings, abandoned homes, the continuing 'cementification' of our valleys, the absence of planning, inappropriate architectural contextualisation, and rural depredation – and not a single tree ever included.

We have to remember that all this also becomes heritage, the bad being classed along with the good in the definition of the sum that makes up our cultural landscape. Sadly, the bad, or rather the sad, has become difficult to exclude and we have become immune to shabbiness and do not question it.

Sophisticated new buildings, even in high value landscape areas, eat away at public horizons because 'views', sadly, are commodities – according to an outrageous statement recently made by Mepa – and so are not protected. We demand that the European Landscape Convention to which Malta subscribed, and now the Faro Convention, addresses this. When there is an area of particular scenic appeal, it is targeted and becomes owned by a few. Subsequently it benefits but a handful, and is lost for the majority. This is a high price to pay and a case of man "poisoning his own hole".

We still have to address our national obsessive compulsive disorder, that of thinking building over every spare patch of land is the panacea for all the island's economic ills. Such sustainability has been disproved by the 70,000 buildings that lie empty and the resulting slow down in construction, which now needs to focus on the regeneration of the ugly parts of Malta and make them beautiful once again. The word "heritage" signifies an inheritance that we wish to pass on. Of the 40 years of building jamboree, I believe there is NOT ONE building I would wish to keep or pass on.

For these reasons, *step change* for quality of urban design is maybe a small step after four decades of building jamboree, but it is a giant one for Malta's future visual legacy. We welcome all the proposals put forward by the Chamber of Architects to entrench



Turquoise cages replace a once picturesque corner of St Julian's

the concepts for the establishment of a Centre of Architecture and Built Environment and of Design Review Panels. These are far-sighted recommendations within the policy and we look forward to their realisation.

### The sad

A few sad examples to highlight the importance of step change mentality as prioritised by our national policy. The recent extraordinary turquoise development of a most poignant corner of old St Julian's vies with the colour scheme of a neighbouring building in the ruination of one of our prettiest creeks, saved only and always by our beautiful sea. However, there are good things happening. The application for an extension to Villa Messina in Rabat was rejected, having been found to be detrimental to the neighbourhood, and we are satisfied that, after much lobbying, demolition of the old Villa Fieres has not been permitted and it is to be restored. However, as we go to press the fate of Spinola sea front's last green terraces will probably have been sealed, losing us the last old rubble walls and trees overlooking the square.

There is the most unusual creation, and one of questionable development permission, at Bahar ic-Caghaq that never ceases to amaze me when I see it, as see it you must, with its total disregard for its still quaint Maltese neighbours. This is an example of how one development starts and the buildings around it fall prey to development like kingpins, so we end up with another coastal city. These are insensitive and brutal buildings built egoistically only for those on the inside, with total disregard for those on the outside whose visual ambience must be respected. The responsibility of a building – and of those involved in its creation – is to look after the needs of both, and if it is unable to do so, then this is where formal guidelines MUST take over. So far, submission to design adjudication will only be voluntary – which is a good start, but it needs to become compulsory. We recommend most wholeheartedly that good building parameters are introduced that exemplify the best of the great Maltese architecture with which we have been blessed. To throw it away on the pretext that we are copying history, as I often hear said, is opportunistic and is something said by those whose hearts and minds are ignorant of the wealth of beauty they have inherited.

# Delimara Lighthouse Restoration

*Stanley Farrugia Randon*

The restoration of the Delimara Lighthouse is a long and painstaking process which is requiring considerable time and energy and the housing of the lighthouse mechanism is currently being restored, thanks to a sponsorship by GasanMamo Insurance Ltd, which has a lighthouse as its logo.

The glass panes had to be removed one by one, and this was not an easy job. Many were broken and others had been replaced by pieces of wood. The housing had to be freed from the base of coralline limestone to which it was attached by an iron ring and hold-down bolts on the inside. Unfortunately, many of the stones had been cracked by the corroded bolts, and the ring itself was also in a bad state. The housing was then lowered by crane, followed by the mechanism with the precious lenses.

When the whole structure had been lowered, the old white paint on the cast iron housing and copper parts was removed, and this revealed other problems in the structure which had not been evident before. The housing was found to be made of cast iron, which is brittle by nature. This was found to be broken in various places at its base – something that had probably been done intentionally when the housing was originally fixed to the stone base, as the pre-drilled holes did not match the bolts which were prepared for it in the stone. Joints and corroded holes were filled, and in some areas the services of a blacksmith were employed to replace parts that were either extensively corroded or completely missing. The cast iron was painstakingly cleaned and then coated with a protective layer to prevent further corrosion.

The white paint on the copper dome of the housing was removed and, once again, extensive corrosion was exposed. The gutters for rain water were in a very bad state and some parts may need replacing. Obviously, as much of the original as possible will be retained and any section of the gutter that has to be replaced will be done so with exact replicas of the originals, with hooks and outer boarder. It was observed that originally the outer boarder of the gutter was laid with the copper alloy sheet ends turned over an iron rod. This resulted in faster corrosion, due to the contact between the two different metals. The wooden shutters will have to be treated and a new door to provide access to the outside of the structure will have to be constructed. The function of the hooks that were attached to the inner part of the copper dome above the metal housing is not known exactly, but it is thought they were used to hang some material to cover the landward side of the glass.

There is still much work to be done. Upper coralline limestone has been ordered to replace the cracked stones to which the housing was fastened, work on the mechanism that used to light the structure is in progress and the few lenses that are missing will be replaced.

*Din l-Art Helwa is grateful to GasanMamo Insurance Ltd and to Malta Freeport Corporation for their support with the restoration of the Delimara Lighthouse.*



Preparing to lower the housing

The housing after restoration



One of the extensively corroded joints of the housing



# Inaugural Event for the Restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church

On 23 March, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi visited Our Lady of Victory Church in Valletta, together with Tourism, the Environment and Culture Minister Mario de Marco. They were greeted by *Din l-Art Helwa* Executive President Simone Mizzi and Council Members and by Mons. Anton Galea, Rector of the church. Also present were representatives of the private sector and the major sponsors who are generously offering financial assistance to the project for the restoration of the church.

Mrs Mizzi conducted a brief tour of the church, during which she highlighted to the Prime Minister the most important artistic and historical features such as the Alessio Erardi paintings on the barrel vaulted ceiling, the five altars, the various coats of arms, the paintings, the organ, the wooden choir and various other artefacts that are badly in need of restoration. The Prime Minister was also able to speak to conservators from the University of Malta about their future plans to launch an M.Sc Course in the Conservation of Decorated Built Surfaces together with the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. This course is to be launched in the autumn.

After the visit to the church, a sparkling reception at the beautiful Auberge de Castille was then hosted by Prime Minister and Mrs Gonzi to honour the companies, foundations and private individuals who have Malta's heritage at heart and who have, so far, committed their financial assistance to the project. Some 30 per cent of the funds needed to restore the whole church and create a museum have been raised, a victory in this time of economic recession.

Mrs Mizzi thanked the Minister of Culture for entrusting the church to *Din l-Art Helwa* and reiterated her commitment to seeing the project carried through, with the aid of the sponsors who have already responded so generously and in the hope that others will join them, as much more funding is needed to reach the required amount of €2 million. Funding still has to be found to restore the 18th century organ, to provide the church new electrical wiring and environmentally-friendly lighting, new wooden fixtures, and for the woodwork of the choir and sacristy.

Finally, Mrs Mizzi said that she hoped the generosity of the individuals and organisations that support the country's cultural and environmental heritage would be given better recognition by the media. She suggested that the public broadcasting restrictions that limit the exposure given to sponsors, which also applied to the written media, should be relaxed and that Malta should emulate countries in Northern Europe, where such sponsorship is respected and applauded.

Minister Mario de Marco praised Mrs Mizzi and the DLH team, saying that he was confident they would restore the church to its former glory. In his closing speech, Dr Gonzi highlighted the passion and enthusiasm of the Executive President of *Din l-Art Helwa* and praised the work that NGOs carry out, underlining the importance the collaboration of the private sector if Malta's rich heritage is to be saved for future generations.

The Enkor Choir, conducted by Ms Johanna Van Lent Singles, entertained those present with music dedicated to the Virgin, beginning with the 16th century *O Bone Jesu*, by M A Ingengneri and ending, with the participation of soprano Gillian Zammit, with a splendid rendition of Schubert's *Ave Maria*. DLH is grateful to the Enkor choir for voluntarily offering their wonderful performance, and to the HSBC Malta Foundation for enriching the evening with the performance of Soprano Ms Gillian Zammit, as well as to all the team at Castille who organised the event to perfection.



Prime Minister signing the Victory Book with Simone Mizzi in the background



Simone Mizzi with Prime Minister, the Hon. Lawrence Gonzi and the Hon. Mario de Marco, Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Environment. (Photos – DOI – Omar Camilleri)

## OUR NATIONAL APPEAL CONTINUES

With this Vigilo you will receive our successful National Appeal Leaflet. Please help us keep the fund raising effort for Victory Church going by giving it to your friends. If you need any more leaflets kindly contact the office on 21225952.

# The Victory Team is Launched....Long May It Grow

**Simone Mizzi**

*Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa*

*Din l-Art Helwa's* National Appeal for funds for the restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church has not gone unheeded. The private sector has rallied to our cause and at a celebratory reception hosted by Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi at Castille on 23 March, and in the presence of the Minister for Tourism, the Environment and Culture Mario de Marco, I had the huge privilege of announcing the names of the main sponsors who are to spearhead this most challenging project. We were able to celebrate the good news with everyone who has helped with the work in any way so far and we hope that the example of the generous people mentioned below will encourage others to join the Victory Team. I also had the privilege of accompanying the Prime Minister when he visited the church the same evening and was proud to show him the progress already made in such a brief time since DLH was awarded the church in guardianship.

First and foremost I wish to thank our two Principal Valued Partners of the Victory Team: the HSBC Malta Foundation and PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers). Through the generosity of HSBC, we will be able to save the irreplaceable Alessio Erardi paintings on the baroque barrel-vaulted ceiling of the church – eight segments of vault art that require skill, patience and a great deal of money spent on them. The far-sighted vision, already many years ago, of PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) enabled us then to work with the Valletta Rehabilitation Project (VRP) to secure the external masonry of the façade, essential if the work on the interior was to be carried out. Today, PwC have again come to the aid of Our Lady of Victory Church and with their long-standing commitment, DLH will be able to save the numerous works of art that the church holds.

Our Valued Partners –the Alfred Mizzi Foundation, The Strickland Foundation and the Vodafone Malta Foundation – are giving substantial aid. Through the help of the Alfred Mizzi Foundation, whose constant encouragement has always motivated us to continue with the project, we will be able to restore the altars and monuments, including the altar reredoses which require studying and treatment. Vodafone will assist us establish didactic and interpretation schemes so that the church and its works of art and treasures can be appreciated and understood by those visiting it. The Strickland Foundation was the first to react to our call and their beautiful words of encouragement will be precious to DLH for many years to come. Thanks also go to P. Cutajar & Co. and Farsons Foundation the most recent supporters to announce their commitment.

There are many private individuals who have been most generous and we are sorry there is no space to acknowledge all donors in this edition of Vigilo, but all will be acknowledged on the Our Lady of Victory Website. All donations – no matter how large or how small – will be acknowledged. I must also thank the many supporters and associates who have helped in so many ways. Some of them have given us of their professional skills, or of their time – equally important as funding in the case of the restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church which is a multi-disciplined exercise.

I must also thank the many volunteers at our most successful Open Days, during which the church was viewed by some 500 people. Then I must also thank our hard-working executive team and council, and all our numerous volunteers. They are the pillars of our organisation and without them, DLH would not have been able to save 37 historic sites for the nation during its years of operation. I commend you all.

I hope that the example of generosity listed here is followed by others. We still have a long way to go and the list of tasks is indeed

a long one. Funds need to be found for new electrical systems that are environmental friendly and will be as least innocuous to the art as possible.

We have to restore the 18th century organ, purchase museum cabinets, install an accessibility ramp, study the long-term permeability of the roof and project manage the whole scheme while ensuring the church is able to function and continue its pastoral activities. In the meantime, the project to give Our Lady of Victory Church back its dignity has started and I am most privileged to report back to you. I thank you all for the support you give us.

## THE VICTORY TEAM

### PRINCIPAL VALUED PARTNERS

PwC  
The HSBC Malta Foundation

### VALUED PARTNERS

The Alfred Mizzi Foundation, The Strickland Foundation  
Vodafone Malta Foundation

### VALUED SUPPORTERS

Computime Ltd, De la Rue Currency Print Ltd,  
Farsons Foundation  
Maltese Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta,  
Middlesea Insurance, Ignazio Anastasi Ltd.,  
P. Cutajar & Co. Ltd., Prime Bet, Unifin Services Ltd.

### VALUED BENEFACTORS

Dr Noel Buttigieg Scicluna, Mr and Mrs George Darmanin,  
Mr Joseph Gauci, Dr Albert Grech, Dr David Griscti,  
Chev James G Gollcher, Mr and Mrs Jeffery Harris,  
Lord and Lady Lloyd, Mr Albert P. Mamo,  
Chev Joseph Micallef, Dr & Mrs Josie Muscat,  
Mrs Janatha Stubbs, Lt Col K. J. Valenzia

### VALUED ASSOCIATES

Mr Joseph Sammut (Belgravia Auction Galleries)  
Mr Alvin Scicluna (CVC Media Group)  
Mr Tony Cassar (Cyberspace Solutions Ltd)  
Mr James Licari  
(Malta Association of Professional Conservator-Restorers)  
Mr Norbert Gatt (Malta Rehabilitation Projects Office)  
Mr John Formosa (Network Publications Ltd.)  
Dr Anthony Pace (Superintendence of Cultural Heritage)  
Sharon Cather (The Courtauld Institute of Art, London)  
Profs JoAnn Cassar (University of Malta)  
Mayor Alexiei Dingli (Valletta Local Council)

# Din l-Art Helwa News

## Launch of DVD *The Tale of Two Towers* in Gozo

On 20 January, 2012, in the historic hall of the Old Hospital in Victoria, Gozo, now the Ministry of Gozo, Minister for Gozo Giovanna Debono and Executive President Simone Mizzi presented the DVD *The Tale of Two Towers* to the public.

Mrs Mizzi said the production of this 26-minute DVD was the brainchild of *Din l-Art Helwa* volunteer Carolyn Clements and John Barnes, who researched and prepared the text. It was filmed and produced by Alvin Scicluna of CVC Media Group, Gozo, on location in Gozo and Comino and features in particular Santa Maria Tower in Comino and Dwejra Tower in Gozo, both of which are held in guardianship by *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Using magnificent views of Gozo and Comino seascapes and countryside, the DVD depicts the story of the two towers, the construction of which was recommended by military engineer Giovanni Rinaldini who was brought over from Italy in 1599 by Grand Master Martino de Garzes to give his expert advice on the defence of Gozo. Acting parts in the film were entrusted to Albert Gauci as Rinaldini, Terry Shaw as Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt and Paul Barnes as Grand Master Juan de Lascaris-Castellar.

*Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to Carolyn Clements and her group of volunteers, through whose hard work this project was completed. It was made possible through the collaboration of Eco Gozo, which made funds available because, as Mrs Debono explained: "This production is in line with initiatives that enhance the preservation of Gozo's natural and historical heritage". The Minister praised the activities of *Din l-Art Helwa* which, she said, does sterling work in the field of conservation.

Copies of the DVD were presented to school heads who attended the launch, and copies will be distributed to all schools in Gozo. The public is reminded that the DVD can be purchased for €10 from *Din l-Art Helwa's* office and from all its other sites.



Minister for Gozo Giovanna Debono and Simone Mizzi presenting the DVD

## Irish ambassador visits Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuh

HE the Irish Ambassador Jim Hennessy and Mrs Hennessy visited the two mediaeval chapels of Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuh accompanied by Simone Mizzi in January. They were given a personal guided tour by the custodians of the two churches – Anthony Mangion at Hal Millieri and George Attard Manche at Bir Miftuh. Ambassador Hennessy expressed his interest in strengthening the ties between Malta and Ireland through organisations such as *Din l-Art Helwa* through cultural exchange and events.



Ambassador Hennessy, Mrs Monica Hennessy and Anthony Mangion

## My Experience with *Din l-Art Helwa*

"My name is Jantess Calleja and I am working with *Din l-Art Helwa* as part of my systems of knowledge project. Working with a non-governmental voluntary organisation has enabled me to see the efforts made by the members to support its aims. At the same time, I began to see how bad the actions of littering, damaging and stealing of valuable parts of our history can be. *Din l-Art Helwa* is involved with the upkeep of towers and the plant life around them and visitors such as I can learn a lot by going to these buildings. That is why I decided that this summer I will continue being a part of *Din l-Art Helwa*."



Jantess applying lacquer to the door of Dwejra Tower



### Wignacourt Tower in St Paul's Bay to benefit from EU funding

Wignacourt Tower, Malta's oldest standing tower, is to benefit from European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) in a new restoration project that is to be implemented by the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) in conjunction with *Din l-Art Helwa*.

This announcement was made by Tourism, the Environment and Culture Minister Mario de Marco at Wignacourt Tower during a visit on 9 February, where he was greeted by Executive President Simone Mizzi and DLH volunteers, officials from the MTA and St Paul's Bay mayor Graziella Galea. Dr de Marco said that the restoration of Wignacourt Tower follows the recent completion of the adjacent promenade and is an investment that strengthens the tourism, culture and environment sectors. St Paul's Bay, Qawra and Bugibba receive 30 per cent of Malta's tourists and the tower is a focal point and destination for visitors. He commended *Din l-Art Helwa* for its efforts in strengthening the cultural heritage sector and the MTA, which will be implementing the ERDF project.

Wignacourt Tower was built by Grand Master Aloff de Wignacourt to strengthen defences on the northern coast. Its foundation stone was laid on 10 February 1610 and is dedicated to the Apostle Paul. DLH has looked after the tower since 1970 and holds it in guardianship. Simone Mizzi said the tower was symbolic not only because it was the oldest coastal defence tower still standing, but because it represented the commitment and work done by the organisation during the last 46 years in the protection of the country's built heritage. It was the first historic site entrusted to *Din l-Art Helwa*, while today the organisation holds 17 national sites in guardianship and has restored 37.

In 1975, when the Council of Europe celebrated the Year of Architectural Heritage, *Din l-Art Helwa* decided to invest all its funds in restoring Wignacourt Tower and this first restoration was begun on 10 February 1976. Further work on the external walls was carried out in 1994 and in 1997 the National Tourist Organisation of Malta (now the MTA) provided funds for the continued restoration of the tower's interior and the provision of a small museum.

Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon, *Din l-Art Helwa*'s long-standing warden for Wignacourt Tower, giving details of the work planned for the tower's exterior and roof, said: "Once more, on the occasion of the feast of St Paul, the tower that has suffered from exposure to the elements and pollution is to receive generous funds so that – with the new scientific methods now in use – the new phase of restoration will give it a new lease of life, preserving it for future generations".



Minister for Tourism, the Environment and Culture Dr Mario de Marco being shown around Wignacourt Tower by Simone Mizzi and Stanley Farrugia Randon

### Ghajn Tuffieha Barracks handed over to the Majjistral Heritage and Nature Park Federation

PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) organised a clean-up day, involving 150 volunteers, at the old Ghajn Tuffieha Barracks. The barracks were handed over to the Heritage Parks Federation, of which *Din l-Art Helwa* forms part together with the Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust Malta. They are to be restored and will operate as an activity and information centre for the Majjistral Heritage and Nature Park. The handing over ceremony took place on 19 November and Parliamentary Secretary for Lands Jason Azzopardi formally signed the premises over to the federation. Martin Galea, former Executive President of *Din l-Art Helwa*, was present for the event.



PwC volunteers at the Ghajn Tuffieha Barracks. The clean-up day marked the official handing over of the barracks to the Majjistral Heritage and Nature Park Federation of which *Din l-Art Helwa* forms part.

### *Din l-Art Helwa* reinstates the coat of arms at St Anthony's Battery

Master mason Leli Bufajra worked through the winter to carve a replacement of the missing coat of arms that once adorned the entrance to St Anthony's Battery on Qala Point in Gozo. This two-metre block of hard stone, chosen specially from a quarry in Gozo, carries the coat of arms of Grand Master de Vilhena and the Cross of the Order of St John, together with an inscription by the Governor of Gozo which reads: Nel Governo del Cav Fra Paulo Antonio de Viguier, 1732 (During the rule of Fra Paulo Antonio de Viguier, 1732).

*Din l-Art Helwa* has been restoring the 18<sup>th</sup> century battery since 2007 in a joint project with Qala Local Council. Funding has been obtained from Mepa (derived from planning gain), and from the restoration funds of both Qala Local Council and *Din l-Art Helwa*. The work on the battery, which had been left in a state of total abandonment, with decayed and crumbling walls, is now at an advanced stage. Offering marvellous views over the straits to Comino, it is hoped that the battery will be ready to receive visitors later this summer. *Din l-Art Helwa* must thank former DLH vice-president Lt. Col. Eric Parnis, who has visited the site to oversee the project, come rain or shine, every Monday for the last few years.



### Duo Misciagna e Vilardi perform heavenly music at Our Lady of Victory Church

On 29 December, *Din l-Art Helwa*, in collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute, delighted an audience at Our Lady of Victory Church in Valletta with a concert by Marco Misciagna on violin and Vito Vilardi on guitar.

The Duo, Misciagna e Vilardi, was already known to music lovers in Malta as they performed during the Bir Miftuh Festival last year. The return to Malta of these two young and gifted musicians for the *Din l-Art Helwa* Christmas Concert was therefore all the more eagerly received by a very appreciative audience that was charmed by the music of Paganini, Scheidler and Giuliani and particularly by such musical gems as Gounaud's *Ave Maria* and Brahms' *GutenAbend*.

Not only was the music heavenly, but it was played in the historic Church of Our Lady of Victory, in Valletta, against the splendid backdrop of the marble altar and the illuminated apse that boasts an altarpiece depicting the Birth of the Virgin as well as the icon of the Virgin so precious to Grand Master Jean De Valette.

This was the second in a series of concerts being presented by *Din l-Art Helwa* to create awareness of the need to raise funds for the restoration of the church, in particular for the conservation of the vaulted ceiling painted by Erardi that depicts various scenes from the life of the Virgin.

*Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to Bitmac Ltd, The Rug Gallery and Fimbank Plc., for their kind collaboration.

### *It-Teżori taġhna l-Maltin* publication and website launched

Produced by Miranda Publishers, *It-Teżori taġhna l-Maltin* is a publication which, together with its website, is being made available at no charge to all schoolchildren in Malta and Gozo. A total of 55,000 copies of the book have been printed in both English and Maltese. The book was launched by Miranda Publishers director Eddie Aquilina at the Santa Margherita School for Girls in Cospicua on 20 January, in the presence of Education Minister Dolores Cristina.

The book is a cultural treasure trove of most of the photographic wealth accumulated by the publishers over their years in the publishing industry. Created in two versions, one for primary and the other for secondary school students, it is intended to help the student of culture and history, via the website [www.tezorimaltin.com](http://www.tezorimaltin.com), to visit the most important heritage sites in Malta and Gozo, learn about their history and download images for project work or just general interest.

The website [www.tezorimaltin.com](http://www.tezorimaltin.com) is a comprehensive pictorial and virtual guide to 7,000 years of history that allows the reader to browse and learn about the many phases in Malta's history, starting with pre-history and ending with the modern period, WWII, 20th century history and the country's independence.

On the very first page of the book, *It-Teżori taġhna l-Maltin* asks the reader to support the restoration of Wignacourt Tower, Malta's oldest tower built by Grand Master Wignacourt in 1610. Over the centuries, the tower has become a symbol of defence of our cultural heritage. Donations can be made through the *Din l-Art Helwa* Wignacourt Tower Fund at any branch of Banif Bank.

### 2011 Photographic Competition for the Marine Environment

*Din l-Art Helwa* has awarded prizes for the two categories in the 2011 Photographic Competition for the Marine Environment: *The Negative Effects of Human Activity on The Sea or The Coastline* and *The Beauty and Unique Qualities of Underwater Life*. Speaking on the occasion, Executive President Simone Mizzi said that it had been difficult to choose the winners from among the 23 entries, as most of the photographs displayed technical ability, originality and a kaleidoscope of colours. Stanley Farrugia Randon, who has been organising the competition from its inception, thanked all the participants as well as Joseph Chetcuti for the setting up of the photographs. He pointed out that the aim of the competition is to raise awareness of the beauty of marine life and the negative effects human activities can have on a world that is not that obviously visible.

The panel of expert adjudicators awarded first prize in the *Marine Pollution* category to *Gunpowder shells at 5m depth at Reqqa Point* by Sonia Silvio, and the winner of the *Beauty of Marine Life* category was Matthew Farrugia for his *Fan Worms on the Um El Faroud*. Both winners received €250.

This is the fifth consecutive year that *Din l-Art Helwa* has organised this photographic competition for the marine environment, which forms part of DLH's Blue Campaign and was open to all dive schools, clubs, students, lovers of the environment and the general public. The awards for this year's event were made possible with the support of Avantech Ltd and the competition owes its success to the enthusiasm and hard work of Stanley Farrugia Randon and Joe Chetcuti.



*Fan Worms on the Um El Faroud* by Matthew Farrugia



*Gunpowder shells at 5m depth at Reqqa Point* by Sonia Silvio

### HSBC Deputy Head of Corporate Sustainability visits Our Lady of Victory Church

Francis Sullivan, adviser on the environment and Deputy Head of Group Corporate Sustainability of the HSBC Foundation, recently visited the church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta, together with *Din l-Art Helwa* Executive President Simone Mizzi and Communications Officer Pat Salomone. Mr Sullivan viewed the conservation work currently being carried out by the Courtauld Institute of London on the Alessio Erardi paintings on the vaulted ceiling of the church which the HSBC Malta Foundation is generously supporting.



### Fish4tomorrow Campaign

The fish4tomorrow campaign notes with satisfaction the launch of the Healthy Weight for Life Strategy as reported in *The Malta Independent* on Sunday, 26 February, which advocates greater emphasis on fish consumption. While fish certainly offers greater dietary benefits than processed fatty foods such as burgers and sausages, it is also a sad fact of life that fish consumption is relatively low compared with meat. This is due to many factors, one of which is the erroneous public perception that fish is more expensive to buy than meat.

Although it is true that while on one hand some fish – such as dentici – costs more than a burger, on the other hand mackerel is cheaper to buy than beef fillet steak. One must compare apples with apples. Price difference need not be a factor when choosing between fish and meat. The real problem is that the consumer tends to buy “hassle-free” fish – fish without lots of little bones that can get stuck in your throat. Fish such as tuna and swordfish come in this category. What the consumer tends to ignore is the fact that tuna and swordfish will not be available for much longer because we are fishing them out of existence just like cod was fished to near-extinction 60 years ago.

To avoid this undesirable consequence requires a multi-fronted approach. The consumer needs to know that there are species of fish on the market that are cheap and healthy. The fishmonger needs to offer the cheaper species of fish filleted and cleaned, so that buyers avoid finding small fish bones on their plates. Governments need to manage the situation by enforcing existing fishing regulations on an international scale, while on the local scene the traditional fishermen need to be given help and incentives to diversify their catch and present consumers with an attractive display of locally-caught, sustainable fish. Restaurant owners need to reduce the usual four-year culture lag with the rest of the Western world by serving sustainable fish now such as famous chefs in the UK and Italy are doing.

Fish4tomorrow is a campaign by environmental NGOs *Din l-Art Helwa*, Greenhouse Malta, Nature Trust and Sharklab Malta, the aim of which is to promote sustainable fish eating in Malta.

### Monument to Private Charles McCorrie

*Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to the HSBC Malta Foundation for coming to its aid to support the costs of erecting a monument to Private Charles McCorrie, VC, of the 57<sup>th</sup> West Middlesex Regiment, the third recipient of the Victoria Cross who is buried in the Msida Bastion Garden. *Din l-Art Helwa* will be erecting this memorial shortly and is grateful to Julian Alexander Gatt from Eagle Heights, Australia, a member of the Victoria Cross Society, for his donation of a replica of the Victoria Cross which will be kept within the Cemetery Museum.

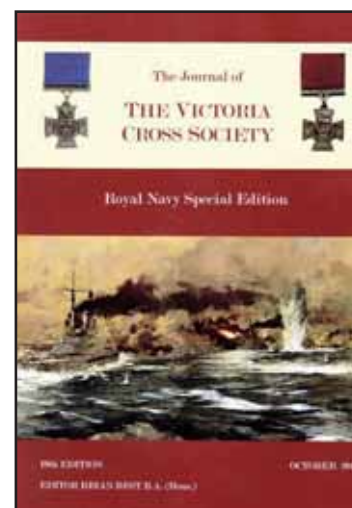
The Victoria Cross is the most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. According to the records of the Victoria Cross Society, Private McCorrie, who was born in County Antrim in Northern Ireland, is buried in the Msida Bastion Cemetery in an unmarked grave. He was around 25 years old when he was killed during the siege of Sebastopol in the Crimea.

A short piece by Julian Alexander Gatt was published in the October 2011 issue of the Victory Cross Society's Journal after he visited the Garden and met Simone Mizzi during the Spring Fete last year.

#### VC Memorial Appeal for Private Charles McCorrie

“Member Julian Gatt has been active in gaining permission to erect a memorial at the Msida Bastion Cemetery, Valletta in Malta to Charles McCorrie who died on 8 April 1857.

On 23 June 1855, he threw a live shell over the parapet after it had landed in his trench during Sebastopol. He was amongst the first recipients whose citations appeared in the London Gazette of 26 February 1857. His VC was sent to Malta where he was serving but he died before his investiture could take place.”



# Is-Salib tad-Dejma ta' Ħal Millieri

Stanley Farrugia Randon



Ġwann (li ġġarfet fl-1634 iżda reġgħet inbniet u għadha teżisti sal-ġurnata tal-lum) u l-Kappella ta' San Mikiel (li ġġarfet fl-1667). Is-Salib tad-Dejma f'Ħal Millieri jinstab quddiem il-Kappella ta' San Ġwann u x'aktarx huwa tas-seklu sbatax. Is-Salib innifsu gie vvandalizzat hafna drabi u għalhekk ma jistax jitqies bhala l-origjinali. L-aħhar darba li twahħal kien madwar l-1970. Is-salib qiegħed fuq kolonna li twahħlet fuq bażi kwadra u żewġ tarġiet. Għalhekk is-salib jokkupa l-quċċata ta' din il-kompożizzjoni u b'hekk jingħata l-importanza li jisthoqlu.

Dan is-salib se jiġi rrestawrat bhala parti mill-proġett ta' tisbiih li l-Kunsill Lokali taż-Żurrieq se jwettaq madwar il-kappella bhala parti mill-fondi mill-Ewropa (Rural Development Funds). Din l-Art Helwa applikat għal fondi biex jiġu studjati b'mod xjentifiku l-affreski li din il-kappella thaddan, iżda din l-applikazzjoni ma gietx aċċettata! Restawr fuq is-salib u l-istruttura ta' tahtu jinkludi t-tnehhija ta' siment meta sar xi restawr fil-passat, tikhil, u tindif ġenerali minn tniġġis speċjalment minn karozzi. Is-siment, li kien jintuża fil-passat meta ma kienx magħruf il-ħsara li jagħmel, għandu hafna mluħa li meta jdubu bl-ilma u jinxfu biex jiffurmaw kristalli jaqsmu l-ġebbla. Is-siment ma jhallix il-ġebbla tinxfew u żżomm l-umdità warajha. Dan iż-żmien jintuża tikhil bażi ta' ġir biex din il-ħsara ma sseħħ. It-tniġġis li jiġi mill-karozzi jiffurma sustanzi aċidużi li jdewwbu l-ġebbla Maltija permezz ta' reżazzjoni kimika. Il-karozzi ma jkunux jistgħu jidhlu aktar viċin is-salib.

Iżda għaliex jissejjaħ is-Salib tad-Dejma? L-irġiel minn tmintax sa sittin sena kellhom jidhlu fid-dejma u jagħtu sehemhom fid-difiża tal-ġzejjer. Dawn is-soldati kienu organizzati f'għadd ta' ġemgħat daqskemm kien hemm parroċċi jew irhula dak iż-żmien. L-attakki mill-furbani kienu komuni fiż-żmien medjevali u l-villaġġ ta' Ħal Millieri ma kienx protett minn dawn l-attakki. Minħabba f'hekk il-Maltin lejn tmien is-seklu 14, kellhom iwaqqfu ġemgħa ta' soldati magħrufa bhala d-Dejma.

In-nies tad-Dejma kienu joqogħdu għassa billejl u b'inhar fuq ix-xtut u l-gholjiet. Kif jilmħu l-ghadu riesaq lejn ix-xtut, iqabbd u huġġieġa u malli l-ghassies tat-torrijiet l-ohra jaraw id-duħħan tiela' matul il-jum u n-nar matul il-lejl, isejhu n-nies għat-taqtiġha. Id-daqs tal-ħġejjeg kienu d-daqs tal-qawwa tal-ghadu. Is-soldati tad-Dejma kienu jingħabru hdejn is-Salib tad-Dejma u għalhekk dawn is-salib baqgħu jissejju tad-Dejma. Huwa minnu li l-ewwel darba li nisimgħu bl-isem tal-villaġġ ta' Ħal Millieri huwa minn lista tad-dejma tal-1419 meta kien hemm biss 14-il raġel eliġibbli.

Meta jasal is-sajf il-baħar joffri żvog għalina l-Maltin. L-ghawm huwa eżerċizzju rilassanti, u l-baħar joffri esperjenzi sbieħ għal min iħobb imur mawra bid-dgħajsa jew jogħdos u jiskopri l-animali u l-ħxejjex differenti li jgħammru fih. Madankollu, meta tiġi x-xitwa, il-kesha u l-maltemp jagħmel dawn il-passatempo anqas popolari. Meta toħrog xi ġurnata sabiħa f'dan il-perjodu tas-sena mhawnx isbah minn mixja fil-kampanja. Il-pajsaġġ Malti joffri karatteristiċi partikolari li jsaħħru l-ghajn, bhall-hitan tas-sejjieħ, għelieqi mtarrġa, kappelli żgħar imwarrba, niceċ reliġjużi u s-salib tad-Dejma li hu s-suġġett ta' dan l-artiklu.

L-aktar sit antik li Din l-Art Helwa tiehu hsieb f'isem il-poplu Malti hija l-kappella tal-Lunzjata f'Ħal Millieri fiż-Żurrieq. Ħal Millieri huwa villaġġ antik hafna fejn kien hemm erba' kappelli medjevali viċin hafna ta' xulxin – il-Kappella tal-Lunzjata, Il-Kappella tal-Viżitazzjoni (li kienet tmiss ma' dik tal-Lunzjata iżda twaqqgħet fl-1657), il-Kappella ta' San



# Din l-Art Helwa Architectural Heritage Awards 2011

On 2 December, in the Judge Caruana Curran Hall, *Din l-Art Helwa* announced the winners of the 2011 Awards for Architectural Heritage. This initiative was established by the organisation to encourage architectural excellence in Malta and the rehabilitation and re-use of old buildings, and to recognise the dedicated work of those active in the field of restoration.

The panel of judges was composed of former DLH executive president Martin Scicluna, Chamber of Architects representative Conrad Thake, distinguished art historian Keith Sciberras and DLH Council member Maria Grazia Cassar. On behalf of the judges and the DLH Council, Mr Scicluna welcomed Dr Mario de Marco who, in his capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, Culture and the Environment, kindly agreed to present the awards.

*Din l-Art Helwa's* Architectural Heritage Awards were conceived in 2005, DLH's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, primarily to encourage better architecture and in the awareness of the urgent need to improve quality in construction development, as a way of contributing to the debate on the standards of Maltese architectural design. *Din l-Art Helwa* works closely in this with the Chamber of Architects, which offers it unstinting support in encouraging good architects to produce work of high quality, that respects the outstanding tradition of built heritage stretching back thousands of years, sends a clear message that old buildings can be successfully restored and that good contemporary architecture plays a vital part in the beauty of our Islands.

In his speech, Martin Scicluna said: *"We would like to think that our initiative is now beginning to bear fruit. It is so encouraging to see the planned improvements now afoot at Fort Manoel and in Valletta, where great strides are finally being taken to enhance the beauty of our capital city. We are thrilled by the work going on to restore our fortifications and excited about the prospect of seeing Fort St Elmo restored to its former glory"*.

Although this year there were fewer projects – which, while entirely worthy and commendable, did not quite match the glamour, high profile and ambition of the 2010 entries – this in no way diminished the importance of this year's submissions. There were no submissions this year in either Category A: Major Regeneration Projects, or Category C: Restoration and Conservation Projects. There were, however, two most deserving entries in Category B: the Rehabilitation and Re-use of a Building.

"Criteria for the judgement", Martin Scicluna pointed out, "is based on the quality of the work executed, its historical, cultural, educational and social relevance, the research conducted and the aesthetic and visual merit of the project. The over-riding consideration is the significance of the project in the Maltese context, and its contribution to Maltese cultural heritage." As a result, and after careful consideration, the judges concluded that it would award two diplomas to two quite different, but most worthy, projects in Category B.

Dr de Marco presented the first prize to architect Aaron Abela for his restoration of Villa Aspinal in Tarxien. The judging panel considered that this rehabilitation, which was completed within a very limited budget, was most deserving of recognition as the preservation and rehabilitation had been well thought out and most sensitively executed. No structural alterations were made to this lovely 19<sup>th</sup> century villa, which has now been converted to a fully-functioning office. Best practice in conservation was followed and the villa is an excellent example of how a large town house

can be used successfully for other purposes without resorting to demolition and re-building. Villa Aspinal successfully combines utility and practicality with visual and aesthetic integrity and is a glowing example of how a restoration of this kind can contribute to the regeneration of a town centre.

The second award in the same category was presented to architect Chris Briffa, for a most unusual project – the highly imaginative restoration, rehabilitation and re-use of the public convenience on the corner of Strait Street and Old Theatre Street.

Mr Scicluna explained that, as in the days of Ancient Rome, firm indication of the civilised nature of any advanced city can be judged by the nature of its public lavatories. Architect Chris Briffa set out to challenge the normal concept of a public convenience by designing the Strait Street public lavatories so that they are not only hygienic and functional but are also exciting, colourful and of provocative design. That the Strait Street public convenience also captures the colour and zest of Strait Street in its glory days is an added bonus.

Chris Briffa has taken great pride in designing for a specific purpose in a specific place in an unusual way. Strait Street is the first of five public conveniences in Valletta to be given this highly original treatment. When Valletta becomes the European Capital of Culture in a few years' time, no space within it, no matter how mundane its function, should be overlooked and not considered as a designed space.

Mr Scicluna thanked all the contestants for their admirable contributions to the enhancement of Malta's rich architectural heritage, while Dr de Marco congratulated the winners on winning these prestigious awards. He stressed the importance to Malta's culture and tourism of ensuring the highest standards of architectural heritage, aesthetics and good design. He encouraged Maltese architects to continue working to safeguard Malta's outstanding cultural heritage and to participate in the *Din l-Art Helwa* Architectural Heritage Awards.

From left to right:  
Architect Chris Briffa, The Hon Dr Mario de Marco,  
Architect Aaron Abela and Martin Scicluna Vice President of DLH



# Europa Nostra's Endorsement of the Victoria Declaration

Martin Scicluna

*Din l-Art Helwa Vice President*



## INTERNATIONAL NATIONAL TRUSTS ORGANISATION

Delegates from 193 countries held a meeting for the 17<sup>th</sup> Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa from 28 November to 9 December 2011. On the agenda was a 'pathway' towards a cut in carbon emissions, a fund to help poor countries deal with the effects of climate change and protection measures against the effects of deforestation. After the huge disappointment following the much-hyped Copenhagen Conference two years ago, the prognosis for Durban was more modest. Yet the scientific evidence of global warming and climate change is now overwhelming and the need for action more urgent.

It is not too dramatic to state that if global warming continues on its upward path, and if climate change is not mitigated by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the world as we know it will be radically changed and the effects on Europe's cultural heritage will be significant. No one can predict the outcome of climate change, or its effects, with complete certainty. There are, indeed, legitimate concerns over particular details and effects. But scientists now know enough to understand the risks. Global warming is no longer a theoretical phenomenon. Its potential damage is no longer an abstract proposition.

I had the privilege of representing Europa Nostra, as well as *Din l-Art Helwa*, in Victoria, Canada at the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of International National Trusts (INTO). INTO occupies a unique role within the global heritage movement, bringing together natural and cultural heritage organisations from around the world, representing a constituency of well in excess of six million individual members across some 45 countries, and growing. Through alliances and affiliations with other organisations sharing a common concern for the global environment and cultural heritage, including Europa Nostra, the INTO voice speaks for tens of millions of people globally.

In Victoria, INTO returned to the issue of climate change which it had last addressed in Dublin two years earlier, in preparation for the presence of a delegation from INTO in Durban. Europa Nostra had strongly endorsed the Dublin Declaration on Climate Change in 2009.

Our discussions in Victoria focused on the aspect of climate change which we felt had hitherto been ignored by world leaders. This was the essential need for a necessary reform of United Nations procedures to incorporate far more effectively into the language of climate change a firm recognition that the integrity and survival of the cultures of all the peoples and nations of the world are threatened by climate change.

In the course of climate change debates and descriptions of its possible effects, world leaders frequently speak of consultation and seeking community consensus. Yet invariably climate change is simply expressed in terms of impacts on the physical environment (even though efforts are sometimes made to draw links to human health and welfare). But this is to miss the wood for the trees.

As a consequence of this limited perspective, communities are disconnected from understanding the full implications of climate change.

If the threat of climate change is largely described in terms of impacts on the physical environment, then the prospect of achieving global consensus for action to avert climate change will always fall short. However, if the effects of climate change are also couched in terms of culture – of societal values, customs, heritage, civilisations and achievements of particular peoples – then there is likely to be greater responsiveness across the global community.

Put in terms of cultural heritage and sustainability, the path to wider community understanding and so support for climate change action (be it mitigation or adaptation) should be more achievable. There will be a greater willingness to embrace essential reforms if the effects are seen in terms of the cultural, human and societal impacts.

In the light of the realisation that the failure hitherto to communicate the threat of climate change in terms that describe the dire implications for cultural sustainability and that this fundamentally weakens the prospects for global reform to combat climate change, the Victoria Declaration on the Implications for Cultural Sustainability of Climate Change was adopted by members of INTO, including *Din l-Art Helwa*, in order to underline to world leaders assembled in Durban in December that what is at stake is not just economic, social and political issues but that cultural heritage is also in jeopardy and social sustainability is at risk.

The reality is that climate change will affect social sustainability. It will fundamentally jeopardise cultural practices, in our case practices which are uniquely European. It will undermine connectivity with place – what makes the various different countries and regions of Europe different and what makes Europe what it is. If the integrity of the world's cultures is destabilised then social dislocation and social instability will follow.

In the words of the Victoria Declaration: "For the sake of future generations, we must collectively tackle climate change not just because of changes in the physical environment, not just for reasons of sustaining human health and welfare, but to recognise that the core strength and connectivity of all the socio-economic systems of human-kind, lies in maintaining cultural sustainability".

*The Victoria Declaration on the Implications for Cultural Sustainability of Climate Change was adopted by members of the International National Trusts Organisation ('INTO') and other delegates representing cultural and natural heritage organisations gathered in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada on 12-15 October 2011 for the 14th International Conference of National Trusts: the theme of which was Connecting People, Places and Stories – New Strategies for Conservation in a Changing World.*

# Restoring Malta's Pauline Heritage

*James Licari and Joe Azzopardi*

The figure of St Paul occupies a central role in the cultural patrimony of the Maltese Islands, and not just from the religious aspect. It was because of St Paul that Malta has a mention in one of the fundamental books which shaped European culture. He is also identified as the original point of contact between Malta and the Christian faith – which would have such a central role in the historical vicissitudes of these islands. Finally, for many centuries he was invoked as the greatest protector of Malta and its people. As a result, physical representations of St Paul are found all over the Maltese Islands. Within this nation-wide distribution the cult of St Paul also had two important geographical focus points, the Mdina/Rabat area, with the cathedral and the complex of St Paul's Grotto, and St Paul's Bay, with the two churches of *San Pawl Milqgħi* (dedicated to the welcoming of St Paul) and *San Pawl tal-Ħġeġġeġ* (St Paul of the Bonfires).

Although always enjoying great popularity, the Pauline cult was greatly invigorated – and, to an extent, even institutionalised – by the Knights of St John during their rule. This came about for various reasons, including the socio-political situation arising from the Catholic Counter Reformation and the opportunistic attitudes of the Order, which felt a continuous and increasing need to boost its prestige within the European arena. The Order, in the person of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (1601-1622), went to great lengths to obtain control of St Paul's Grotto and the church of *San Pawl tal-Ħġeġġeġ* from Pope Paul V (Camillo Borghese 1605-1621).<sup>1</sup> Having reached his aim in 1617, Wignacourt endowed the grotto with a rich purse of landed property, mainly located in Gozo, to give it an ever-increasing status<sup>2</sup>.

Following the departure of the Order in 1798, and the establishment of British rule in 1814, the Pauline cult was again presented by the local Roman Catholic Church as a focal point around which to collect its faithful in opposition to the Protestant creed of the new overlords. To lift the cult to new heights, the Maltese diocese sought – and obtained – an important Pauline relic in the form of a portion of the Saint's decapitation column conserved in the church of *San Paolo Alle Tre Fontane* in Rome. This was donated by Pope Pius VII (Barnaba Niccolo Chiaramonti 1800-1823) to the collegiate church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta and reached Malta in May 1818<sup>3</sup>. Twenty-seven years later, a monumental statue representing St Paul was raised on the small island which, according to popular tradition, is where the saint was shipwrecked in AD 60. An alternative hypothesis to this popular belief is that St Paul was shipwrecked off the coast of Qawra while making for the port – long since silted up – located in Burmarrad<sup>4</sup>.

That the Pauline cult had flourished over the centuries was manifestly apparent when this statue became the centre of the celebrations – in the presence of thousands of the faithful – held to mark the 1,900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the shipwreck.

The celebrations of the Pauline Year presented yet another opportunity for the dioceses of Malta and Gozo to once again give a public manifestation to the historical thread that links them to St Paul. Heritage-ResCo, a company that supplies heritage protection-related services, was involved in five restoration projects relating to items connected to the Pauline cult, namely, a marble holy water stoup depicting St Paul, the '*Għajn Rażul*' fountain, two marble statues of St Paul in St Paul's Grotto, and the statue of St Paul on St Paul's Island.

The studies, restoration work and related reports were all undertaken by Ingrid Ross, managing director of Heritage-ResCo, James Licari and Frank Chetcuti, who is a conservator and was the co-ordinator of vocational training at Heritage Malta.

*The celebrations of the Pauline Year, which ran from June 2008 to June 2009, presented the opportunity for the start of various restoration projects regarding items that pertain to the cult of St Paul in Malta. In this article, Joe Azzopardi delves into the historical aspects of some of these artefacts, while James Licari of Heritage-ResCo reports on some of the interesting discoveries made as a result of the restoration work.*

**All photographs are provided by James Licari**

Holy water stoup depicting St Paul





The restored holy water stoup set in the wall of the church of the Nativity of the Virgin

### Holy water stoup depicting St Paul

This marble stoup, which dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century, comes from the small church of the Nativity of the Virgin (*ta' Qasgha*) in Rabat. However, it is possible that it might have originally been used in the old parish church of Rabat, which was also dedicated to St Paul<sup>5</sup>. It is 79cm long, including the support, 18cm high, and presents a fluted decoration with a rosette on the underside. The front section is decorated with two winged cherub heads between which is a medallion with a seated figure of St Paul holding an upright sword and an armorial shield bearing the devise of the Mdina Municipality<sup>6</sup>. The stoup is attributed to the Gagini workshop of Palermo.

The restoration process entailed dismantling the stoup from its wall setting in order to place waterproofing material around the embedded marble in order to reduce the deterioration caused by water exposure through capillary action. When the stoup was removed, it was discovered that the section of marble embedded in the wall was a representation of a hand bearing the font. This had been extensively damaged, possibly during an earlier restoration undertaken in the chapel, and only the upper part of the hand and thumb are still visible.

Following the restoration of the marble stoup, which was sponsored by Heritage ResCo and carried out in liaison with Mons. John Azzopardi, it was replaced in its original wall setting with the rediscovered hand detail left exposed. It was later transferred to the Wigncourt Museum, where it is now on display.

### The Ghajn Rażul Fountain in St Paul's Bay

This fountain plays an important part in the tradition that identifies St Paul's Bay as the place where the apostle Paul was shipwrecked. As a centuries-old popular belief would have it, when the apostle and his fellow travellers were shipwrecked here, the inhabitants of the Island offered their assistance in the form of clothes, food and water. When it emerged that the amount of water was insufficient, St Paul lifted his staff and hit the ground three times, causing a spring to begin to flow.

It is not certain when the fountain was first erected, but its antiquity may be deduced from the appellation 'Ghajn Rażul' meaning 'Fount of the Apostle'. In fact "rażul" is a very old word and is thought to be a derivative of the Arab word for apostle. An old photograph shows that the lower part of the fountain was originally carved out of what looks like a single block of probably ancient granite of unknown provenance<sup>7</sup>. Within this granite block, and also close to it, were located two troughs which collected the water of the spring.

The old fountain was described by Gian Frangisk Abela in his *Della Descrittione di Malta* first published in 1647. He writes that the fountain bore an inscription in Latin which translated as:

Under this hollow rock  
which you see near the waves  
is a flowing water spring.  
You who are passing  
venerate this fountain  
because its waters were bestowed to you  
by St Paul after being shipwrecked here.

The fountain was remodelled in 1725, when the upper part was added. This consists of a vertical pedestal accommodating a small niche, housing a statue of St Paul, at its upper extremity. The pedestal is flanked by corner Doric pilasters over which are set narrow pyramidal finials. The capitals of the pilasters are joined by an open arched pediment which constitutes the upper section of the niche. This is surmounted by a cross. On the face of the pedestal, underneath the niche, is a shield with the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Anton Manuel de Vilhena (1722-1736). Beneath the coat of arms is the inscription:

OMNES GENTES  
VENIENT, ET  
GLORIFICABUNT  
NOMINE TUUM. PSAL.85.  
ANNO DNI. MDCCXXV

*Which translates into:*

All the people come  
and venerate your name. Psalm 85.  
The year of the lord 1725.

Old photograph showing the Ghajn Rażul Fountain as published in *San Pawl il-Bahar – A Guide* by Eugene Theuma





This historical fountain was moved, and partially destroyed, during road-widening work in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from the physical damage inflicted, this operation also separated the fountain from the shore – which was one of its fundamental characteristics. It was probably at this stage that the antique lower section was lost and replaced by the poor quality masonry structure we see today. The fountain was included in the Antiquities List of 1932.

Stone surface cleaning carried out in the course of the restoration, which was co-sponsored by *Din l-Art Helwa* and St Paul’s Bay Local Council, revealed the letters ‘F S’ surmounting the letters ‘G M’ within the niche behind the statue of St Paul. The ‘F S’ might identify the craftsman who was commissioned to move the monument, while ‘G M’ might stand for ‘Government of Malta’. Also, in the course of cleaning the statue, the conservators discovered some evidence of an inscription on its base. This was confirmed as being linked to the inscription described by Gian Frangisk Abela.

**The statues of St Paul in St Paul’s Grotto**

Certainly, the most important Pauline shrine of the Maltese Islands is the subterranean St Paul’s Grotto. This is part of – and gave origin to – the extensive architectural complex of St Paul Outside The Walls in Rabat. Tradition holds that this man-made grotto was where the apostle Paul was detained during his three-month stay in Malta. Following the Council of Trent, and the initiation of the Counter Reformation, the grotto assumed an important role in the promotion of the Pauline cult throughout Christian Europe. It was popularly believed that the rock from which the grotto was formed had been infused by St Paul with protective and curative powers against poisoning and that it continuously regenerated, so that no matter how much rock was chipped off, the cave remained the same size. These rock chippings were known as “*Pietra or Terra di San Paolo*”, “*Terra Sigillata Melitensis*” and also as “The Grace of St Paul”. Stone chippings from the grotto were made into anti-poison cups, medals and votive tablets, or powdered and added to small amounts of water or wine and drunk. *Terra Sigillata* attained international fame, mainly due to travelogues, botanical and medical treatises and handbills extolling its protective and curative powers<sup>8</sup>.

Between 1653 and 1683, the complex was the object of a total renovation in the baroque style mainly to designs by Francesco Buonamici (1596-1677) and Lorenzo Cafà (1639-1703). In 1666, Melchiorre Cafà (1636-1667) was commissioned to sculpt a statue of St Paul in alabaster to stand on the altar within the grotto. The figure was completed by Ercole Ferrata (1610-1686) following Cafà’s untimely death. It arrived from Rome in September 1669 together with 10 loads of marble to be used for facing of the altar and two kneelers showing the coat of arms of Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner (1663-1680) which delineated the chancel. This was already paved in marble using material that was acquired by the chaplains from a structure dating back to classical times<sup>9</sup>.



Representation of St Paul on the Ghajn Razul Fountain before restoration



Fine cut and wedge within the head of the statue of St Paul on the altar of St Paul’s Grotto discovered during restoration

During the restoration work, a deliberate cut, pointed with lime, was revealed along the line of the scalp of the statue which could thus be removed from the rest of the head. The conservation team studied this anomaly in depth and eventually decided to gently and gradually open it up to see what could have been the reason for separating the scalp from the rest of the head. It was clear that this was not merely an accidental breakage that had been repaired, but that the statue had been carved this way intentionally. This was evident from the very fine cut, and the marble wedge within the head itself. The conservators worked meticulously and with great care not to damage or chip the marble.

Once the area was fully cleaned, the conservators discovered that the scalp did not simply detach, but could only be removed or re-attached by means of a sliding technique, involving a wedged section, ensuring that the detachable part would always return to its intended position. This provided a further indication that it had been done intentionally. Furthermore, the marble selected for the scalp seemed identical to the rest of the statue.

This discovery prompted a number of questions and hypotheses such as the following:

- Could it be that there was a fault in the marble block and the sculptor decided to replace that part with a similar attached piece?
- Was the head cut open intentionally to insert a relic or a religious stigma within it? (If so, why was nothing found in the space?)
- Could the statue have suffered damage while being transported to Malta and a Maltese sculptor was employed to restore it, with marble also being sent over with the statue consignment? (This may explain the use of visually identical marble).
- Could the statue have been broken while a hole for a halo was being drilled and it was restored by this means to avoid further damage to the scalp? (If so, then why does St Paul still not have a halo?)
- Could it be that the statue was damaged and repaired during the extension work carried out to the cave?
- Was the damage done, and repair carried out, in Malta or Rome where the statue was originally sculpted?

If such damage occurred, requiring repairs, this would in all likelihood have been recorded, but no documentation has surfaced to prove or disprove any of the above hypotheses.

Another statue of St Paul was commissioned for the grotto by Grand Master Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1773). This was completed in 1753 and set directly on the ground in the inner chamber of the grotto. This statue was also the subject of conservation and study. It was discovered that part of the drapery on the right side of the figure is missing and that the statue had been previously repaired.

For a time, it was believed that this statue replaced an older one of unknown authorship and provenance that was incorporated in the baroque façade of St Paul's church, and is now in the Wignacourt Museum. However, the older statue is documented as having been already on the façade in 1736. This older statue also benefited from conservation work by James Licari and Robert Cassar (curator of the Palace Armoury) when working with another restoration firm. This representation of St Paul produced an interesting discovery as it

became apparent that it had been carved out of a re-utilised classical Roman cornice, evidence of which can be seen on the back of the statue<sup>10</sup>.

The restoration of the two marble statues in St Paul's Grotto was sponsored by a private individual and carried out under the authority of the Collegiate Chapter of St Paul, Rabat and the Commission of Sacred Art in liaison with Archpriest Fr Louis Suban and Mons. John Azzopardi.

### The statue of St Paul on St Paul's Island

The enduring popularity of the cult of St Paul is probably best embodied by the monumental statue that was erected on St Paul's Island in 1845. It represented an explicit message directed at the relatively new British overlords to the effect that the Roman Catholic faith still endured in Malta, notwithstanding the cultural and political upheavals, both local and international, of the preceding decades. What better way to demonstrate such endurance than by honouring the saint who was universally credited with having brought that same faith to the Maltese shores.

The appeal for funds began in 1843. The intention behind the erection of the statue is obvious when it is considered that two subscription lists were drawn up – one for people who were considered members of higher society and the other for residents of the three cities. This had to be, without question, a collective effort of all the faithful across all the social strata<sup>11</sup>. The committee for the raising of the necessary funds consisted of Fr Francesco Caruana Dingli, Dr Michele Parnis, Filippo Busuttill, Vincenzo Spiteri and, above all, Salvatore Borg – who donated 100 skudi and also bequeathed funds for the upkeep of the statue<sup>12</sup>. Such generosity merited him a reference in the inscription that was eventually attached to the statue.



The work on the figure was entrusted to Sigismondo Dimech (1780-1853) of Valletta and his assistant Salvatore Dimech (1805-1887) from Lija, while the pedestal was crafted by Francesco Spiteri<sup>13</sup>. The five blocks of globigerina limestone for the statue came at a cost of 171 skudi, while the sculptors' fee was 333 skudi. The pedestal, made out of second grade travertine, increased the cost by an additional 1,150 skudi. The component parts of the monument were ready by September 1844 but only half the necessary funds had been collected<sup>14</sup>. The statue was solemnly inaugurated on 21 September 1845 in the presence of the parish priest of Mellieħa, the clergy of the church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta, and a considerable crowd.

The south-facing statue stands on a base which, in turn, rests on a high pedestal. The rectangular, and vertically aligned, pedestal rises on a three-step podium and has Doric corner pilasters supporting an entablature and panelled sections on each face. The saint is seen holding his iconographic symbols – the sword and the book – in his left hand, while the right arm is raised. A flame, from which originally a viper emerged, is set at the foot of the statue. The overall design follows what were by then outdated, baroque aesthetic principals, with the saint shown wearing a long-sleeved tunic over which is wrapped an agitated convolution of drapery forming a cloak. The same feel for movement is echoed in the waves formed by the hair and long beard of the apostle. This was the artistic style favoured by the Roman Catholic Church.

The monument rose to an overall height of 12.3 metres, 8.3 metres of which were taken up by the pedestal. The Latin inscription was composed by Dun G Zammit (aka Brighella) and translates as follows:

“To the Apostle Saint Paul, Master and Doctor of the Church of all People, Father and Patron of the Maltese. This statue rises in the same place where he was shipwrecked – together with 275 others – on this Island where he had to come and teach the faith of Christ, as his friend Saint Luke says in the Acts of the Apostles Chap. XXVII (27). Salvatore Borg, in memory of this event – in the year 1845 – worked hard for its erection.”

The exposed location of the monument meant that it soon began to deteriorate. The statue suffered from both weathering and vandalism. The left arm was replaced in 1960 on the occasion of the Pauline Centenary celebrations, which saw St Paul's Island as the converging point of a nation-wide pilgrimage held on 15 July<sup>15</sup>. But this was rather a cosmetic operation.

*Din l-Art Helwa*, sponsored by Nazzareno Vassallo and Vassallo Builders, initiated a first restoration project in 1995. The monument was found to have badly deteriorated. The left arm was about to fall and most of the fingers on the hand of the right, outstretched, arm were missing. Large gaps, which in some areas were up to an inch wide and two-thirds-of-an-inch deep, were visible between the blocks from which the statue had been made. The loss of mortar joints meant that the various blocks had come completely, or partially, apart and the whole structure was in danger of collapse. The right hand and forearm had been redone in concrete and the marble block bearing the inscription was found shattered.

Traces of at least four previous restorations were identified. In one case at least, the restoration technique used could at best be described as crude. Large stone chippings had been forcibly embedded in the open joints deflecting the original axis of the upper bust<sup>16</sup>. The restorer appointed to carry out the 1995 restoration was Godwin Xuereb of Rabat, under the direction of architect Michael Ellul. Before being aesthetically restored, the statue had to be made structurally sound. This was obtained by the insertion of no fewer than 18 structural keys in various areas. A replica of the marble block carrying the inscription was made at the government's marble workshop<sup>17</sup>.

A second restoration project, once again initiated by *Din l-Art Helwa*, sponsored by Vassallo Builders, was carried out in 2007. The conservators of Heritage-ResCo noted that expandable foam, a product that is no longer used in conservation/restoration, had been used in the past to fill in gaps and other missing features. Most of this expandable foam has been removed and new lime-based mortar was introduced within the mortar joints. The surviving part of the viper in the flames was also identified.

A common aspect that emerged from the various restoration projects referred to in this article is the need for constant conservation undertakings in the heritage field. As seen, apart from physically improving a particular artefact, such projects are also a means of allowing in-depth studies to be carried out. From the conservator-restorer point of view, James Licari would like to emphasize the need for constant maintenance and to point out that conservation-restoration does not make a monument or artefact 'cured' for life but mainly serves to prolong its life for present and future generations. As they say in English: "Prevention is better than cure".

### James Licari

*James Licari is a conservator-restorer at Heritage Malta, President of the Malta Association of Professional Conservator-Restorers (MAPCo-Re), Vice-President of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-Malta), secretary of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS-Malta) and a member of various NGOs.*

opposite bottom:

The statue of St Paul on St Paul's Island undergoing restoration

### footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ibid
- <sup>2</sup> Heritage Fragments, Joe Azzopardi, *Din l-Art Helwa* 2010
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid
- <sup>4</sup> James Licari, personal communication
- <sup>5</sup> St Paul in Malta, Editors John Azzopardi and Anthony Pace, OPM 2010
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid
- <sup>7</sup> SAN PAWL IL-BAHAR – A Guide, Eugene Theuma, Saint Paul's Bay Local Council 2003
- <sup>8</sup> St Paul's Grotto and its Visitors, Thomas Freller, Valletta Publishing Ltd, 1996
- <sup>9</sup> Roman Baroque Sculpture, Keith Sciberras, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2004
- <sup>10</sup> James Licari, personal communication
- <sup>11</sup> S Farrugia Randon, Heritage Saved, *Din l-Art Helwa* 2002
- <sup>12</sup> S Farrugia Randon and R Farrugia Randon, Comino, Filfla and St. Paul's Islands, 1995
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid
- <sup>15</sup> S Farrugia Randon and R Farrugia Randon, Comino, Filfla and St. Paul's Islands, 1995
- <sup>16</sup> S Farrugia Randon, Heritage Saved, *Din l-Art Helwa* 2002
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid



Like most things which survive the test of time and last well beyond their period of origin, the early form of *muxrabija* had a very basic functional purpose. Few people, in fact, would think that the *muxrabija* originated as an archaic refrigeration device. The original word for *muxrabija*, which is still in use in Arab countries, is *mashrabiya*. As is inferred by its Arabic root, 'shin-raa-ba', *mashrabiya* is probably derived from the verb *xariba* (to drink) and refers to a "place of drinking". This term, apart from securely placing its origin in the Arab cultural context, perfectly describes the function of the perforated screens that would eventually evolve into the *muxrabija* – that is, a place to keep drinking water cool<sup>1</sup>. An alternative theory, however, claims that the word *mashrabiya* is, in fact, a corruption of the word 'mashrafiya', which is derived from the verb *ashrafa*, meaning to overlook or to observe. These diverging theories clearly exemplify the duality of the origin of the Arabic *mashrabiya* which, in fact, probably originated as a place where drinking water was stored and eventually evolved into a means by which the outside world could be discreetly observed.

### The Origins

The earliest records referring to the *mashrabiya* date back to the 7th century<sup>2</sup> and place it solidly within the Arab sphere of influence. These consisted of lattice screens, sometimes including a projecting compartment referred to as a *roshan*<sup>3</sup>, behind which clay pots containing drinking water were placed. Thanks to the alternation of solid and empty areas, these screens provided an ingenious combination of shade and ventilation which were the key to the cooling effect being sought. These screens also helped to soften the sharp sunlight that is characteristic of the North African and Mediterranean areas, thus also helping control room temperatures. Quickly growing in size and popularity, these screens spread rapidly on all sides of the Mediterranean basin and into the east – eventually covering an area encompassed between Spain and India where similar climatic conditions, together with a marked Islamic influence, prevailed.

Having spread across many different geographic areas and cultures, the concept of the *muxrabija* proved to be a versatile one that could be adapted to different requirements. To the Arabs, the characteristics of the *muxrabijiet* appealed beyond its original function concerned with climate control, with the realisation that it could also be useful in the social sphere. It provided the perfect device by which to enforce the rigid gender segregation that is such a fundamental aspect of Arab culture whilst at the same time creating a link between female members of society and the world outside their domestic confines. This led to the development, particularly in 14th

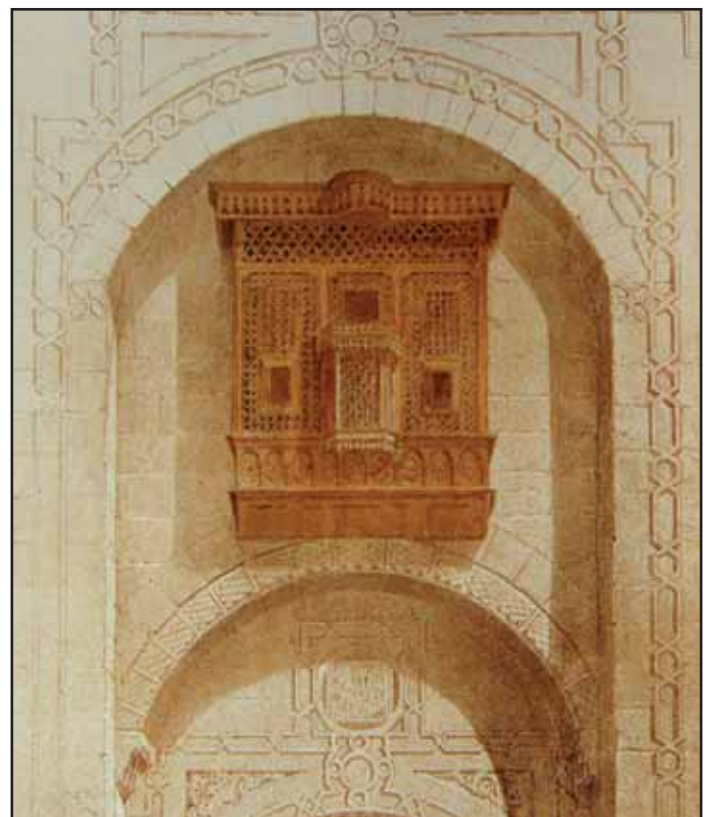
# A Survey of the M

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century Egypt, of enclosed balconies – also defined as *mashrabiya* – made up of such screens. These were often made from hundreds of parts in precious woods imported from Lebanon and Asia Minor<sup>4</sup> and constituted one of the few elements that connected an otherwise introverted architecture to the outside world.

Where the question of gender segregation was not a primary issue, the *mashrabiya* developed into a means of increasing privacy and security. The provision of a window on the outside without exposing the person behind the screen offered many advantages which also found applications in the military ambit. This concept was again developed by the Arabs themselves into the *mushrabiya* found on many of their fortifications dating back to the early Middle Ages. The concept was introduced to western culture by the crusaders who had fought in the Holy Land and developed into the *box-machicoulis*. These consist of overhanging structures similar to corbel-supported balconies, with floor openings defined as 'machicolation', through which material could be dropped on attackers at the base of a wall<sup>5</sup>.

In Malta these appeared on a number of private towers that had been built by land owners to afford some protection to their estates and households from the occasional corsair raids and which become popularly known as *Torrijiet tal-Mishun*<sup>6</sup>. One such structure is Torre Gauci in Naxxar. The tower, which overlooks St Paul's Bay, was built in 1548 for Francesco Gauci<sup>7</sup>. The uppermost section consists of a parapet wall with alternating box-machicoulis and musketry loopholes. So strategic was the position of Torre Gauci that Grand Master de Valette (1557-1568) tried to requisition it. When this attempt failed, the Order constructed a similar tower – the first tower to be built by the Knights in Malta – in the area: *Torre del Capitano*. In some ways this resembled other towers built by the Order in Rhodes during the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup> and also included a machicolated parapet.



# Maltese Muxrabijiet

zopardi

opposite top:

Polygonal hood *muxrabija*  
in Misrah Vitmi tal-Gwerra,  
Siggiewi

opposite bottom:

An Egyptian *mashrabiya*.  
Detail from a 19<sup>th</sup> century  
lithography by David Roberts  
representing the entrance to a  
private mansion in Cairo

below:

Corbels and slab *muxrabija*,  
Trejjet San Pulpulju,  
Ta' Ghammar, Ghasri

Another interesting feature of the Torre del Capitano is the *piombatoio* at first-floor level. This is a sort of enclosed balcony from where a discreet eye could be kept on anyone approaching the tower. So at this tower can be observed both the military and social function that evolved from the Arabic *mashrabiya*. Both these functions were sometimes amalgamated in the box-*machicoulis* themselves, which often also included spy holes for keeping an eye on the surrounding territory such as at it-*Torri Kavalier* in Qrendi. These spy holes were often large enough to enable the use of firearms, thus also serving as musketry loopholes.

The box-*machicoulis* were a characteristic of fortifications of the Middle Ages and became largely obsolete with the development of artillery warfare, which moved back the line of engagement to the distance covered by cannon fire. However, the alternative function of the Arab *mashrabiya*, that of observing without being observed, would be the aspect of the Maltese *muxrabija* that would endure over the years and allow it to survive, even if outwardly transformed, beyond its earlier military applications to become a recurring element in domestic architecture.

## Gourgion Tower

There was an instance, however, where the shape of the box-*machicoulis* was directly adopted for the design of a series of *muxrabijiet*. It is not surprising that such a fusion occurred in a building that was halfway between a domestic residence and a military outpost – the late 17<sup>th</sup> century Gourgion Tower – more a fortified farmhouse than a tower that was built for Giovanni Gourgion on the outskirts of Xaghra.

Gourgion was a Gozitan nobleman who had held the combined posts of *Secreto* and *Capitano della Verga*<sup>9</sup>. He was also a friend of Grand Master Adrien de Wignacourt (1690-1697) who participated in the opening of the Gourgion Tower in 1690<sup>10</sup>. Certainly, one of the most outstanding features of the Gourgion Tower was a series of eight small balconies designed in the shape of box-*machicoulis* attached to the parapet wall. These included a permanent masonry base and were therefore not meant to be used for bombarding attacking forces. Each balcony, however,





*Muxrabijiet* of the Gourgion Tower.  
Photo courtesy of the  
National Museum of Archaeology

opposite top:  
Vertical body *muxrabija*  
on a rural structure  
along the road leading  
from Siġġiewi to Rabat

opposite bottom:  
*Gifna*-type stone *muxrabija*  
Sqaq 3, off Triq is-Siġġiewi,  
Zebbuġ

Remains of corbels and slab *muxrabija*,  
Triq il-Madonna tal-Karmnu,  
Rabat (Gozo)



had a series of seven small and three large perforations distributed on its three sides which functioned as spy holes and musketry loopholes, qualifying them as fully functional *muxrabijiet*. An additional feature, with a similar function, was also inserted over the main entrance to the building. This consisted of a stone slab perforated by an alternation of seven round and five square spy/musketry holes, which ensured that anybody approaching the property would be receive in a way befitting their intentions. Unfortunately, the Gourgion Tower was demolished between 16 and 20 June 1943<sup>11</sup>.

### The Maltese *muxrabijiet*

Although not a local invention, in Malta the *muxrabija* responded to a series of regional environmental, social and historical realities that were common throughout the Mediterranean, such as the constant threat of external assault and the vulnerability of rural areas. These, together with the insular reality of the archipelago, provided a fertile environment in which the *muxrabija* could flourish. The *muxrabija* was popular mostly in villages and rural areas, the inhabitants of which lived away from the security afforded by the fortifications of the harbour area. This is evident in the geographic distribution of the surviving examples. Apart from this, the threats were not exclusively external, such as corsair raids and the like, but also internal in the form of banditry, which was often beyond the control of the central administration. In this context, the *muxrabija* is a physical manifestation of the constant perception of insecurity.

This state of affairs fostered the development of devices by which people could keep watch over areas in their immediate vicinity. Particular attention was paid to the observation of doorways and the streets approaching a person's residence. For these reasons, *muxrabijiet* were generally placed in such a way as to offer the best view of the areas that were intended to be kept under surveillance. They are often located at high points – directly over doorways or at the entrance of alleys. Internally, they often correspond to the location of a staircase. The closest western architectural element to the Maltese *muxrabija* is the oriel window, a form of bay window commonly found in Gothic architecture. Like the oriel window, the *muxrabija* projects from the wall of the building at various courses above ground level, often supported on corbels or brackets. It consists of a projecting window screen, in stone or timber, with various perforations intended to serve as peepholes.

A particularly interesting aspect of the *muxrabija* is the considerable variety of names by which these window screens are known. Although '*muxrabija*' is the most enduring term, there are a considerable number of other appellations. Some of these are

closely connected to each other, often sharing a similar derivation verb, as is the case with *muxrafija* and *xerriefa* (both derived from the verb *tixref* – to look out) and *kixxiefa*, *kixxifija* or *kixxifejra* (derived from the verb *tikxef* – to uncover). Other terms used to identify the *muxrabija* are *rewwieħa* (derived from the verb *trewaħ* – to air or ventilate), *glusija* (from the French *jalousie* meaning envy) and, most importantly, *seksieka* and *nemmiesa* (derived from the verbs *isseksek* and *tnemmes* – both meaning to pry). These different definitions are all related to the function of the *muxrabija* but are also a testimony to changing perceptions of it. This is particularly true for the term *nemmiesa*. *Nemmiesa* is, in fact, the most commonly used term among the recent past generations<sup>12</sup>. This may be derived from the fact that although the threat of raids had completely receded by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the *muxrabija* did not, having lost its



security function, fade out but instead gained a renewed popularity. This was because it had, by then, regained its original social function of affording a discreet observation of the outside world that is best defined in Maltese as *tnemmies*.

As seen, the Maltese *muxrabijiet* evolved from the Arab original but after considerable evolution developed features that make local specimens uniquely Maltese in character. With some few exceptions, the most striking characteristic is the frugality manifest in the design. While in the Arab world the *mashrabiya* is often a status symbol, the Maltese *muxrabija* is a discreet utilitarian accessory.

The clearest classification criteria for the Maltese *muxrabijiet* is the material out of which they are crafted, this being either stone or timber. Such a classification system is being used in this article with further sub-grouping for each class. In the case of stone *muxrabijiet*, sub-grouping is simply based on appearance, while the criteria used for timber ones is based on the type of frontage. Dating *muxrabijiet* is often difficult, and although the older existing ones are of stone, these continued to be built even when timber became the material of choice. On the other hand, as timber is a far more perishable material than stone, some of the surviving timber *muxrabijiet* may be replacements of older timber, or even stone, examples.

### Stone Muxrabijiet

Whether it was the durability of the material, the local confidence in working in stone, or the continuous shortage of wood that was such a determining factor in the development of the stone-based local building industry, the older surviving *muxrabijiet* are made of stone. In their scope and design, these are closer to the original military *mashrabiya* than their timber counterparts – although many variants have been derived from the original, fairly homogenous, stone examples. Some display a considerable degree of sophistication, being elaborately designed and crafted out of a single stone block or being made up of different masonry elements.

Stone *muxrabijiet* have attained what might be defined as a distinctive local character as a result of being produced from a quintessentially Maltese material, thus easily becoming an intrinsic part of the local landscape. Apart from one particular instance in

Balzan, which will be touched upon later in this article, 15 stone *muxrabijiet* have survived. With two exceptions, they can be broadly classified as falling under the following categories:

- Corbels and slab: two examples
- Polygonal hood body: five examples
- Rectangular vertical body: four examples
- Ġifna (trough) body: two examples

Corbels and slab *muxrabijiet* are probably the oldest type, being very simple structures fundamentally inspired by the box-*machicoulis* design. Furthermore, they consist of an assembly of various architectural elements, all of which were commonly found on vernacular buildings. These consist of a transverse stone slab resting on two plain corbels. An additional stone slab, functioning as a screen, is set slanting vertically from the outer edge of the corbels and resting on the façade. This arrangement results in lateral triangular viewing spaces on both sides. An additional viewing point is normally located at the base in order to permit a view of the area immediately underneath the *muxrabija*.

Apart from their derivation from the box-*machicoulis*, corbels and slab *muxrabijiet* might also represent a direct evolution of a surveillance technique formerly very common on vernacular buildings. When a *muxrabija* was not opted for, an equivalent was sought through a “*tieqa taż-żewġ ħarrigiet*” (two-corbelled window). This consisted of a small window, often found above the main door of the building, which was flanked on either side of the base by a small corbel. A transverse stone slab was often placed between the corbels leaving a gap between the wall masonry and the slab and thus allowing the person at the window a view of the entrance area beneath<sup>13</sup>.

A good example of corbels and slab *muxrabija* can be seen in Trejjet San Pulpulju, in Ta’ Ghammar, Ghasri. The *muxrabija* overlooks an arched door and is located at a height of approximately 11 courses. A wide rectangular opening has been cut from the transverse stone slab to act as a spy hole. Carol Jaccarini records the fact that a piece of wood, that could be moved back and forth to act as a shutter to open a narrow peephole, was once inserted over this opening<sup>14</sup>. The building to which the *muxrabija* is attached forms part of a small enclave largely surrounded by open countryside.

A more sophisticated, and so probably later, version of corbels and slab *muxrabija* survives, even if only partially intact, in Triq il-Madonna tal-Karmnu, Rabat, Gozo, within the *mandragio*



area. This *muxrabija* overlooks a wide arched doorway which has replaced a traditional doorway, parts of which are still visible, and is located at a height of approximately 18 courses. The elements of the *muxrabija* that still exist consist of two inverted pyramidal corbels and a peephole in the sill of the window next to the corbel on the right. On the elevation, corresponding to the line of sight of the peephole over the former door, is a widening funnel-shaped groove carved out of the masonry. It is probable that the *muxrabija* included a transverse stone slab resting across the corbels and a vertical slab having its lower edge resting on the corbels and its upper edge resting against the façade so as to act as a screen obliterating the person at the window from view. This possibility gains further weight when considering the urban context of the building which faces an opening in the urban fabric and an approaching road thus providing ample opportunity for passers by to locate any person at the window and rendering an unscreened *muxrabija* useless.

The largest number of surviving stone *muxrabijiet* fall under the polygonal hood category and are distributed between Żabbar, Marsascula, Siġġiewi and Ghasri. The ones in Marsascula constitute the only occurrence of twin stone *muxrabijiet* in Malta. They are located on the garden wall of a fortified farmhouse, adjacent to the parish church, in the area known as Ta' Monita. The *muxrabijiet* are placed on either side of a segmental headed doorway at a height of approximately 11 courses. They present an irregular polygonal profile and include five rectangular peepholes on the front and a larger peephole on each side. The one on the left has five more square peepholes at the bottom. The corresponding bottom section of the *muxrabija* on the right-hand side appears to have been replaced, resulting in the loss of the bottom peepholes.

The Ghasri polygonal stone *muxrabija* is probably the most iconic example in the Maltese Islands, having been featured in various publications. It is indeed a spectacular specimen of stonework which, unlike most other *muxrabijiet* – which were naturally intended to be inconspicuous – never fails to attract people's attention. It is attached to a building in vernacular style at the end of Triq il-Muxrabija (formerly Triq il-Fanal). The building stands between the areas known as Il-Wilga and Ta' Cremona. The *muxrabija* overlooks an arched door and is located at a height of approximately 13 courses. It is shaped as a flat-sided hood with a tilted front, tapering inwards from the base to the top, and rests on a pair of quarter round corbels. The corbels are decorated – one with a Latin cross rendered in low relief and the other with an incised circle. The *muxrabija* appears to have been made from five separate stone slabs (excluding the corbels). Both the front and the sides are characterised by louvered viewing slits, 18 on the front and six on each side. The left side, which faces the approach road, also includes a plain vertical observation slit. In contrast to the ornate central sections, the base and top slabs are very plain. The section of the base between the corbels is heavily eroded and an additional stone slab has been placed over it from inside. Unfortunately, the *muxrabija* appears in a bad state of preservation with potentially harmful cement pointing noticeable in many places.

The four rectangular vertical body *muxrabijiet* that still exist are located in Balzan, Lija and Żebbuġ, and one on the road between Siġġiewi and Rabat. As their classification implies, these are vertically aligned rectangular stone structures, often including a cover. Although all falling under the same category, these *muxrabijiet* provide good examples of how a single architectural element may appear in several variations, depending on the context in which it is used.

The *muxrabija* attached to a rural structure, set on a rock outcrop along the road leading from Siġġiewi to Rabat, has the most basic and functional of designs, reflecting its remote location. It consists of three plain vertical surfaces each housing a plain rectangular peephole. The base slab constitutes the only decorative element, having a bevelled edge moulding, while the cover is formed by a tapering stone slab protruding beyond the vertical surfaces and intended to deflect rainwater.



Polygonal stone *muxrabija*,  
Triq il-Muxrabija, Ghasri

opposite:  
Rectangular vertical body *muxrabija*,  
Sqaq 1, Triq Hali,  
Żebbuġ





The Balzan and Lija examples, which are attached to utilitarian vernacular buildings, are also simple structures reflecting the austerity of the buildings of which they form a part. The one in Balzan abuts the parapet wall of the two-storey building in Triq Wied Hal Balzan, opposite the cemetery. The *muxrabija* overlooks a square-headed door and is located at a height of approximately 22 courses, thus once commanding a wide-ranging unobstructed view. The lower section is crafted from a single stone block with bevelled edges, and round spy holes are located within the three faces and the base. The *muxrabija* is capped by a sloping cover consisting of two joined slabs leaning against the parapet wall which results in triangular shaped viewing spaces.

The *muxrabija* in Lija, unfortunately, is in a dilapidated state, having lost its lower elevation and left-hand lower corner. It is attached to a plain elevation running along Sqaq 1, Triq Mabel Strickland, and the remaining elements suggest a well proportioned, if unpretentious, structure.

The example in Żebbuġ, on the other hand, is on a building that was formerly part of a sizable *palazzo* in Triq Hali. It fully reflects its palatial setting, manifesting a deliberate attempt at embellishing what was normally a simple utilitarian feature, no doubt with a view to expressing the status and refinement of the owners. It is located at a height of approximately 24 courses and appears to be crafted out of a single stone block. The three vertical surfaces are decorated with oval mouldings emerging in relief from the stone background. Within these mouldings are funnel-shaped recessions, at the base of which are located round peepholes. There is an additional shallow moulding surrounding a peephole at the base, and there is no cover. Fortunately, this exquisitely crafted stone *muxrabija* is in a fair state of preservation.

*Ġifna* body type stone *muxrabijiet* are horizontally aligned rectangular stone structures which, if not perforated by peepholes or viewing slits, would look very much like a trough or tub. The term *ġifna* in fact refers to either a trough for livestock's drinking water or a tub for washing kitchen utensils. In the second instance, the *ġifna* was normally placed at first floor level, protruding from the façade in order to facilitate the disposal of dirty water, in a way very similar to a *muxrabija*.

Only two examples of *ġifna*-type stone *muxrabijiet* have survived – a well-preserved one in Żebbuġ and a partially preserved one on the outskirts of Siġġiewi. The one in Żebbuġ, located in Sqaq 3, off Triq is-Siġġiewi, is possibly the best preserved stone *muxrabija* on the Maltese Islands. It is set within a panelled section along the parapet wall which appears to have originally been conceived as the lower part of a window surround for a first floor elevation that was never built. The *muxrabija* appears to be crafted from a single stone block and comprises a series of rectangular, square and round peepholes distributed on all its sides, including oblique funnel-shaped peepholes and drill holes. It is covered by an additional stone slab that extends over the parapet wall.



A unique stone *muxrabija*  
in Triq l-Mdina,  
Siġġiewi

A unique stone *muxrabija*,  
Sqaq 12, Triq Santa Luċija,  
Naxxar



The partially surviving one on the outskirts of Siġġiewi is on the first floor of a two-storey rural building overlooking a country road (Triq il-Fawwara) at a height of 17 courses. All that remains are two corbels supporting two side sections with tall slit perforations and an internal angled groove which probably accommodated the missing front part. It is possible that a stone slab, acting as a screen to shield the upper part of the window aperture, once formed part of this *muxrabija*.

Notwithstanding the simple criteria used for this survey, two stone *muxrabijiet* defy classification in any of the above categories – a testimony to the creativity of their designer/builder and to the versatility of the concept from which they originated. These two *muxrabijiet* do, however, have a common feature in that they are both designed to be as discreet and inconspicuous as possible.

The first example is on the first floor of the side elevation of a vernacular building fronting Triq Santa Luċija, and running along the first part of Sqaq 12 from that street in Naxxar. It overlooks the approach road and the alley, and is located at a height of 18 courses. It is crafted from a single square stone slab protruding from the façade. Viewing slits were obtained by cutting into three sides of the block. This design allows for a perfect integration within the masonry of the building rendering the *muxrabija* barely discernible.

The other *muxrabija* is found on a building in vernacular style at 22 Triq l-Mdina, Siġġiewi. It overlooks a square-headed door and is located at a height of approximately 13 courses. The main body consists of a conic stone element in the form of an elongated hood which might easily be mistaken for, if indeed it did not originally function as, a kitchen chimney. This recedes vertically to meet the façade at its upper extremity and accommodates the peepholes, which are currently blocked, on its sides. The base of the cone rests on a thick transverse stone slab which in turn rests on two triangular corbels. Although not extending to touch the façade the slab, which was very probably a later addition, is possibly blocking a peephole situated at the base of the *muxrabija*.

In general, stone *muxrabijiet* are difficult to date. Documentation is practically non-existent and the often simple utilitarian design gives few clues as to when they were created. Tentative dating may be inferred by studying the buildings of which they form a part but this form of dating amounts to little more than speculation. What can be stated with a certain degree of certainty is that at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the practice of crafting stone *muxrabijiet* was largely abandoned in favour of a new and more flexible material – wood. Just as happened with open stone balconies, the arrival of the British provided a financially viable alternative to the omnipresent use of stone for certain architectural features. Thanks to the commercial network of the British, timber, which up to that point had been hard to come by and thus prohibitively expensive, became a stock commodity. This resulted in yet another transformation of the Maltese *muxrabija*, which from then onwards would be mostly made from wood<sup>15</sup>.

**Part two of this article  
will appear in the  
next issue of Vigilo**

bottom left:  
Partially surviving *ġifna*-type *muxrabija*  
on a vernacular building in Triq il-Fawwara  
on the outskirts of Siġġiewi



#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> J Feeney, *The Magic of The Mashrabiya*s in Saudi Aramco World July/August, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> M S Briggs, *Mohammedan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine*, New York, 1974

<sup>3</sup> M S Briggs, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> J Feeney, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> S Spiteri, *Fortress of the Cross*, Malta, 1994

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> J Calleja and F Zammit Haber, *The Gourgion Tower*, Midsea Publications, 1997

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> R Galea, *A Descriptive Gazetteer of Muxrabija-Windows and Roundel Carvings in the Maltese Islands*, unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, University of Malta, 2008

<sup>13</sup> C J Jaccarini, *Il-Muxrabija wirt l-Islam fil-Gżejjer Maltin*, in *Ġabra ta' Kitba minn Membri ta' l-Għaqda Maltija tal-Folklor* (G Lanfranco Editor), Malta, 2001

<sup>14</sup> C J Jaccarini, *Ir-Razzett The Maltese Farmhouse*, Malta, 1998

<sup>15</sup> J Azzopardi, *Heritage Fragments*, Malta, 2010

# Lower Fort St Elmo and The Mortar Shells Fountain

Denis A Darmanin



Fort St Elmo with sentries on the roof of the Pinto Stores, 1857, © The British Library Board

The loss of Fort St Elmo during the Great Siege of 1565 taught the Order of St John an important lesson regarding the “*Sheb-el-Ras*” Peninsula. Whoever commanded the heights of this promontory could easily position numerous gun batteries and direct their fire onto most strongholds and fortifications within Grand Harbour. St Elmo also proved to be a costly and tragic error for the Order, located as it was on low ground at the tip of the peninsula, while the Ottoman gunners had the greater advantage of being on high ground and could thus rain salvo after salvo down on the fort until it crumbled and fell. In the aftermath of the siege, Grand Master Jean Parisot de Valette reconsidered the earlier plans presented by Antonio Ferramolino in 1541, by Bartolomeo Genga in 1558 and by Bartolomeo Lanci in 1562, for the building of an entirely new fortified city on the peninsula.

As the members of the Order came from the cream of European nobility, and since the siege was held in high esteem by the monarchs of Europe – especially the Pope, help in the construction of this *Citta Nuova* was forthcoming. The Grand Duke of Tuscany favoured de Valette with the services of Gabrio Serbelloni; one of the most capable military strategists and engineers of his time, and the Dominican Pope Pius V sent his personal military engineer, Francesco Laparelli from Cortona, another of Europe’s finest, to help in the design of the new city. Assisting Laparelli were Baldassare Lanci d’Urbino and his able Maltese assistant Girolamo Cassar, who continued the work after Laparelli left Malta in 1570. The Pope also contributed large sums of money towards the construction of the city, as did King Philip II of Spain and King Sebastian of Portugal, while other monarchs sent weapons to arm the new fortifications.

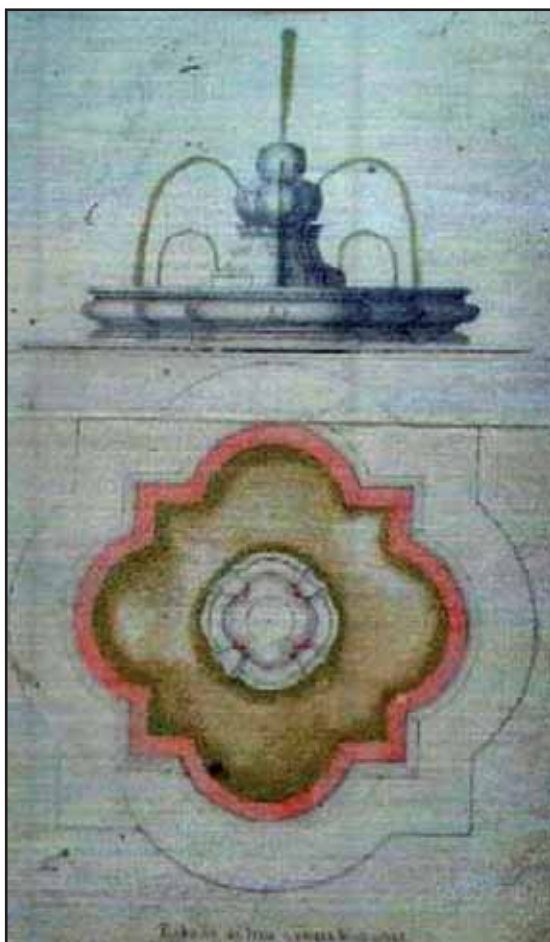
Another priority for the Order was the rebuilding of Fort St Elmo, which was to be physically independent from the new city. This was taken in hand immediately following the end of the Great Siege. The fort continued to be modified and extended over the years until it reached its present size during the 1680s, when it was enclosed with a vast apron of walls and bastions of a changing profile, known as the “Carafa Bastions” after the then Grand Master Fra Gregorio Carafa della Roccella.

In 1761, during the long reign of Grand Master Pinto (1741 – 1773), various barracks were built facing the *piazza* along the St Toscana Curtain within the ditch on the Marsamxett Harbour side in the lower section of the fort. The following year, 19 large vaulted magazines on three floors with bomb-proof roofs were constructed along the Carafa Bastions. These were intended to be used as magazines, for the storage of food and as a shelter for women and children in the event of a siege. Some of these buildings probably also served as a barracks for the *Reggimento di Malta*.

The esplanade in front of the Pinto stores and barracks was referred to as “Piazza Valletta”. Facing the magazines across the *piazza* is a fountain of unique and interesting architectural design which drew water from the Vendom reservoir nearby. The fountain, designed by de Tigné, is made of globigerina limestone and consists of a basin with an irregular oval pedestal at its centre, on each of the four recesses of which are hanging garlands of fruit. Resting in a pyramidal arrangement on the pedestal are four piled mortar shells: three at the bottom that support a fourth set above in their centre.

These mortar shells, sometimes also called bombards, are very similar to the ones towering on the pedestals flanking *Portes des Bombes* in Floriana. Each grenade had a pair of lifting handles, now broken, carved from the original stone block. In between, and corresponding to the fuse hole, are embedded tubes that sprayed water into the basin – the lower three to the sides and the shell above vertically upwards.

Plans of the fountain, National Library, Malta





The peculiar design of the fountain gives it a distinctively military character that links it directly to its surroundings. Actual mortar shells, which were hollow and made of iron, were a devastating weapon. They were packed with gunpowder, lifted by the handles into a large mortar and fired at the enemy in order to explode and cause maximum damage through pieces of flying shrapnel and fire from the blast.

Little is known of the use of the lower section of the fort between 1798 and 1800, during its brief occupation by French troops following the ousting of the Order of St John by Napoleon. When they took possession of Malta in 1800, the British were still at war with France and numerous troops were using Malta as a point of transit and a garrison force. The Pinto Barracks were ideally located and could easily serve as billet for an entire regiment and their dependents.

In the early years of British rule, a neo-classical exedra was added behind the grenade fountain. This features 12 Doric columns on the front and an additional two at each end and its design is attributed to Giorgio Pullicino (1780-1852).

During its use by the British military as a barracks and a fort, St Elmo was garrisoned by various regiments that were stationed in Malta. Numerous changes and alterations were made, according to the necessities of the times and for the defence of the harbour area. A veranda supported on cast iron columns was built abutting the façade of the Pinto stores facing the *piazza*, now referred to as the Lower Parade Ground. Casemates were converted into stores, cookhouses and ablutions, and quarters for officers were added. The exedra offered cool shade to officers and soldiers alike, especially during the hot summer evenings, while the water splashing in the fountain added to the atmosphere. The building overlooking the exedra at the rear was used by various regimental bands, which also used the terrace above the exedra itself for musical performances when they were not beating the dust of the *piazza* with their boots.

The fountain, exedra and later structural additions

During the Second World War, Fort St Elmo played an important part in the defence of Malta. It was here that the first casualties had fallen, all members of the Royal Malta Artillery. The fort was also instrumental in repelling and destroying the *Decima Flottiglia Mezzi d'Assalto* (X<sup>a</sup> MAS) of the Italian *Regia Marina*. After the war, the last elements of the British Army to occupy Fort St Elmo were units from the two Maltese Regiments – the Royal Malta Artillery and the King's Own Malta Regiment. Between the late 1950s and the early 60s, much of the fort was ceded to the Maltese government and the lower fort and Pinto Barracks were used as stores by various government departments. In the 1970s, the fort proper was handed to the Malta Land Force for use as barracks for the paramilitary Malta Pioneer Corps, but was vacated again in the 1980s until this part of St Elmo became the Malta Police Force Academy in 1987.

The fountain with the four mortars





In 1978, the Pinto Barracks and other buildings at Lower St Elmo were opened to be used as the setting for the film *Midnight Express*. Afterwards, the area was occupied by squatters and builders of carnival floats and the buildings, many of which had already deteriorated badly, suffered an alarming amount of damage and vandalism. The fountain had long lost its glory when it ceased to function many years earlier, with its basin becoming filled to the rim with rubbish and layers of dust, its joints wide open and void of any mortar, and many of its stones becoming dislodged.

top left:  
Recording of the  
restoration in 1879

top:  
Drawing of the inscription  
recording the  
1879 restoration

**A Commemoration**

British infantry regiments were posted to various corners of the Empire as garrison troops, in transit to other destinations, or en route to any ongoing conflict. Malta was a major transit and victualling station, even more so following the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869.

Wherever the British Army was based, it was renowned for erecting monuments to commemorate particular events, battles or members who had performed some glorious deed. Its regiments found the soft Maltese stone ideal for carving their badge, or an associated device, to commemorate their tour of duty in Malta and this is very evident at Sa Maison Gardens and the walls of many of the barracks they built and occupied.

With the Caldwell Reforms of the British Army in 1881, the 101st (Royal Bengal Fusiliers) Regiment of Foot and the 104th (Bengal Fusiliers) Regiment of Foot amalgamated to become the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions, The Royal Munster Fusiliers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was stationed in Malta from 1882 to 1884 and was billeted at Lower Fort St Elmo. Their badge consisted of a shield with three crowns – the coat of arms of the Province of Munster in Ireland – superimposed on a flaming grenade, a grenade being the symbol of fusilier and grenadier regiments in the British Army.

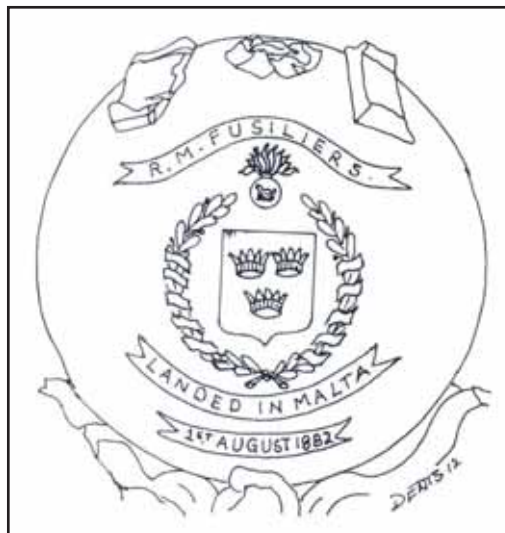
Thus it must have felt logical that one of the mortars on the St Elmo fountain should be carved and converted to represent their regimental badge as a memento of their Malta posting. The badge was carved on the bottom mortar shell facing the barracks and although weathered and worn, it can still be seen that the badge consists of the arms of Munster within a laurel wreath bearing 10 battle honours, surmounted on a flaming grenade. Above the badge is a scroll inscribed “R. M. FUSILIERS” and below it another scroll with “LANDED IN MALTA” and underneath this a scroll inscribed “1<sup>ST</sup> AUGUST 1882”.

**All photographs and drawings  
provided by the author**

Glengarry badge of the  
Royal Munster Fusiliers



Details of the badge carved on the mortar



Drawing of the badge carved on the mortar



The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The King's Own (Royal Lancaster Regt), was stationed in Malta between 1895 and 1897. Prior to their departure from the island, the regiment had the fountain restored – a fact that was recorded through an inscription carved on the upper shell of the fountain that reads: “RESTORED BY THE KING'S OWN 1897”.

Since the fort, barracks and parade ground were used by the numerous regiments and corps that served in Malta, elements from the Royal Regiment of Artillery were stationed at the fort to man the guns that defended the harbour approaches. The band of the Royal Artillery also chose the fountain to record their presence in the fort, as on another of the bottom mortars are carved the words “R. A. BAND MALTA”. Other graffiti on the grenades are not of a military nature.

At the time of writing, the exedra and fountain are in very poor condition, just like the rest of the lower fort area and barracks, although recently a number of planning applications have been submitted for the fort to be restored in phases. The *piazza* and barracks are again being used for film productions and by the builders of carnival floats.

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority scheduled the exedra and fountain as Grade 1 national monuments in 2001.

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Government Notice No. 276/08.

Author's Collection.



above:  
Details of the fountain's  
decorative elements



British soldiers quartered in Pinto Barracks, c 1890. Photo by Richard Ellis



Graffiti commemorating the R A Band

# The Malta Aviation Museum Foundation

Joe Galea Debono

Malta has, for the past 90 years, been in the forefront of developments in aviation history – mostly thanks to the presence of the Royal Air Force until the end of the 1970s and the fact that for many years it was a staging post for air traffic crossing the Mediterranean to and from the Middle and Far East. There are few aircraft, either civil or military, from most countries which, at one time or another, did not either transit Malta or were based here. It was therefore fitting that Malta should have its own Aviation Museum to mark mankind's achievement in conquering the skies.

The Malta Aviation Museum Foundation was set up on 1 November 1994 by a number of associations connected with aviation, namely the Malta Historic Aircraft Preservation Group, the Malta Model Aircraft Flying Association, the National War Museum Association, the Society of Scale Modellers, the Malta Aviation Society, the Military Vehicles Collectors Club, the Arms, Armour & Militaria Society and *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna*.

However, the seeds of the present Museum were sown a year earlier when the present director-general Ray Polidano, together with Mike Eastman, began restoring a World War II Spitfire at the former's small garage in Attard. From these very modest first steps, the museum has developed over the last 18 years into the present historical attraction for Maltese and foreign visitors alike.

When Ray's garage became too small to accommodate the Spitfire being rebuilt, two Romney huts at the former RAF airfield at Ta' Qali were earmarked as a possible site for the restoration work to continue and, after considerable lobbying, the government eventually released part of one hut, then the rest of it and finally the other to the Foundation, which had in the meantime been established on the

advice of the then Minister responsible for Museums, Dr M Refalo.

With the passing of time, two other associations joined the Foundation – The Island Microlight Club and the Hal Far Model Aircraft Association. Hundreds of people, many of them from overseas, also became members, adding their support to the Museum's ever growing expansion.

When in May of 1995 the restoration of the Spitfire was completed, it was put on show in St George's Square, Valletta as part of the celebrations marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in Europe Day. This was the Foundation's first achievement and besides helping to place the Museum in the public eye, it also made a good impression on the authorities.

A Flying Flea, the relic of a Hawker Hurricane salvaged from the bottom of the sea off Filfla, and a Douglas DC-3 Dakota and Beech 18, both saved from the fire-fighting school at Hal Far, soon joined the Spitfire in the one Romney Hut that up to then had been made available to the Foundation.

The year 1996 saw the inauguration of the fledgling museum by Minister Prof. Josef Bonnici in the presence of Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, Dr J Psaila Savona. The latter presented a donation from the National Tourism Organisation of Malta to cover the purchase price of the Dakota and Beech aircraft.

However, the urgent need for more space eventually led the authorities to take over the adjacent Romney hut. After a great deal of refurbishing work, undertaken by members of Ray Polidano's family and a number of eager volunteers, the new extension was inaugurated by the then President of the Republic Dr Guido De Marco on 21 April 1999.

A number of new aircraft, cockpit sections, engines and other memorabilia started pouring in from both Maltese benefactors and foreign donors. A Vampire Trainer was donated by the Malta Aviation Society and a Hawker Sea Hawk was acquired through the initiative of Malta's High Commissioner in London,

Dr G Bonello Du Puis and sponsored by Midland Bank. Next, a De Havilland Tiger Moth was acquired and, after years of restoration to flying condition by David Polidano, this bi-plane aircraft is now airworthy and often seen gracing the skies above Malta at the Malta International Airshow and in filming sessions.

The next major project was the acquisition of the nearby land from Government, its levelling and clearing in preparation for the construction of the Air Battle of Malta Memorial Hangar and, eventually and more recently, the erection of the Main Hangar. These projects were only made possible through the help of the Maltese Government and the substantial amounts forthcoming from EU funds and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Private industry sponsorships and donations from private individuals did the rest.

The Hawker Hurricane  
in the early stages  
of restoration





The Air Battle of Malta Memorial Hangar was officially inaugurated in September 2005 by the then President of the Republic Dr Edward Fenech Adami, in the presence of hundreds of Maltese and foreign war veterans, who came out to Malta to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of hostilities in September 1945.

Meanwhile, the surrounding areas of the Museum were landscaped, a Nissen hut was built to house the NAAFI catering area and another to house the carpentry workshop. At present, the final touches are being made to the newly constructed Elephant Hut, which will house the memorial chapel erected with the sponsorship of APS Bank.

More aircraft have been acquired or donated to the Museum over the years. These included a Fiat G91 donated by the Italian Air Force through the good offices of Colonello Alberto Zucchi of the Italian Military Mission, a Meteor NF 14, a Meteor T7 Trainer, a Meteor F8, a De Havilland Sea Venom and a Dragonfly helicopter, all donated by David Dalton from the UK, another DC Dakota from Medavia, a Link Trainer from a German donor and, last but not least, a Birddog and an airworthy Bell helicopter from the Armed Forces of Malta Air Wing, which has continuously supported the Foundation since its inception, so much so, that successive AFM Commanders have graciously agreed to be the Foundation's Honorary Presidents.

Considerable financial support has also been raised by the Foundation's Honorary Life Patron Frank Salt, who over the years has lobbied a number of firms and other donors to meet the Museum's ever-growing expenses.

#### Recent additions to the Museum's collection

The Malta Aviation Museum is continually adding to its ever-expanding collection of exhibits. Last April it re-assembled the 101 parts that make up a Gloster Meteor Mark F8 that it had received from its greatest benefactor, David Dalton in the UK. The assembly team, led by the Museum's aircraft restorer David Polidano, burnt the midnight oil getting the 60-year-old aircraft back on its undercarriage legs.

The Meteor was the first operational jet fighter to enter service with the RAF in the summer of 1944 and its main task was to shoot down or cause to crash – by destabilising their gyros – the hundreds of Nazi secret V1 weapons that were raining down on Britain after D-Day. Meteors were a common sight in Malta's skies in the 1950s and early 1960s and the latest specimen at the museum sports the markings and insignia of 500 Squadron of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force which was deployed to Malta during summer camps at Ta' Qali. Other recent acquisitions are two HUEY helicopters left in Malta by the producers of the film *World War Z*, and two gliders.

#### The new Main Exhibition Hangar

The inauguration of the newly erected Main Exhibition Hangar at the Malta Aviation Museum at Ta' Qali by President George Abela on 27 September 2011 was a red-letter day and saw the fulfilment of a 17-year-old dream of the Museum's promoter and director-general Ray Polidano.

It was only with the substantial assistance of the ERDF, the scheme created by Parliamentary Secretary Chris Said to help NGOs meet part of the costs and dedicated sponsorships from firms such as Vodafone Malta that has made the construction of the new hangar possible.

Among the distinguished guests attending the inauguration ceremony were Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Tonio Borg, The then Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism and Culture Mario De Marco, the Deputy Commander of the Armed Forces of Malta, Col. David Cachia, The CEO of the Malta Air Traffic Services, Brigadier Carmel Vassallo, Mr and Mrs David Dalton and members of the diplomatic corps.

General view of the Museum's new Main Hangar





The former AFM Cessna Bird Dog being restored to airworthy condition

The poignant ceremony was preceded by a fly past and aerobatics by the Museum's own restored Tiger Moth and, after the President had declared the Hangar open, a fanfare by a detachment of Armed Forces of Malta trumpeters heralded two low fly pasts by the RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight's DC-3 Dakota with landing lights blazing in the gathering gloom.

The new Main Hangar, which has been constructed with ERDF Funds, will now house the post-1945 exhibits, except for aircraft of the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm which will remain in the Romney Huts together with other aircraft still to be restored. The Air Battle of Malta Memorial Hangar will house the restored Spitfire and Hurricane, the Fairey Swordfish restoration project, wing parts of a Gloster Gladiator and other World War II vehicles, guns and memorabilia.

### Museum's Tiger Moth returns to Ta' Qali

Sixty-six years after a Station Flight Tiger Moth operated from Ta' Qali and, 48 years after the airfield was placed on a "care and maintenance" basis, the Malta Aviation Museum's own restored 9H-RAF flared gently on the northwest threshold of the old concrete runway.

It was 9 December 2011 at 11.45am when veteran warbird pilot Clive Denny expertly brought in the biplane for a perfect three-point landing to the applause of the scores of enthusiasts who had gathered to witness this historic occasion.

This remarkable event was the culmination of long months of lobbying with the powers-that-be to make this operation possible. The Foundation had long been urging the authorities to conserve a stretch of the historic former runway at Ta' Qali for the taxiing of the Museum's restored aircraft as well as to allow positioning flights to Luqa and back whenever these aircraft participate in air shows, photographic shoots or similar flying events.

It had applied to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority to have the centre section of the runway preserved for this purpose and in fact a permit had been issued some years back. But the project seemed to have been stymied when the children's park – and later the outdoor gym – was erected on the area earmarked.

The only stretch of runway left was obstructed by street lighting poles and planters, as well as a central strip, and indeed it was not long enough unless the extreme northwest end of the runway used by the Malta Model Aircraft Flying Association (MMAFA) was made available by that association for such operations.

This necessitated protracted talks with the Parks Management and MMAFA to have the runway cleared of obstacles and for the latter to allow the occasional and sporadic use of their part of the runway whenever this was needed. At times these negotiations seemed to be getting nowhere, but then a number of Ministries and Parliamentary Secretariats

intervened to give the project the green light and a push in the right direction. The help of Minister George Pullicino and Parliamentary Secretaries Mario De Marco and Jason Azzopardi was invaluable in getting the runway cleared of obstacles, and Franz Zammit Haber's role as MMAFA president – in convincing his members to allow this limited use of the area allocated to that association – was the determining factor. The Foundation is greatly indebted to all these gentlemen.

As the day of the Tiger Moth's flight approached, final arrangements were made with the DCA and MATS, the air traffic control people, to allow the operation to take place. Even here the Foundation encountered all possible co-operation and goodwill. The date was set for 7 December, with a fall-back date of the 9<sup>th</sup>, in case meteorological conditions were not right on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

And they certainly were not! One of the conditions imposed by the DCA was that the final approach to any landing at Ta' Qali had to be made from the northwest.

The re-assembled Gloster Meteor F8



This, of course, presupposed a southeast wind or no wind at all on the day. But, as luck would have it, a force 5-6 northwesterly was forecast, which ruled out the possibility of the flight from Luqa on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Clive Denny was only in Malta for five days, including his arrival and departure dates and 8 December was out of the question as the permit did not allow the use of the runway on public holidays. The only remaining slot was the 9<sup>th</sup>.

Everyone at the Museum had their fingers crossed for good weather. At the crack of dawn on the 9<sup>th</sup> December, Mary Rose and David Polidano were on the runway, together with a small group of the “regular” helpers. Miraculously, there was not the slightest breeze and as the weak rays of the December sun started shining on the dewy film on the runway, it looked as if it was going to be a very fine day after all, with a slight crosswind from the southwest. So it was all systems go. David started removing the barrier wall sections separating the runway from the MMAFA area, specially installed by the Foundation some days before and the team of helpers got cracking sweeping the area free of road grit and other minor obstacles.

A number of last minute hitches delayed the operation by more than two hours. In the meantime the sky was gradually clouding over and the slight early morning breeze was gradually changing into a noticeable cross wind. The doubting Thomases were anxiously looking at their watches as noon approached and still there was no sound from Luqa Control Tower authorising 9H RAF to start up.

Then finally, just after 11.30am, the “start up” order from Luqa Control Tower came over the air, soon followed by the clearance to “line up and take off” and the news spread around the hundred or so enthusiasts at the side of the runway. The shout of “*ara – fejn hu!*” (“look, there it is!”) echoed among the bystanders as the tiny aircraft was seen flying to the west coast, slowly gaining altitude. Soon Clive Denny came overhead for a crossover and a low pass and, when he was satisfied that all was clear, he brought 9H RAF in – making aviation history in the process.

It was smiles all round when Clive taxied back to the MMAFA’s Club House apron, where he was mobbed by the Club members who had taken the day off to watch the event. But the biggest and most beaming smiles of all were on the faces of Ray, Mary Rose and David Polidano and Clive Denny, who had seen the project through from start to finish.

This latest event in the Museum’s short history crowned the efforts of all the aircraft enthusiasts and volunteers who have, at one time or another, given of their best to ensure our country has a living memorial to its rich aviation history.

The Tiger Moth's historic landing at Ta' Qali  
on 9, December, 2011



# Protecting Modernist Architecture

*Matthew Vella*



Former Faculty of Architecture building,  
University of Malta

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) has added to the ever-expanding list of protected properties in the Maltese Islands by including a number of items designed during the post Second World War Modernist Movement. The list includes examples ranging from educational facilities and residential buildings to spiritual and commercial buildings. It is a versatile and often misunderstood form of design that some consider to be an unpopular era in Maltese architecture. Therefore, what is “modern architecture” and why protect it?

There is a misconception of what is considered to be modern architecture. In architectural history, “modern” does not necessarily refer to work of a contemporary nature as is often taken to mean, but rather to a particular style and ideology that started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and lasted some 70 years. It is characterised by a simplification of form. The creation of ornament comes from the structure and theme of the building and is often designed to be organic with its environment rather than imposed upon it. There is a focus on shape, form, light, shadow, solids, voids and transparency at the expense of decorative embellishment, with an emphasis on functionality. This was partly driven by technological and engineering development with the use of factory-made components, and human-made materials such as metal and reinforced concrete.

Modernism in Malta did not make any impact until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Knights and the British Neo-Classicism left behind a rich legacy of architecture which weighed heavily on the local mind-set, and so up until the 1930s, design was still considered to be predominantly conservative. Although there was some experimentation during the post-art nouveau period, the local population still expressed a preference for baroque style architecture, especially in ecclesiastical buildings.

Due to the abundance of local limestone, construction methods remained traditional until the advent of reinforced concrete which would only be widely introduced on the island after World War II.

Mepa commenced the project for protecting modern architecture a number of years ago. However, this process was reinforced with the submission of formal requests by notable local organisations such as the Chamber of Architects and the local chapter of DoCoMoMo (the International Committee for the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement).

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One of the earliest examples – and considered to be the pioneer of modern architecture in Malta – is Villa Ellul. This is one of the few protected buildings of modern design to be built prior to the mid 20th century. It was designed by architect Salvatore Ellul in the 1930s as his own residence and was considered to be a bold statement in the conservative neighbourhood of Ta' Xbiex. Its most notable feature is the reinforced concrete cantilevered semi-circular terrace that wraps around the corner of the building.

The most iconic industrial building on the island to this very day is the monumental Farsons Brewery in Mriehel, designed by Lewis Farrugia immediately after the end of the Second World War. Its innovation lies in its structure as a purely reinforced concrete frame together with the architect's focus on natural lighting and ventilation. However, its main architectural highlight is the exposed functional copper brewing vats. Their sheer scale highlights the building as a symbol of the long-lasting effect of the industrial revolution.

Another example of modern architecture worth mentioning – although protected under a different Government Notice in 2011 – is Manikata parish church, dedicated to St Joseph. This iconic piece of modern architecture was designed in the early 1960s by a young Richard England in one of his first design projects given to him by his father, himself an established designer on the island.

England, aware of major reforms from the Second Vatican Council, decided to dispense with the traditionally styled baroque churches of yesteryear and focused on the site and its surroundings as a source of inspiration. He found it close to where the church sits today in the shape of the traditional structures known as corbelled huts (*giren*) and from the modernist architectural influences to which he had been exposed while studying in Milan. What resulted was a building that many architects aimed for during the Modern Movement but rarely achieved, namely the successful cohesion of

human spirituality within the peacefulness of its natural environment. Manikata parish church is considered to be one of the most innovative structures on the island and a fine example of modern architecture.

Other notable examples which were scheduled include a number of University of Malta buildings within the Tal-Qroqq complex, The Lodge at Ta' Xbiex, Villa Mediterranja and Villa Clunaird in Attard, Villino Grech in Birkirkara, Villino Sunshine in Ta' Xbiex, All Souls Church in Tarxien, Mount St Joseph retreat house in Mosta, Muscat Motors in Gżira and three bus shelters in Marsa, Floriana and Hamrun. These properties are in addition to seven other Modernist structures that had already been scheduled following the inception of scheduling in 1994, including the Rediffusion building, the JFK Memorial and Fgura parish church.

It is still debatable whether Modernism was considered a success as an architectural style, locally and abroad. Many of the buildings designed during this period have a degree of failure, mostly in their structural integrity. The new use of reinforced concrete at the beginning of the 20th century to span or project over large areas was still experimental and perhaps premature because its characteristics were not then fully understood. However, it cannot be denied that Modernism changed architectural design for ever. Even today, contemporary buildings carry heavy influences from this era, not only in terms of design but as a way of life. Bright, well-ventilated buildings with large open areas are a preference for those who can afford them.

At the time of writing, Mepa has received four proposals for the restoration and rehabilitation of scheduled Modernist buildings, while most of the others remain in good use and in a fair state of conservation. The Malta Scheduled Property Register can be accessed through the following link:

<http://www.mepa.org.mt/schedschedulingsearch>



Villa Clunaird, Attard



All Souls Church, Tarxien



Villino Grech, Birkirkara



Villa Mediterranja, Attard

# Wirt iż-Żejtun

Ruben Abela

*Wirt iż-Żejtun* is a locality focused voluntary organisation, active in the heritage sector, that was founded on the initiative of a group of people, mostly hailing from Żejtun, through a resolution approved at a meeting held on 3 October 2010. Its statute was approved on the following 13 December and its first AGM, at which the first executive committee for the next two years was elected, was held on 30 January 2011. *Wirt iż-Żejtun* is chaired by architect Ruben Abela. The first elected committee consisted of Dr Malcolm Borg as General Secretary, Jesmond Cutajar as Treasurer, Dr Nadia Theuma as Public Relations Officer, Carl Grech, Ninette Sammut, Audrey Testaferrata de Noto and Keith Vella. At the last AGM, held on 29 January, Tracey Anne Cumbo was elected General Secretary.

The organisation's primary aim is to motivate the people of Żejtun, in the shortest possible time, to understand the need to appreciate, respect and care for the natural, cultural, environmental, historical, ethnographical and archaeological heritage of Żejtun and its people. *Wirt iż-Żejtun* has been very active in its first year, holding an event almost every month.

To commemorate Żejtun Day (*Jum iż-Żejtun*), on 20 March, a heritage walk was organised around Casal Bisqallin or, as it is commonly known to Żejtun residents, ir-Rahal t'Isfel (lower village). This activity was very well attended by about 80 participants and a sizeable group of young children. Notwithstanding the bad weather, those who participated in the walk enjoyed the experience, particularly when they were granted access to the chapel dedicated to Our Saviour and St Clement's chapel. Mr Ray Gatt also granted the request to visit Villa Cagliares.

On 11 April, *Wirt iż-Żejtun* organised its first public interview with a well-known individual who answers questions about his or her experience of a particular subject or event. The person interviewed was Dr Alexander Cachia Zammit and the subject was the events during Holy Week in Żejtun. Dr Cachia Zammit was interviewed by journalist Fiona Vella and the event was held at the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, next to the parish church. The audience was very interested to hear Dr Cachia Zammit talk about how Holy Week was commemorated in the past and the changes that have been made over time.

The first activity of the *Wirt iż-Żejtun* Kids Club was held on 22 May. Members of the club were taken on an educational visit to Għar Dalam and its museum. The gallery site officer of Heritage Malta guided the children around the museum and cave and explained in detail not only how the cave had been formed thousands of years ago, but also how the skeletal bones of a number of "strange" animals had ended up buried inside it. At the end of the visit, the children were gathered around two sand-pits and were shown how to carry out an archaeological investigation. This activity was organised as part of the national activities to commemorate International Museum Day under the auspices of ICOM and was made possible through the assistance of Heritage Malta.

On 30 June, the association's members visited the Roman Villa in the grounds of Żejtun Girls' Secondary School. The members were taken around the site by Dr Nicholas Vella who was directing the archaeological excavations, together with Professor Anthony Bonanno, during a four-week work camp organised for the archaeology students by the Department of Classical Studies and Archaeology of the University of Malta. Dr Vella gave a detailed account of the work carried out so far and the most interesting

features of this villa from the national aspect. One of these is that the archaeological investigations carried out have proved that the site was already inhabited during the Punic Period, something that had always been claimed by archaeologists but never before proven.

In 2006, the University of Malta commenced excavations on the site with the aim of understanding its history, teaming up with *Din l-Art Helwa* to raise funds for the conservation and preservation of the site. A generous grant from the HSBC Malta Foundation made it possible to begin the first phase of the project, which has included documentation, emergency conservation treatment and the erection of a temporary shelter. *Wirt iż-Żejtun* is currently seeking the necessary funding to organise a national symposium complemented by an exhibition and a publication on this important site, which could easily be the origin of the Żejtun of today.

On 10 July, members of the Malta Institute of Professional Photography had a photo-walk in Żejtun, organised in collaboration with *Wirt iż-Żejtun* which was responsible for guiding the photographers. Although the photographers spent most of their time at the old parish church of St Catherine (known as St Gregory's), they had time to walk through part of the centre of the town, visiting Triq San Girgor, Triq San Lucjan and Triq Santa Katarina, and appreciated the town's architectural and historical gems.

On 29 July, *Wirt iż-Żejtun* organised a cultural event in Luqa Briffa Garden ("Il-Ġnien tal-Kmand") which began with an informative presentation by Dr Malcolm Borg on the history of the garden and its significance on a national level. This was followed by a tour of the garden led by Dr Joseph Buhagiar, who explained the importance of a number of the trees found in it.

One subject about which the organisation feels strongly is the loss of traditional games and activities. *Manuċċa* is the word that was commonly used by the people of Żejtun when referring to a kite. This word was only used by Żejtun residents, as the rest of Malta refers to it as *tajra*, *hamiema* or *fjamma*. Until about 20 years ago, the flying of *manuċċi* was the most popular hobby of children and young people during the summer holidays but, unfortunately, this traditional hobby has had to make way for the games console and computer games. *Wirt iż-Żejtun* would like to revive this traditional activity and attract children and young people to this craft and hobby. This is why it asked Maltese kite master Lino Psaila to share his skills in this craft. Lino accepted the organisation's invitation and gave an interesting presentation to a group of 13 children who, along with some parents, were engrossed for more than an hour-and-a-



half by what Lino was doing in front of them. At the end of the presentation, held on 18 August at Żejtun Local Council's Arts and Crafts Centre, every child was given a *manučča*.

On 21 September, the photographic exhibition *Focusing on Żejtun's Heritage* was opened by Rev. Canon Joe Abela. The exhibition consisted of 24 photographs submitted by eight participants in a competition organised by *Wirt iż-Żejtun* in association with the Malta Institute of Professional Photography. Three of the participants were from Żejtun and the subjects chosen by the photographers covered architecture, local characters and folk singing (*għana*), as well as other crafts and hobbies. This event was one of the numerous activities organised in Żejtun during the annual *Żejt iż-Żejtun*.

On 20 November, *Wirt iż-Żejtun* organised an event to commemorate the people who, through their work, talent or activities, had contributed to the historical achievements of Żejtun and its community. This year the focus was on Girgor Bonici, the main benefactor of the new parish church that was built to a design by Lorenzo Cafà.

A traditional activity that the organisation feels is slowly being lost is that of crib building. It is for this reason that it thought of organising an event to do with this traditional craft for children. During the activity, held on 30 November in the premises of the Society of Christian Doctrine (MUSEUM) in Żejtun, the principles of crib-building were explained to the children and then each child made a crib.

The last event held in 2011 took the form of a public interview with Trevor Zahra about his father, Walter. Walter Zahra was a key contributor to increasing public awareness on the need to protect cultural and historical heritage, not only in Żejtun but also at national level. In fact, he was secretary of *Din l-Art Helwa* for a considerable number of years. In the words of his son, Walter "had Żejtun in his heart and his main wish was to help the people of Żejtun better appreciate the heritage of their town".

Besides these activities, *Wirt iż-Żejtun* has its own website, [www.wirtizzejtun.com](http://www.wirtizzejtun.com), which not only provides information about the organisation's events but is also a source of information on the heritage of this old town in the southeast of Malta.



"Young Archaeologists" at Ghar Dalam - photo Ruben Abela

#### The Wirt iż-Żejtun Mission Statement

*"Together we should foster interest and respect towards the natural, cultural, environmental, historical, ethnographical and archaeological, tangible and intangible heritage, passed down to us by former Żejtun people. Our aim is to protect, value and hand over this heritage to the generations to follow, at all levels of society, in the best possible state whilst acknowledging its sustainable development."*

Lino Psaila showing a *manučča* - photo Saviour Delia



Members visiting the Żejtun Roman Villa - photo Ruben Abela



# The Socio-Economic and Environmental Suitability of Industrial Animal Farming in Malta

John Portelli

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**All photographs are  
by the author**

Farms, including a new dairy farm, operating near the edge of the Maghtab landfill

The increasingly intensive exploitation of and dependence on cultivated plants and animal husbandry to produce food gradually replaced total reliance on hunting, gathering, fishing and foraging. It also meant that people were much more tied to the land that they cultivated. The period characterised by these far-reaching changes is conventionally referred to as the “New Stone Age”, or “Neolithic” and it is against this backdrop that the Maltese Islands appear to have been settled some time before 5,000BC.<sup>1</sup>

Over the thousands of years that have followed, agriculture has left its deep mark on social and economic life, and the environment, of the Maltese Islands. This is clearly visible from the rural landscape to be found all over the islands and is also evident from the old village cores that were once rural settlements and eventually grew into villages and towns. New occupiers brought with them new cultures and traditions. Olive trees and grape vines, as well as cotton plantations, were a common sight; so much so that Roman historians referred to the islanders’ prowess in producing cotton and honey.<sup>2</sup> We also have evidence that olive oil was produced on a large scale and that it was a major source of revenue.

## A recent history of agriculture

Agricultural development is hampered by land fragmentation resulting from inadequate legislation, land parcels that are too small or too irregularly configured to be farmed efficiently, shallow soil and an inadequate supply of water. Most farming was carried out on small terraced strips of land that precluded the introduction of large-scale mechanisation. As a result of increasing urbanisation, the agricultural labour force has become increasingly older, and more farming is carried out on a part-time basis. Nevertheless, production levels have risen gradually due to improved techniques in the cultivation of some crops. The major crops are potatoes, tomatoes and fruit (especially citrus and drupes) and since the late 1990s there has been





a substantial increase in grape and olive production. Malta is hardly self-sufficient in food production, and beef is mostly imported. With the country's accession into the EU, Malta's agricultural sector has become open and competitive.<sup>3</sup> But intensive agriculture has also been the major cause of soil depletion and mineralisation and, worst of all, the contamination of our limited fresh groundwater supply.

Over the last 50 years, the method of producing animals for food has changed from the extensive system of small and medium-sized farms owned by a single family to a system of large, intensive operations where the animals, sometimes in their thousands, are housed in large numbers in enclosed structures that resemble industrial buildings more than a traditional farm. This change has happened primarily out of view of consumers but has come at a cost to the environment and has had a negative impact on public health, rural communities and the health and well-being of the animals themselves.<sup>4</sup> This change is also very noticeable in the local animal farming industry. Up to the 1960s, the typical farmhouse was actually the farmer's home, along with which there would be a number of small animals, mainly chickens, rabbits, some goats, a pig and maybe a few sheep, and either a donkey or a working horse.

In time, particularly after Malta became a British colony in 1814, most of the gainfully occupied population became active in secondary and tertiary production, and from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, agriculture began to experience a slow but long decline. The large farming-oriented villages such as Żebbuġ, Siggiewi, Żejtun and Żurrieq, hitherto the traditional backbone of Maltese society, saw their importance lost to the newer settlements such as Paola or the urban areas near Grand Harbour, on whose western shore had nestled, since the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the magnificent capital city of Valletta, usurping both the old capital, Mdina, and the Borgo (Cospicua), the Knights' original administrative centre.

### Soil threats

With the advent of industrial farming, soil has been put under increasing threat from a wide range of human activities that are undermining its long-term availability and viability. Increases in urbanisation and development, and the intensification of agricultural systems, have accentuated the pressure on the land. Although there is very limited data on the extent and severity of each of the soil threats, and on the economic and environmental implications of soil degradation, the major threats to Maltese soils are erosion, sealing (through land uptake), decline in organic matter (mineralisation), soil contamination with heavy metals, and salinisation.<sup>5</sup>

Although data on rates of soil erosion in Malta are not available, this phenomenon is believed to be one of the most important threats to soil in the country. National policies and agri-environmental measures have been directed to the minimisation of soil erosion and damage mitigation, and have often been linked to the preservation of rubble walls, since these are considered to be instrumental in the prevention of soil erosion.



Whilst a huge farm built on public land lay abandoned for years, a new dairy farm was built next door on agricultural land

### A national water crisis?

The lack of a regular and sufficient water supply has always been an obstacle to Maltese agriculture, but our forefathers knew this and were very creative in finding ways of capturing and making the best use of this very precious and limited resource by selecting the most appropriate locations. They also very diligently selected crop and animal varieties that were most adapted to our climatic conditions. One such animal was the goat, a typical Mediterranean animal that is very suitable for the hot Mediterranean climate. Up to the 1940s the goat population stood at around 42,000, which declined to around 34,000 in the 1960s and has rapidly declined since. The number today is in the region of 6,000. Goats were the main source of milk up until the 1950s, when the Dutch Friesian cow was introduced in the mid-60s. The unfavourable feed conversion efficiency for dairy cattle is largely responsible for the relatively large demand for water. Sheep and goats also have an unfavourable feed conversion efficiency, although it is better than cattle.<sup>6</sup>

Freshwater resources in the Maltese Islands are scarce and depend entirely on rainfall, which is unpredictable and insufficient<sup>7</sup>. The largest aquifer is the mean sea-level aquifer, which has also reached critical levels and the quality of which has been drastically degraded with nitrates and salinity levels above legally permitted levels.

The windmill extracted water from the perched aquifer and resulted in drastic changes to food production; this problem increased when it was replaced with fuel and electric pumps which could extract water from the water found at sea level. Boreholes and galleries were sunk in both sea-level and perched aquifers and up to about 30 years ago, water extracted from underground sources was sufficient to meet the domestic and agricultural requirements of the local community. Both aquifers are replenished by the relatively low annual rainfall. In 2009, nitrate levels exceeded the EU limit value of 50mg/l in almost 90 per cent (13 out of 15) of groundwater supplies. The most recent agriculture census, in 2010, estimated that the total volume of water used for irrigation between September 2009 and August 2010 amounted to 28.2 million cubic metres.

High nitrate levels are attributed to intensive agriculture activity and the high use of fertilisers, leaks from the sewerage system and animal husbandry<sup>8</sup>. The highest nitrate concentration (346mg/l) was recorded in Pwales coastal groundwater, whilst the highest value in the perched aquifer was recorded at Żebbuġ at 315.9mg/l. Nitrate concentrations in the important mean sea-level aquifer system were also high, with 73.9mg/l and 49.4mg/l being registered for the Malta and Gozo sea-level groundwater bodies respectively<sup>9</sup>. This led to the closure of several water extraction boreholes that were previously used by the Water Services Corporation, the national agency for the provision of our water. Over extraction from the mean sea-level aquifer has also contributed to the high level of salinity. Many blame this over extraction on bad agriculture practices, but it should be pointed out that the extraction of such water is still largely unregulated for many purposes other than agriculture.

### Environmental impact

Agriculture, in particular animal husbandry, creates large volumes of waste. Unfortunately, some of this waste is not always dealt with correctly, causing considerable harm to the environment. It is extremely important that this waste is managed properly, especially since Malta and Gozo have been designated "nitrate vulnerable zones" under the European Commission's Nitrate Directive. This designation presents a severe limitation on the quantity of and manner by which untreated biological residue and manure may be disposed of on agricultural land, hence entailing the need to improve the handling of manure on farms and its subsequent application/disposal on agricultural land.<sup>10</sup>

Agriculture has also gone through a period of intensification, known as the "Green Revolution", that promised to eradicate world shortages. But today we are trying to rectify the results of long-term unsustainable agricultural practices. Now companies are promising to eradicate starvation with their wonder genetically modified seeds, which, however, still need the energy-hungry agro-chemicals produced by the same companies, which prohibit any independent research being carried out on their products.

The use of synthetic fertilisers and intensive farming in this relatively short period reduced the soil quality to a level that is a cause for concern "Soil in Malta is facing the threats of erosion, decline in organic matter, contamination and salinisation, MEPA warned today in the State of the Environment report for 2008."<sup>11</sup>

### The economic assessment

The economic gain from agriculture is also measured against other economic activities. The agro-food processing industry accounts for just fewer than three per cent of the value added generated by the total economy and two per cent of employment. Part-time employment amounted to 17,238 people (93 per cent), while 1,301 (seven per cent) worked on a full-time basis.

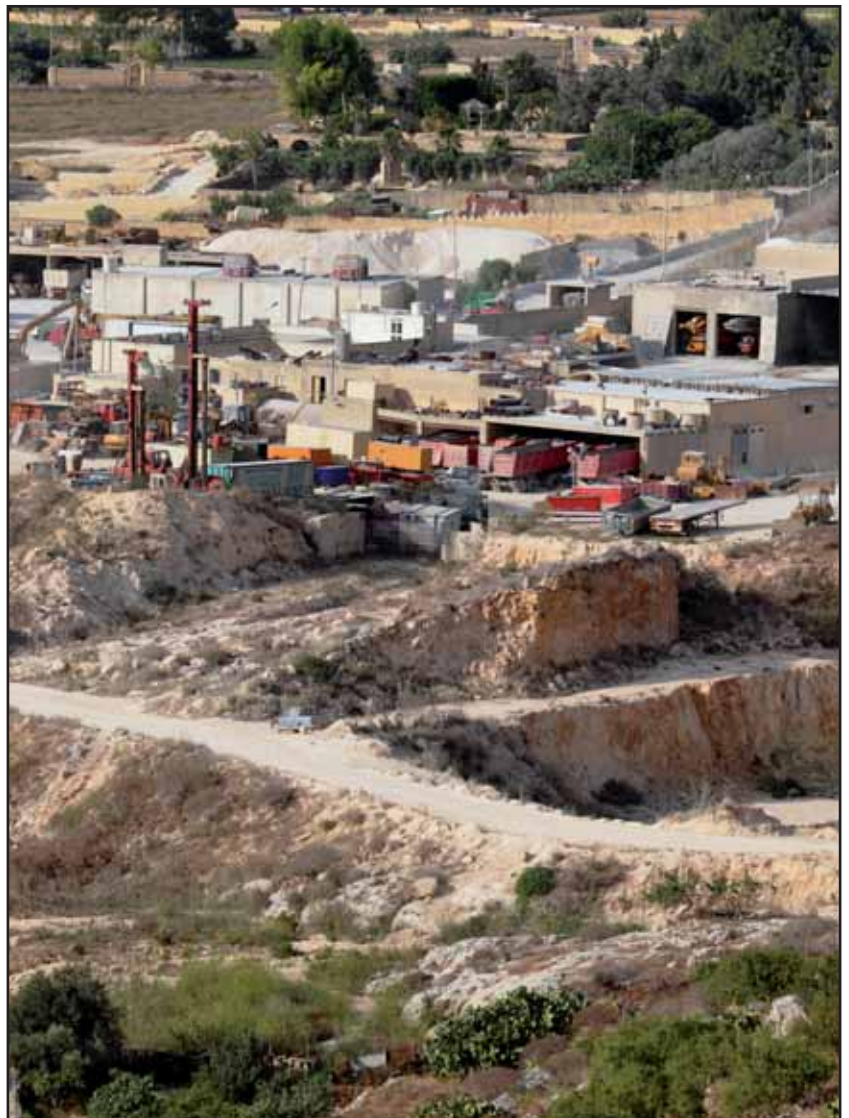
Direct employment distribution has also changed dramatically in recent years, with a shift from full-time to part-time farmers. There has also been a fall in the number of animal farms. The

2010 census shows that 12,529 hectares of land is used for agricultural purposes. With a population of 415,000 and 1.4 million tourists a year, the country will never be self-sufficient, which means we are mainly dependent on imported food. In one way or another, even locally-produced food is dependent upon imported raw material such as seeds, agro-chemicals, animal fodder, plants, equipment and energy.

The sustainability of the dairy industry is questioned in a 2010 EU Dairy Report, which concludes: "The highest operating costs are observed in Malta (310 €/t), due to its insular characteristics and the necessity to import feed. Although Malta grants some national aid to dairy farms (34 €/t in 2007) in order to compensate, the resulting gross margin is still among the lowest in the EU." and: "The highest relative falls in average gross margin between 2007 and 2009 are observed for Malta (-235%, from 85 €/t to -34 €/t). This is also reflected in the trend of the share of specialised farms with positive gross margin. The share of farms with positive margins is falling the most in Malta (-66%)." <sup>12</sup> Over the years, the Maltese dairy industry has also been afflicted by various diseases due to poor animal welfare. Such are the occurrence of disease conditions, in particular foot and leg disorders and mastitis.<sup>13</sup> Reproductive, metabolic and behavioural problems are also relevant indicators of poor welfare.<sup>14</sup>

opposite:  
A large-scale pig farm  
in a water sensitive zone  
in Pwales

Not so long ago, Wied  
il-Ghasel, was renowned for  
its high agriculture value



### An environmental assessment

Although agriculture makes only a small contribution to Gross Domestic Product, it accounts for the largest single use of land and is a major contributor to the environmental character and quality of the rural landscape. Its products provide a limited degree of self-sufficiency, whilst it provides a full or part-time livelihood for a significant number of people, contributing to the rural economy and to the maintenance of rural communities. In short, agriculture has multiple functions and a value beyond its limited economic role.

There is considerable variation in the type of accommodation provided for livestock. Accommodation constructed in the 1960s and 1970s requires modernisation, while more recent buildings could have been better designed. In the planning and design of most of these buildings there is insufficient provision for either the storage of feed and/or the manure produced. It is very evident that the development of the livestock sector has not been fully aware of the damage that livestock farming can cause to the environment.<sup>15</sup> The density of livestock per hectare of arable land in Malta and Gozo is high, and is completely dependent on imported feed, whilst experiencing a build-up of nutrients in the soil.

Apart from fragmentation and degenerating land management practices, other environmental problems appear to be nitrate, phosphate heavy metal and pesticide pollution, mainly as a result of the misuse and/or overuse of chemicals and concentrated livestock production.

Intensive agriculture has had a major impact on the way we produce food, but whilst it has increased production levels, it has now become evident that it has had a harmful effect on land, air and water quality, the farmer and the consumer. Industrial farming has also introduced high levels of systemic chemicals that have become a social danger with a build-up of antibiotic-resistant bacteria – methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA for short). Government officials and scientists blame the use of antibiotics in livestock farming for the appearance of the drug-resistant strain in farm animals<sup>16</sup>.

This led the EU to rethink its future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to protect humanity. The links between the richness of the natural environment and farming practices are complex. Many valuable habitats in Europe are maintained by extensive farming and a wide range of wild species rely on this for their survival. But inappropriate agricultural practices and land use can also have an adverse impact on natural resources. The CAP has identified three priority areas for action to protect and enhance the EU's rural heritage:

- Biodiversity and the preservation and development of natural farming and forestry systems, and traditional agricultural landscapes;
- water management and use;
- dealing with climate change.

The CAP ensures that its rules are compatible with environmental requirements and promote the development of agricultural practices that preserve the environment and safeguard the countryside. Farmers are encouraged to continue playing a positive role in the maintenance of the countryside and the environment. This is achieved by targeting aid at rural development measures that promote environmentally-sustainable farming practices such as agri-environment schemes and enhancing compliance with environmental laws by penalising disregard of these laws by farmers by a reduction in financial support from the CAP.



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## Heritage Publications Review

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

*Din l-Art Helwa*  
133 Melita Street  
Valletta

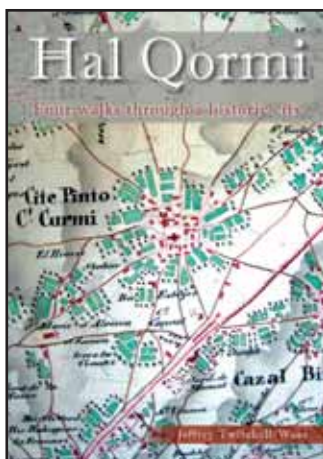
### **Hal Qormi - Four Walks through a Historic City**

Author – Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas

Published by – *Din l-Art Helwa*

ISBN – 978-99957-31-02-1

Reviewed by *Victor Rizzo*



To continue to create awareness of the need to preserve local culture and heritage, *Din l-Art Helwa*, in collaboration with Qormi Local Council, has published a 56-page booklet entitled *Hal Qormi – Four Walks through a Historic City*. The booklet is extensively illustrated, in full colour, and gives a detailed description of all the historical sites along the routes. Printed by Best Print Co. Ltd of Qrendi, the booklet was officially launched on 13 January.

Author Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, aided by his wife Margit Waas, who live in one of Qormi's quaint alleys, introduces the city as rich in history and best known for its traditions dating back to the time of the Knights of Malta, mainly *Casal Fornaro*, the Village of Bakeries.

The name Qormi (or Curmi as it appears on old maps) is etymologically derived from the Arabic for 'vine', or Greek meaning 'a confluence of waters'. In all likelihood, Curmi was simply a surname.

Unlike most Maltese towns and villages, which tend to lie on high ground, Qormi is situated at or below sea level in the lower reaches of the *Wied il-Kbir* river system in the fork where the *Kbir* and *Sewda* valleys converge before continuing to Marsa and Grand Harbour. There really is a river in Malta: the *Sewda* valley has quite a flow during the rainy season. Only when there are heavy rains does the Sewda River momentarily reappear and one can glimpse how the valley once looked.

Unfortunately, although the beauties of the valley can still be seen, insensitive development is also apparent everywhere.

In 1743, in view of its increasing population, the village petitioned Grand Master Pinto de Fonseca to officially recognize Qormi as a *città* (city). This request was granted and, for good measure, the Grand Master gave it his own name, *Città Pinto*. Qormi's coat-of-arms adopted Pinto's shield – with five upturned red crescents, above which is a mural crown representing the fortifications of Malta and indicating its status of *città*.

Today Qormi is the third largest town in Malta, with a population of around 17,500, and includes two parishes – St George and St Sebastian.

Qormi has much to offer those interested in Maltese heritage. The old centre of St George's parish remains a maze of narrow streets and alleys, old stone houses and traditional features such as holy niches (over 200), intricate ironwork, handcrafted doors and Maltese balconies.

In the first three walks, the author guides the reader through the winding streets and alleys of the town, including the parish churches of St George and St Sebastian, and many other chapels. Walk four takes the reader around two significant chapels in a countryside walk that passes old farmhouses and affords excellent views of the valley in which Qormi is situated.

Copies of the booklet, at €2.50, are available from *Din l-Art Helwa* and various bookshops.

An old photograph of a Qormi bread cart



## Nostalgias of Malta Images by Alfred Vella Gera from 1920 to 1964

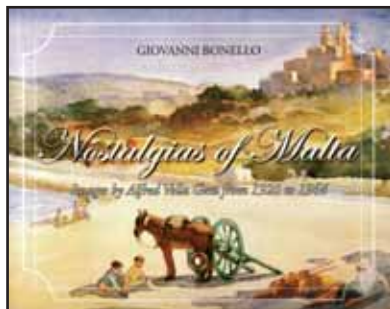
Author - Giovanni Bonello

Published by - Fondazzjoni

Patrimonju Malti

ISBN – 978-99932-7-358-5

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



With the development of digital technology, photography has reached a truly universal distribution. The incorporation of cameras with most mobile phones has made the capture of images possible at any moment, while the development of software has rendered the fruition and editing of the captured images virtually immediate. However, this has been an inverted pyramidal evolution, with photography starting off as a practice for the few and involving long hours of painstaking work to achieve results. Early photographers had to be a particular type of person – one who was willing to meddle in innovative technologies and think of ad-hoc solutions when problems cropped up – as they invariably did. So the restricted circles of the early professional photographers were of necessity comprised of what had to be distinctive and inventive personalities. As a result of this, the border between craftsmanship and art often become blurred, with some achieving results that can be justifiably defined as artistic.

For some time now, Giovanni Bonello has made it his mission to inform first himself and then, through well-produced publications, his readers about a number of such photographers. This time, he has gone a step further and has delved into the work of one of the earliest amateur photographers who, intrigued by the results of the professionals and the greater availability of photographic know-how, tried their hand at this form of art. Bonello is quick to clarify that the term “amateur” applies to Alfred Vella Gera (1901-1989) in as much as he was a banker by profession and a photographer by passion – a passion inherited from his father Walter (1864-1935). This state of things, however, did not stop Vella Gera from either achieving considerably quality, or from finding a commercial outlet for his images.

Like the work of most of those who came before him, many of Vella Gera’s photographs were aimed at being reproduced in the form of postcards. Probably for this reason, the predominant subject by far is the Maltese landscape, in all its forms. In this regard, timing was a fortunate factor in the choice of subject matter, as during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century photography developed to a noticeable qualitative level before most of the Island’s historic urban areas and countryside were also developed, one must add, with rather less happy results. This allowed even amateur photographers to obtain fascinating images of a largely unspoilt scenery not yet marred by out-of-scale buildings and tarnished by pollution. This is probably why many of us find it almost impossible not to succumb to the fascination of such old photographs and have to look time and again at any that come our way.

And the samples of Vella Gera’s photographs presented in this volume are certainly fascinating. Not having to pander to the logics of the market, Vella Gera seems to have photographed first and foremost what interested him. His landscapes are often of an urban nature and are populated by all sorts of interesting individuals rather than the usual stock of folklore characters. His is a more honest, pertinent and dynamic form of photography than that of the professionals. Each time you look at his pictures, new details emerge, such as fashion accessories, shop signs, street furniture and decorative elements that place the image in its period.

The photographs published by Bonello span the period from 1920 to 1964. For someone with a keen eye such as Vella Gera, it was impossible not to be stimulated by the essentially graphic devastation wrought by WWII air raids. The few images in the book in this category are extremely poignant and represent an effort to infuse an artistic pathos which, to us who are detached from the realities of the time, seem to clearly demonstrate the futility of all wars.

Certainly aware of the fact that photographs are made to be looked at, not written about, Bonello limits himself, as he has done in the previous volumes, to provide a compact and invariably interesting historical note about the photographer, leaving the photographs to speak for themselves. This is not to say that Bonello’s job stops at researching his information and consigning it to print because, having done that, he is left with the arduous task of selecting the images that are to find their way into the book and the rather more difficult one of deciding which are to be excluded.

With this volume, Bonello has opened yet another window onto our past. Like those that preceded it, this volume can be considered as a family album of our country. We browse through it with the same affection that we afford our personal family albums. We look at buildings and sites as we would look at long since departed relatives we never knew but with whom we feel a natural affinity of kinship. We take pleasure in identifying details that make the photograph recognisable in the same way that we look for family traits in the features of relatives. Perhaps more importantly, the photographs give body to our speculation about how Malta looked before we allowed the so-called “modern age” to deface many of her prime sites, and may even use them to reverse some of the inflicted offences.

Bomb-damaged site in front of  
St John’s Co-Cathedral  
by Alfred Vella Gera



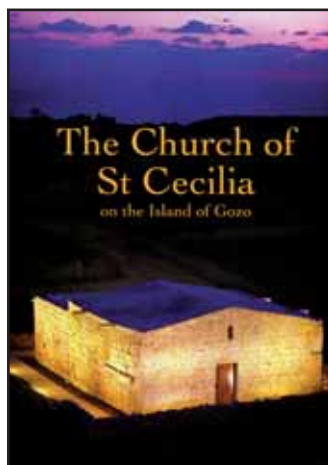
## The Church of St Cecilia on the Island of Gozo

Author - David Mallia

Published by - *Wirt Ghawdex*

ISBN – 978-99957-0-212-0

Reviewed by *Joe Azzopardi*



*Wirt Ghawdex* president Franco Masini writes in the preface to this excellently produced publication that the Church of St Cecilia is a survivor. This definition is certainly correct for any mediaeval building still standing today and it is even more so in this case, considering that apart from being the sole surviving example of “undiluted mediaeval architecture in Gozo”, to quote Franco Masini again, St Cecilia has suffered the humiliation of being deconsecrated, of becoming an ancillary building to the nearby tower – possibly housing a mule-driven mill, the loss of one of its walls and finally being set on fire.

A telling factor is that, as pointed out by Masini, the structure has suffered more in the past 50 years than it did over the centuries. Not even the close proximity of a WWII air field managed to inflict the kind of damage done to it in the recent past, with the arson incident of 2007 marking the lowest point of the church’s history, but also thankfully providing the impetus for the commencement of a restoration programme. As is often the case, we had to risk losing the Church of St Cecilia before we realised its true value and took steps to save it for posterity.

Thankfully, the energy dedicated to the restoration of the church was directly commensurate to the immense value of the building and the very present possibility of it being lost. Firstly, a clear understanding of the church and its history was needed to act as the guide on which the restoration programme would be based. This understanding came in the person of Dr David Mallia, who had carried out research on the Church of St Cecilia in all its aspects over many years. Thankfully – again – *Wirt Ghawdex* decided that, with the work concluded, all the information collected deserved to be preserved in a permanent form, resulting in the publication under review.

Dr Mallia starts off by looking at the Church of St Cecilia from a distance – both physical and historical. He traces out the context of the church in both of these aspects trying to establish its origins, the factors that brought it into being, its life as a place of worship until the definite deconsecration in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century (when it was supplanted by Xewkija parish church), and the various uses to which it was put before the long abandonment which almost brought about its destruction. Following this long distance approach, he starts to focus on the structure proper, analysing the building techniques used for its construction and drawing parallels with other buildings that present architectural affinities with St Cecilia.

Next comes a detailed dissection of the various component parts of the building, with sections dedicated to the plan, the walls, the arches, the roof, the altar, the doorways and the parvis. For many of these, the author draws yet more parallels with other buildings of the same era, while in the process emphasising the particular elements that characterise those same elements in St Cecilia’s church. By so doing, the author ensures that this unique building will have the place it deserves in the architectural history of Malta.

While much of the strength of this publication is based on Dr Mallia’s in-depth knowledge, much of its appeal comes from the intelligent layout and magnificent photographs – both by Daniel Cilia. These two aspects come together in the section dedicated to the many graffiti found in the church, which are meticulously mapped, graphically illustrated through drawings and vividly presented in a series of photographs cross-referenced to the drawings.

This publication is certainly visually enjoyable and stimulating. While the photographs of the blackened masonry strike a deep cord of disbelief and anger at the insensibility of those who could perpetrate such an act, those of the restored church fill the soul with joy and anticipation of the moment when this newly saved monument will be open to the public. Now that the Church of St Cecilia has been saved, *Wirt Ghawdex* will no doubt care for it with infinite dedication for many years to come.



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