



# **MALTESE E-NEWSLETTER**

**The Journal of the Maltese Diaspora**



**Frank L Scicluna OAM - Editor**

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**Valletta - European Capital of Culture 2018**

**TRITON FOUNTAIN - VALLETTA - MALTA**





## Urban star returns to Strait Street – Strada Stretta



A lot is said about Valletta and its history, however it is rare to encounter a discussion on the city as an urban cultural hub for alternative artistic forms. A couple of years ago, I delivered a public talk at the University of Malta Valletta Campus on this topic, organised by the Department of History of Art. The aim was to see whether an urban consciousness had developed in Maltese art production by studying a number of modern works in relation to the writings of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin.

Towards the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, there were some visual artists who explored Valletta's urban dimension. Their paintings revealed the essence of urban forms of social interaction and behaviour, technology and culture which planted their seeds within the streets and traditions of Valletta. The everyday experience became the subject matter of art, images of the power station, jazz musicians and anonymous café patrons appeared on the Maltese art scene, contrasting to the dominant religious-celestial visions of Giuseppe Calí and the later decorative church schemes by Emvin Cremona.

Although traditional practices and aesthetics persisted in the city, there developed a modern counter-cultural area that brought together musicians, performing artists, entertainers, local and foreign. Strada Stretta was the "socially and morally problematic" (as written in John Schofield and Emily Morrissey's 2013 study of *The Gut*) quarter of the capital, a Bakhtian counter-culture replete with mass forms of modern entertainment. Maltese and also international performers hailing from the UK, Norway, former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union brought Valletta to life during the dark hours of the night. There were musicians, cabaret artistes, cross-dressers, and also barmaids who populated the Egyptian Queen, the Cotton Club, the Morning Star, Las Vegas Jazz Club, and numerous others.

In their 1945 reconstruction report, Harrison and Hubbard noted that Valletta was "a city palpitating with life" so much so that "there are among its citizens some so conscious of this vital urge that they would raze its ramparts to rock and replace its canyon-like streets with spacious avenues." (Austen St. B. Harrison and R. P. S. Hubbard, *Valletta: a report to accompany the outline plan for the region of Valletta and the Three Cities*, 1945).

So much was happening and changing. George Cini's two volumes on Strait Street reveal the stories of those who inhabited the street and were an integral part of its history. Cini's books have made public stories which never formed part of Malta's official history but which are no less consequential.

Another story will be told in the form of a newly-written play. This is the story of Christina Ratcliffe, the English singer who travelled to Malta to perform for the naval troops. The Strada Stretta Concept, under the auspices of the Valletta 2018 Foundation, will be hosting a production about one of Strait Street's best performers called ***The Star of Strait Street***. It recounts the love story between Ratcliffe and Adrian 'Six Medal' Warburton, a photo-reconnaissance pilot. Both had stellar reputations and were madly in love. The ending of their story was greatly tragic, as were the endings of many intimate relationships during wartime.

Ratcliffe was the protagonist of the Morning Star, the legendary cabaret dance hall and restaurant located at the lower end of Strait Street in the *Due Balli* area. This production brings together multiple



aspects of Strait Street's past and contemporary history. The Morning Star, a bohemian cultural venue, belonged to the Fiteni family which through marriage forged links with the Bonaci's of the Café Premier, Valletta's iconic live music venue and hangout for politicians, artists and intellectuals that embodied the city's post-war *joie de vivre*. It stood directly and contrastingly in front of the Casino Maltese, a bastion of traditional values. The Fiteni-Bonaci's formed the maternal family of Strada Stretta Concept's artistic director Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci. The Ratcliffe-Warburton romance is an

intriguing story in itself, but as Schembri Bonaci informs me, it develops into a sort of Shakespearean drama with the knowledge that Gianni Fiteni, who owned the Morning Star, was deeply in love with Ratcliffe.

This is unsurprising given the singer's beauty and talent. However, this dimension of the romantic tragedy is not included in *The Star of Strait Street*, which focuses on Ratcliffe's life. In fact, she is the only character who is physically represented in the play.

*The Star of Strait Street*, a musical play, was written by Philip Glassborow and features Polly March and Larissa Bonaci as Christina Ratcliffe in her older and younger days respectively. The musical director is Geoff Thomas, whilst choreography is by Emma Loftus, with hair and make-up by Jackie Grima.

Various textual sources provoked the creation of the production, namely Ratcliffe's personal memoirs published in local newspapers, and the books by Frederick R. Galea and Paul McDonald.

Unbeknownst to Schembri Bonaci, Glassborow and March had been working on a production about Strait Street's performer after the pair had successfully collaborated on other shows. The choice of Splendid as a venue is very fitting. Splendid is the only cultural venue in Strait Street today, surrounded



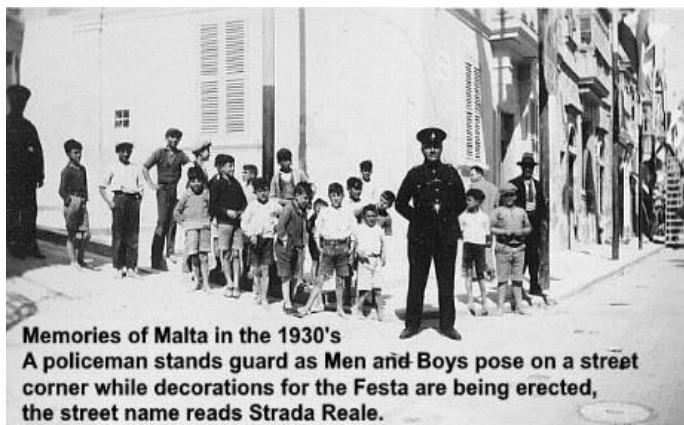
more by legal and corporate offices than it is by bars and clubs, quite a difference to its past environs. The venue was recently used as an exhibition space by the BA and MA in Fine Arts students in the Department of History of Art who showed pieces from various projects they are currently working on.

Like Cini's compendium of memoirs of the real people of Strait Street, the new play promises to represent Ratcliffe's memories of Malta as she penned them.

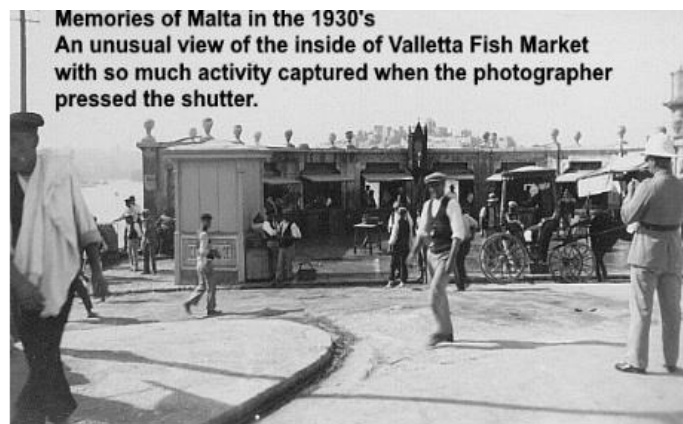
**The Musical STAR OF STRAIT STREET will be performed in Adelaide in May. More details in the future editions. Contact us for information.**



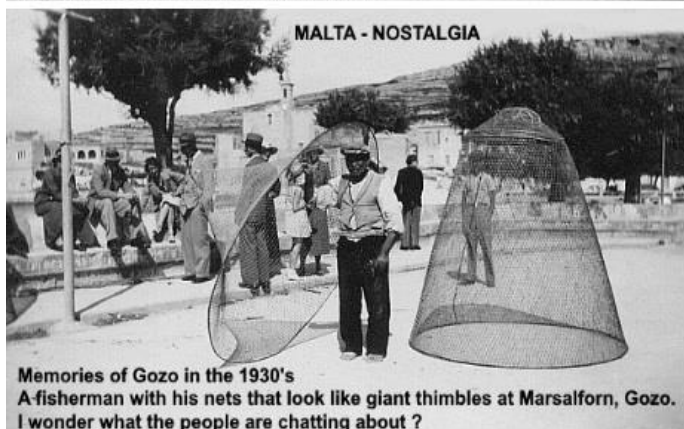
## NOSTALGIA - MALTA IN 1930s



**Memories of Malta in the 1930's**  
A policeman stands guard as Men and Boys pose on a street corner while decorations for the Festa are being erected, the street name reads Strada Reale.



**Memories of Malta in the 1930's**  
An unusual view of the inside of Valletta Fish Market with so much activity captured when the photographer pressed the shutter.



**Memories of Gozo in the 1930's**  
A fisherman with his nets that look like giant thimbles at Marsalforn, Gozo. I wonder what the people are chatting about?



### **DARBA WAHDA PROJECT**

**A multi-disciplinary project which takes place in different locations across the island, involving elderly people and children.**



Elderly people have a wealth of information and experience that makes them valuable members of our communities. Children, on the other hand, in their simplicity and youthfulness, are inspirational. *Darba Waħda* is an intergenerational project giving the two generations the opportunity to meet over a creative platform. Through various creative methods including drama, games and exercises, arts and crafts, storytelling and improvisations, the two generations have the opportunity to relate, to share, to exchange, to learn and to create... and most of all have fun together. This project

explores this relationship and creates a bridge between the two generations.

Coordinated by applied drama practitioner Anna Formosa, the project is being produced by the Valletta 2018 Foundation with the support of a number of participating local councils.

Registrations are currently open to children aged 9 to 12 years and adults over 60 hailing from Gozo. Sessions will be held every Tuesday from 4.30pm – 6.00pm on the following dates: 17, 24 April; 8, 15, 22 May 2018 at the Oratorju Dun Bosco, Pjazza Santu Wistin, Victoria, Gozo.

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networking between relevant local voluntary organisations in Malta. It also advises the Government on new developments in its field of operation and draws up reports for policy-making bodies.

## Muscat, Australian PM discuss bilateral relation

Prime Minister Joseph Muscat today had a meeting with his Australian counterpart Malcolm Turnbull, during which the relations between the two countries were discussed.

Prime Minister Muscat is in Australia on an official visit during which he will attend the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games.

. During his visit to Australia he met many people who had migrated to that country many years ago and made a success of their lives. Now the grandchildren of these people want to come back to Malta and work here, thus closing the circle.

Dr Muscat wished the Maltese athletes in the Commonwealth Games all success. He admitted he does not have the real Olympic spirit in him for he likes to win every time. There are sports in which

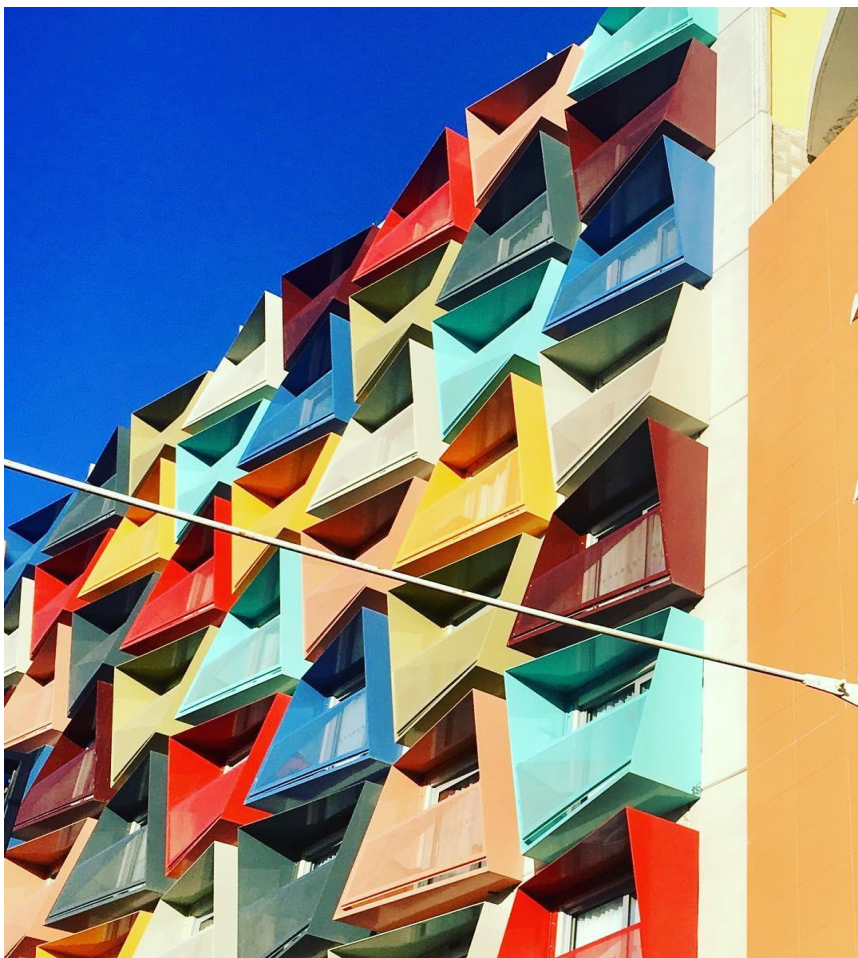
the Maltese already excel and these sports must be helped further

### **MALTA'S MOST COLOURFUL HOTEL IN MALTA**

**Malta's newest hotel has opened its doors last year.**

**The Holiday Inn Express in St Julian's is the most colourful hotel in Malta with its extremely unique facade.**

**The new hotel, which includes 100 rooms, is owned by the Eden Leisure Group and operated by InterContinental Hotels.**





## We love to hear from you

Hi Frank - I would like to congratulate you on this wonderful newsletter - as you know I can't read Maltese but I really enjoy those bits that are in English and I also enjoy handing over a copy to my father-in-law and seeing him reminisce about Malta - a home he left when he was only 17 or 18 and is now 83 but still recalls his childhood with fond memories. I also like to listen to him and my husband discuss the events in your newsletter and talk about Malta's rich history. Keep up the wonderful work you are doing, and I would encourage all those Maltese people out there to contribute to your newsletter - everyone has a story and everyone is different. Regards Katie Cassar (Adelaide) Sent from my iPad

A very Happy Easter Season to you, Frank, and all your loved ones. Yes thanks I have been receiving all the eNewsletters, opening each and every one of them and save them for future reference and refresher. I greatly enjoy the diversity, depth and easy flow of the articles. Must say, I really look forward to receiving the Maltese eNewsletter from you. Keep up the good work. Thank God for people like you. Charles Sant

Mr. Frank L. Scicluna, Hon. Consul & Editor. Congratulations on another excellent newsletter, each time you publish an issue it is extremely informative and most interesting. Richard Cumbo – Canada  
Dear Mr. Scicluna, I thank you heartily for your kindness by sending me the Maltese News Journal. It's really interested and you renew my memory of the many years I have worked and spent there. Please continue this good and interested work among the **Maltese** there. Next time I will tell you more about what I am doing in Kenya. May the Good Lord bless you and all the Maltese there. Regards Sr. Michelina Micallef - KENYA

Dear Frank, Thank you for the 213 edition of your journal **THE MALTESE E-NEWSLETTER**. It is so lovely and you have brought back a nice memory. Antoinette Mascari NSW Australia

Dear Frank, Many thanks for regular transmission of your MALTA news bulletin. I wish my life away, waiting to get one issue after the other, it brings MALTA back to life, for us. Best wishes and God's abundant blessings on you and yours. John R BRIFFA

Thanks once again Frank. May you have a wonderful Easter. Praying for you always. Fr. Manuel Parnis mssp Canada

I absolutely love your **eNewsletter**. Keep up with your wonderful work well done cheers Mary-Anne Psaila

Dear Mr.Scicluna. Thank you so much for the newsletter. It contains very interesting subjects. I had the opportunity to visit Australia twice as we have sisters working in Australia and I also had two brothers. They passed away. I like to read the newsletter for about our MALTESE brethren who went to seek a better life in Australia. Although their first years might have been hard for them, later as they knew how to manage their income, they lived a more comfortable life. I HOPE YOU HAD A HOLY AND HAPPY EASTER. Thanks to our good Jesus we had all the celebrations in our convent as most of us are elderly. we are 50 sisters. May God bless you and the work you are doing with the other Maltese people. Yours faithfully - Sr. Teresia Buttigieg

Please add me to your mailing list. I always read your very informative newsletter which I get from a friend. Keep up your good work God bless. Sahha Mary Debono

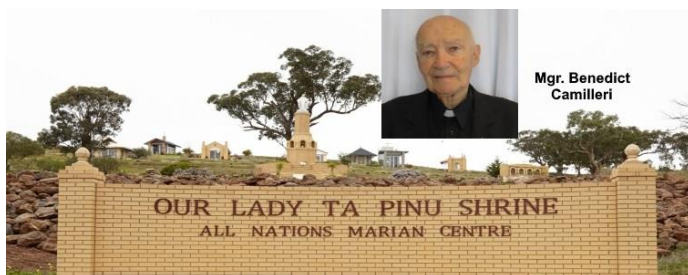
Thanks Frank. Great enjoying varied content Was reading about Jo Jo Zep Camilleri I used to work with him. Back in the late 60 early 70 at the Railways in Sydney. Thanks again I will forward to. My brother Joe he will enjoy reading your newsletter Best wishes George Vella NSW Sent from my iPhone

You surely merit a huge thank you – Antoine Vassallo

Hope all is well with you and I am enjoying your newsletter immensely, as it is so easy to read and full of interesting articles! Marie-Louise Marisa Previtera NSW

Grazzi hafna Frank L-Ghid it-tajjeb lilkom ilkoll. Tislijiet Rose u Paul Spiteri – MALTA



**MESSAGE FROM MGR. BENEDICT CAMILLERI****ALL NATION TA' PINU SHRINE,  
BACCHUS MARSH, VICTORIA – AUSTRALIA**

Greetings to you all from the shores of Gozo, the homeland of Our Lady Ta' Pinu, I am sending you my warmest wishes to you and your family this Easter. On this beautiful day, I pray that God may take care of all your needs. Touch your life with Joy and Contentment. Bless your heart with Love and Faith, comfort your soul with inner peace but above all, grant you good health now and

always...Happy Easter I also take this opportunity to remind and invite you to join our Marian Community as we celebrate jointly the Risen Lord on the Divine Mercy Sunday!!! Two especially good reasons to celebrate and praise the Almighty God and seek His Mercy. Many of you have visited the Shrine during this past Lenten period now it is time to celebrate I will be with you in prayers and you pray for me too! God Bless Fr Benedict Camilleri

Our Lady Ta' Pinu Shrine - All Nations Marian Centre 15 Flanagans Drive  
Merrimu 3340 Bacchus Marsh Victoria Australia

## Malta still unbeaten in the Davis Cup

Malta is still unbeaten in the Davis Cup men's games as Omar Sudzuka and Matthew Aciak managed to beat Moldova.

The Maltese men's team composed of Matthew Asciak, Omar Sudzuka, Denzil Agius and Matthew Cassar Torregiani are having great performances during the Davis Cup Europe Group three which is being held in Ulcinj, Montenegro.

This is an excellent result and an honour for Malta. The Davis Cup is one of the most prestigious tennis tournaments.

Malta had a difficult encounter as they played Moldova who are seeded first. However, Matthew Asciak and Omar Sudzuka who are currently seeded first and second in Malta dominated the game. Both of them had a good performance throughout. They were also on

fine form during the decisive doubles match when they managed to beat Vasiliu Dontu and Egor Matvievici 6-3 , 6-2 in order to keep Malta at the top.

Earlier on today, Asciak also won 6-1, 6-2 during the singles against Alexander Vitcov.

The Maltese players were also dominant yesterday against Kosovo. Omar Sudzuka won against Burim Bytyqi 6-4, 6-1 during the singles. Matthew Aciak did the same as the latter overcame Granit Bajraliu 6-0, 6-2. Matthew Asciak together with Matthew Cassar Torregiani kept on doing great after beating Burim Bytyqi and Muhamed Zulji with the excellent score of 6-0, 6-0.

The Maltese team was trained by Italian coach Danilo Platania.

After a very good start in the Davis Cup European Group 3, with Malta beating Kosovo three rubbers to nil, the Mediterranean island were up against the number one seed, Moldova.

now at the top of Pool B, Group B and puts the team in the driving seat to clinch a promotion play-off berth.



*Malta Team at the Davis Cup in Montenegro*



## Children's book aims to discourage bullying, encourage victims to speak out

'L-Għajnuna hi Prezzjuża', a book that teaches children to respect one another and not resort to bullying, was launched on Wednesday evening at the

Agenda Bookshop of the Valletta Waterfront.

Miller Distributors have published this book written by Greta Antignolo after seeing the potential as it links well to the Maltese syllabus of grade 2. The story not only helps children learn the importance of being kind to each other but it also teaches them to seek help and speak out when things are not going the way they should be. At the same time they will also be learning the days of the week and the parts of the human body in the Maltese language.



The author graduated as a B.ed Hons Primary teacher in 2016 and is currently teaching at San Anton school. After her own personal experience with bullying she had an aim to work harder to try and minimise this problem. In fact she also focused her thesis around this issue. The book was in fact written as part of her thesis together with a number of other resources. The aim of the resource pack is to prevent bullying among 6, 7 and 8 year old children. Greta is now serving as Vice President with the NGO 'bBrave' whose aim is to help bullies and their victims.

A number of special guests, including Education Minister Evarist Bartolo and 'bBrave' president and general secretary Norman Zammit and Aaron Zammit Apap, gave short speeches.

Minister Bartolo said the book would be a good tool for teachers to use in their classrooms. The Minister also spoke about the importance to prevent bullying from a young age and explained how together with his colleagues they are working on new schemes to work upon this problem.

The President of **bBrave**, Ing. Norman Zammit spoke about the various forms of bullying, and the NGO's journey to date. Individuals experiencing some form of bullying should realise that they are not alone in their ordeal because bBrave is growing to be there to support them, he said. bBrave also intends to help individuals demonstrating bullying attitudes to better direct their emotions.

Aaron Zammit Apap, Secretary General, explained that children should learn from a young age that bullying is not on. He spoke of the deficit of role models in our society, and children's rights to look up to their seniors. Glorifying bad behaviour presents grave societal repercussions, and society seems to be far more accepting of untoward behaviour on the social media. A summary of bBrave's operations over its first year was also given. Photos Michael Camilleri

Readers around the World

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## 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE MALTESE RSL SUB-BRANCH (South Australia)

Maltese RSL committee member, Chev. Charles Farrugia OAM JP told The Maltese Newsletter *"I joined the RSL in the sixties, the Maltese veterans made history by receiving the charter in 1968 from Brigadier Eastwick on ANZAC Day Saturday 25th April 1968. I've been serving on this committee since then."*

Anzac Day 2018 will have special significance for the Maltese RSL sub-branch, it will coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the day they received their charter.



The Maltese RSL Sub-branch receives its Charter from the RSL President in 1968, Brigadier T.C. Eastwick. Charles Farrugia is second from the right in this official ceremony.

The Maltese RSL sub-branch was chartered on April 25, 1968 after their contingent had marched for the first time in Adelaide in their own group. They have marched every year since. For many years the sub-branch met every fortnight for a mid-day lunch and playing bowls, cards and bingo. They also have an Anzac dinner dance, and a Christmas party. After their charter, the sub-branch met at the Hackney Hall for about 20 years until Prospect Council gave them the use of their Senior Citizens Hall.

There was a special spring in Charlie Farrugia's step as he marched proudly at the head of the Maltese contingent in this year's Anzac procession. It was the first time the Maltese ex-servicemen had taken part as a group, and the fulfilment of a personal ambition for Charlie.

### ANZAC DAY 1968 DAY THE MALTESE RSL SUB-BRANCH RECEIVED THE CHARTER



Insert: Charles Farrugia, President and Co-Founder and Vincent Fenech of Crystall Brook  
Front row (from left to right): G. Piscopo, C. Bugeja, E. Bugeja, G. Farrugia, C. Sacco, J. Fenech, F. Bartolo, F. Spiteri, and F. Mangion  
Middle Row: C. Mallia, G. Muscat, C. Camilleri, J. Raggio, L. Zammit, A. Mifsud, J. Borg, J. Vella, C. Farrugia  
Back Row: J. DeFelice, F. Busuttil, A. Coleiro, S. Mallia, G. Abela, and F. Brincat.

Records are not new to Charlie Farrugia - he is the youngest World War 2 veteran in Australia. Charlie joined the Royal Malta Artillery in 1943 as a bugler - at the ripe old age of 14. It was typical of the gallant spirit that carried the tiny island through massive bombardments and won Malta the George Cross for bravery. Charlie later became a paratrooper with the 6th Airborne Division. After migrating to Adelaide, he joined the

Payneham sub-branch of the RSL and marched with the British Legion. The sight of Greeks, Turks and Frenchmen in their own groups stirred Charlie's national pride, and he petitioned the Maltese Guild - of which he was assistant treasurer and liaison officer - for support in establishing a Maltese ex-servicemen's club. The Maltese community responded wholeheartedly.

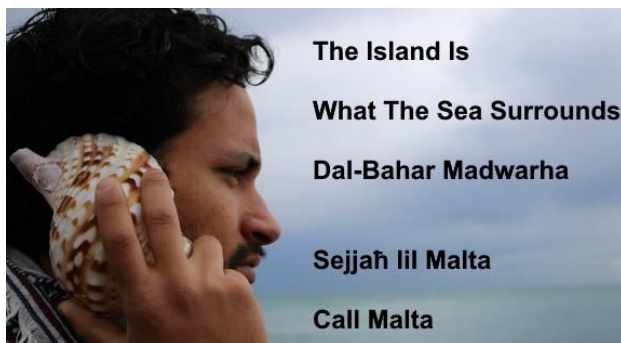


RSL MALTESE SUB-BRANCH (SA) WOMEN VOLUNTEERS 1970-72  
From left: K. Vella, S. Sacco, C. Demosani, J. Sacco, V. DeFelice, M. Mapstone, N. Felice and A. Farrugia

**WOMEN VOLUNTEERS 1970-72:** Photo (from left): K. Vella, S. Sacco, C. Demosani, J. Sacco, V. DeFelice, M. Mapstone, N. Felice, and A. Farrugia.

From then on it was plain hard work. A born organiser, Charlie formed a committee and spent the next eight months recruiting members and raising funds. The culmination came on April 25, when the club was granted affiliation with the Australian RSL.

Charlie is quick to give credit to his helpers - his wife, his committee, fellow MMT members like Frank Bugeja, Amabile Mifsud and John Baldacchino, and the Tramways Club, which made Hackney Hall available for the sub-branch's headquarters.



**VALLETTA 2018'S** major multi-site exhibition, "Dal-Bahar Madwarha", opened its doors to curious visitors across the Islands starting from the 10th of March to end of June. Curated by Maren Richter, large installations, performances and public interventions are taking place in both traditional and unexpected locations across Malta, exploring the idea of "islandness" in playful and critical ways.

**Sejjaħ lil Malta (Call Malta)** is a site-specific performance by Lebanese artist Tania El Khoury, that

take place on two shorelines. It is the sound of the relationship of Malta and Tunisia and the border in between: The Mediterranean Sea. El Khoury is also part of the group exhibition being held at the St Elmo Examinations Centre.

The artist invites the audience to take a journey on a Maltese water taxi boat from Valletta to Senglea, and to listen to sea shells that were picked up from the Tunisian coastal city of Sousse. Sejjaħ lil Malta explores our changing perception of the Mediterranean Sea, a fluctuating space of multiple borders, a leisure destination for some, and a trap to many of those seeking refuge. The water taxis themselves tell a local story of Malta's internal borders as a result of the privatisation of the seashore.

**Narrator and sound designer:** Yasmin Kuymizakis **Performers:** Chakib Zidi and Mohamed Ali "Dali" Agrebi **Singers:** Mouheddine Chalchoule (Huita) and Yasmin Kuymizakis

Performances will be taking place between 4pm to 7pm (6 shows with limited capacity of 5 people each ride) - Duration: 30 minutes. Fee for the boat ride: €4 per person paid directly to boat drivers.

Premiere: 6th of April Next performances: 8th of April and every weekend in May and June

This project is supported by The British Council Malta.



We can only publish a small sample of emails we receive each week. But there are still some readers who have NEVER sent an acknowledgement. Since we are having new subscribers every week if we do not hear from you, your email address will be replaced by a new one. Editor





**Meghan's dress-down Friday! Prince Harry and his bride-to-be go casual as they watch athletes preparing for the Invictus Games - as she reveals trip to the main event in Sydney will be her first foreign tour as a member of the Royal Family.**

*Claps Prince Harry claps while standing next to his fiancée*

*Meghan Markle as they visit the University of Bath.*

Meghan Markle today revealed her first confirmed foreign tour as a member of the Royal Family - a visit to Australia in October. Prince Harry's fiancée let slip that they would definitely be travelling to Sydney to watch the royal's inspirational Invictus Games later this year.

Although the couple are just five weeks away from their May 19 wedding at Windsor Castle, there was no let up in their schedule of public engagements as they went to Bath to watch some of the men and women hoping to represent the UK team compete for a place.

The couple both went for a casual look today. Meghan, 36, wore an Invictus branded polo shirt with black bootcut Mother Denim jeans under a Babaton for Aritzia trench coat, with high-heeled black boots. The US actress was fresh from a few days in Los Angeles with her mother, Doria Ragland, over the Easter weekend, when she caught up with friends and chatted about plans for her May 19 wedding.

## MEGHAN AND MALTA



**Meghan wearing the GHONNELLA during her visit to Malta in 2015**

The couple have many things and tastes in common. Like Harry, Meghan has connections with Malta. Her great-great-grandmother Mary was born in Malta in 1862, shortly after Meghan's great-great-grandmother Mary had moved to Malta with her English soldier husband, and Harry's grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, had lived for a time in Malta.

Meghan had visited Malta some two years ago, to model for *Elle* magazine. Meghan had stated that she became enamoured of the Maltese Islands, with everyone welcoming her wherever she had visited, and she had also liked both the food and the Maltese culture.

During her trip to Valletta in 2015, Meghan sought to educate herself about Maltese history linked to her ancestors, but also to get a feel for the local culture and to feel "at home". Staying in Valletta gave her the perfect base to learn about Malta and to visit some extremely important historical buildings. She marvelled at the 24carat gilded walls of St-John's Co-Cathedral, writing on her blog that it "took her breath away".

Meghan made the most of Valletta's close proximity to Gozo, Dingli and Mdina, making a special effort to visit the Villa Antinori owned by Meridiana Winery. Villa Antinori produce Tignanello, Meghan's favourite kind of wine; she likes this wine so much that it inspired the name for her blog "The Tig".

Maltese food and drink were mentioned several times by Meghan and we weren't surprised that she found the fresh produce, wholesome home-cooked dishes and fresh fish something to write home about, citing her favourite dishes as spaghetti with rabbit and pastizzi for breakfast.

***"I've been fortunate to travel all over the world and I love a different cultural experience wherever you go, but to come somewhere where you so quickly settle in to feeling welcomed is really special; it's this Maltese hospitality that is really special to the place."*** she said. We like to think that some of this great Maltese hospitality that she speaks of refers to our warm family welcome at Casa Ellul.

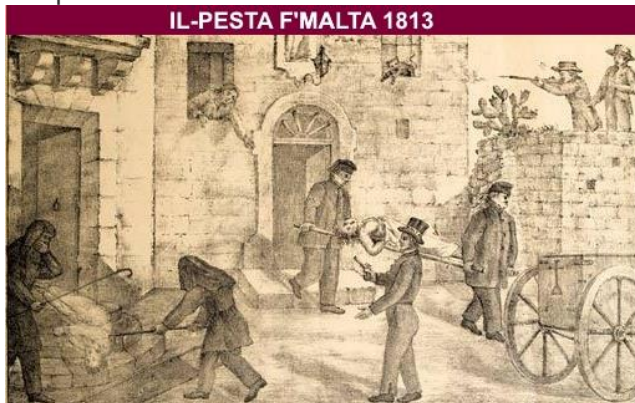


# The plague in Malta in 1813

*A hearse used during the outbreak of the plague recently discovered in the crypt of the sanctuary at Zabbar. Picture: Courtesy of Carmel Bonavia.*

The way the plague in 1813 disrupted life in Malta and gripped the population in a terrifying fear can still send a chill down the spine of anyone who reads of such episodes.

An extremely vivid description of how that outbreak spread and the way the British authorities tried to curb it is presented in the latest edition of Treasures of Malta.



Treasures of Malta is published three times a year by Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti in association with the Malta Tourism Authority.

In the feature about the plague, that lasted about 10 months and wiped out 4,500 people, Giovanni Bonello presents a vivid description of the terrifying effects of the plague and how, in spite of its horrifying results, some people still tended to think it would not hit them, with thieves stealing property from the victims of the scourge.

The courts, the theatre and other buildings where the public met, including churches, were closed down and the harbour areas placed under medical supervision. The carriers of the disease were members of the crew of the Maltese brig San Nicola sailing under a British flag that arrived at Marsamxett from Alexandria on March 28, 1813.

Dr Bonello writes: "...men on board showed obvious symptoms of the plague. Malta had been virtually free from that scourge for over 163 years, and now the dreaded curse appeared again among us..".



"The board of health turned jittery at the threat of a plague reservoir moored at the centre of the harbour. They wanted the ship towed out and burnt. The owners insisted on compensation. After 13 days haggling, the floating coffin left for Alexandria".

The colonial government ordered that anyone withholding information of an appearance of the disease or who concealed infected people would be sentenced to death.

Valletta was segregated into separate districts by means of barricades, fences, gates and armed guards. Signs painted on doors by day and lanterns by night advertised those houses where the infection

had visited.

Criminals were press-ganged under armed surveillance to remove and bury corpses, caking them in quicklime in communal graves and clearing garbage from infected houses.

"Though under military escort, these convicts in their red and black robes, their faces hidden by hoods, spread as much terror as the plague they were engaged to control.

"Their guards, generally frightened of the delinquents in their charge, rarely restrained them from painstaking rounds of rape and robbery," Dr Bonello wrote



## 1.8 million passengers passed through Malta International Airport this winter

**While summer remains high season for traffic through the terminal, the airport has experienced increasingly busy winters, with March's increase being the strongest**



by **Maria Pace** [maltatoday.com.mt](http://maltatoday.com.mt)

1,873,599 passengers passed through the Malta International Airport terminal between the months of November and March, resulting in an upturn of 17% over the same period last year.

In a statement, MIA said that while summer remains high season for traffic through the terminal, the airport has experienced increasingly busy winters. This, MIA said, resulted from collaborative efforts to promote Malta as a year-round destination.

A monthly passenger profile exercise carried out among inbound, non-business travellers compiled by MISCO Ltd revealed that for the stretch between November and February, culture and weather were the top two reasons that attracted tourists to Malta. An encouraging 97% went on to add that the island lived up to their expectations.

Growth in passenger movements was registered in parallel with an increase of 16.6% in aircraft movements and an increase of 18.1% in seat capacity; both stemming from an enhanced winter flight schedule offering five new routes and increased frequencies on existing ones. On the other hand, seat load factor (SLF) for the season dropped marginally and stood at 77.2%.

Malta International Airport's top markets were the United Kingdom (+11.6 per cent), Italy (+12.9 per cent), Germany (+14.7 per cent), France (+20.9 per cent), and Belgium (-3.7 per cent), cumulatively accounting for over 1.3 million passenger movements of the airport's total traffic for winter.

While all winter months experienced double-digit growth, March saw the strongest increase at 22.5%. The Easter holidays and the launch of a summer schedule offering more than 100 destinations were important contributing factors to the significantly improved performance observed last month.

With summer now having started, Malta International Airport has inaugurated 12 new routes operated by different airlines for the season, and will be launching more routes in April. Busier days are expected, but with eight additional check-in desks and a new Central Security Area in operation as part of the company's Terminal Reconfiguration Project, the airport is in a better position to handle the increase in traffic.



### **MALTESE E-NEWSLETTER** The Journal of the Maltese Diaspora



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Photo - DOI - Jeremy Wonnacott

## Il-Festa l-Kbira celebrations in Valletta kick off

Celebrations in relation to *Il-Festa l-Kbira* continued with a concert in St George's Square held by the King's Own Band Club and the La Valette Band Club, during which Minister for Justice, Culture and Local Government Owen Bonnici, Parliamentary Secretary for Consumer Rights and Valletta 2018 Deo Debattista, Valletta 2018 Chairman Jason Micallef, and Valletta 2018 Executive Director Catherine Tabone delivered a short message.

Minister Bonnici said that "this is definitely a unique feast as it celebrates Maltese culture and traditions. The European Capital of Culture is providing us with an opportunity to celebrate our culture in its diverse forms, from dance and contemporary art to Maltese traditions such as feasts, which all form part of our identity"

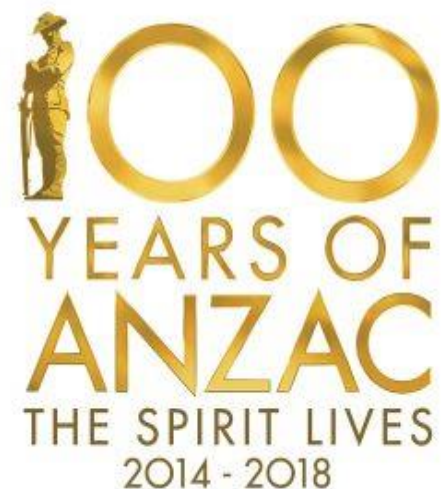
"It is our obligation and duty to work tirelessly in order to preserve our past and also strengthen the future of this unique sector. Culture is at the heart of many, therefore we are committed to ensure that it is accessible to everyone. This government's strategy for this sector is to provide an inclusive culture for this emerging economic niche which is increasingly evolving and being strengthened", emphasised Minister Bonnici.

Parliamentary Secretary Deo Debattista insisted that *Il-Festa l-Kbira* is an event treasured by many as the Maltese festa will be given extraordinary European value. "Above all, it is an excellent occasion for band clubs, the Valletta community, residents, feast enthusiasts, and all those who contribute to one of the four festas, to be a part of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme, where unity is force".

"As Maltese, we must treasure this, because culture is nothing without the communities that live it", Debattista said. Jason Micallef said that, "the Valletta 2018 Foundation always believed that culture belongs to everybody. Its mission, from the beginning, was to give everyone the opportunity to take part in its cultural programme, not only as a passive participant but also actively. We want to increase audiences, but also participation. This Festa, created by the people for the people, is a clear example of our commitment towards these principles. "This initiative is an essential part of the Valletta 2018 Foundation's commitment to promote and safeguard our country's intangible cultural heritage", stated Catherine Tabone.



Next Edition of the MALTESE E-NEWSLETTER will be a special edition dedicated to the ANZACS and MALTA in World War 1







## 'WE ARE BEING BURIED ALIVE' - residents, NGOs, local councillors

Julian Bonnici

Residents, local councils, and NGOs gathered together to express their concerns that the project proposed by the db Group on the former ITS site, which will consist of a 37 storey residential tower and a 19 storey resort, will have significant adverse effects on the infrastructure and environment of the surrounding community.

The development was described as part of the 'siege on Pembroke', even more so given that the project is being proposed despite the fact that a master plan for the area has been shelved following public outcry when it was initially launched, given that it appeared to be geared towards the developers rather than the residents.



The pressure group also launched the campaign '**Tidfuniex Hajjin**', "a completely non-partisan initiative in favour of prioritising residents' rights and environmental protection over the private profits of the few." Pointing towards figures outlined in the Environment Impact Assessment, the group said that beyond the existing traffic issues in the area, the infrastructure, they explained, was not adequate to sustain the extra 7,500 daily car trips into the area the project would generate.

The EIA also shows that waste is also an issue, with the development expected to produce some 336,085 tonnes of waste during the demolition and excavation phase.

It was also said that the batching plant which will be installed on site will also have environmental consequences.

The project will also generate a large shadow imaging the amount of light reaching the area through the year, and significantly change the character of Pembroke. In December, the shadow cast by the tower will reach the Reverse Osmosis Plant.

St Julian's Mayor Guido Dalli warned the crowd that the project could signify "the beginning of the end for Pembroke."

"I remember when St Julian's looked like Pembroke, but now nothing is left but buildings, exhaust, and noise pollution," he said.

Pembroke Mayor Dean Hili echoed these sentiments, also noting that the development does reflect the surrounding community and insisted that the project cannot continue before any master plan is completed. Residents who also spoke at the event expressed concerns over the potential environmental consequences and affect the quality of theirs and their children's lives.

"We need to start speaking and doing things for the good of everyone, and not for the good of our pockets," one resident said.

DB Group and the government signed a 99-year temporary emphyteusis for the land for a €60 million price tag, which is split between a €15 million premium payable over seven years and €23.4 million in redeemed leases which will be paid by individual owners of the residential units and not directly by the group. This is the second time in a year were Pembroke residents have protested a development.

Last August, a large group of residents along with NGOs protested against the development of a private school, Chiswick House School, on Gabriele Henin Street. in Pembroke. However, the crowd today was noticeably smaller than that afternoon.

Environment Minister Jose Herrera had turned up to the previous protest to announce his support of the residents, telling the media that "took an oath in office to make a statement. I am here in support of the residents in the area. The government needs to start protecting public land. We are not a region or an island, we are country, we have to keep sustainable and mitigate the adverse effects on investment"



## 475-YEAR OLD TRADITION KEPT AT ZEJTUN

The Feast of Saint Gregory in Zejtun attracted many hundreds to follow a long tradition and taking their first swim of the year at Marsaxlokk.

It is an old tradition that for the feast of St Gregory on the first Wednesday following Easter, the Maltese flock to the picturesque fishing village of Marsaxlokk to celebrate the occasion.

This year many hundreds of young and old to uphold the tradition, spending the day playing tombola, snacking on traditional oiled bread and taking a refreshing drink. On a day when temperatures reached 24 degrees Celcius, ice creams are also on the day's main menu.

However, despite the good weather only a few ventured to take their first swim, another traditional element on St Gregory's feast day.

However, besides playing tombola and lashings of fresh bread only a few folkloristic traditions have been maintained and the traditional Maltese folk singing "ghana" has been replaced by contemporary music from bars and restaurants.

On the religious side, the liturgical aspect is solemnly celebrated at Zejtun. With roots stretching back to 1543, a procession led by the Archbishop is held and stops at three churches, starting with the church of St Clement and terminating at the St Gregory church where a Mass is celebrated.

## Mamma Mia in Malta



*The cast of Mamma Mia – photo-Justin Mamo*

**Producer:** FM Theatre Productions **Venue:** Republic Hall – Conference Centre, Valletta  
Get ready for Mamma Mia – the musical packed with ABBA's hits, which together tell the hilarious story of a teen's search for her birth father on a Greek island paradise. Being performed for the first time in Malta, over 54 million people all around the world have fallen in love with the characters, the

story and the music that make Mamma Mia! the ultimate feel-good show! A mother. A daughter. Three possible dads. And a trip down the aisle you'll never forget! Locally the show is being produced by FM Theatre and will star Izzy Warrington, Pia Zammit, Tony Edridge, Edward Mercieca, Ray Calleja, Thomas Camilleri, Maxine Aquilina, Jeremy Grech, Francesco Nicodeme, Nicole Cassar and Tezara Camilleri. It is being directed by Chris Gatt. Schedule Friday 13 April at 8 pm Saturday 14 April at 8PM Sunday, 15 April 2018 at 7.30pm





MEDITERRANEAN  
CONFERENCE  
CENTRE

## MEDITERRANEAN CONFERENCE CENTRE KNIGHTS' HALL VALLETTA – MALTA

One of the most imposing buildings in Valletta is the former "**SACRA INFIRMERIA**" of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, now popularly known as the Mediterranean Conference Centre, which is located adjacent to Fort St Elmo and overlooking the Grand Harbour in Valletta, Malta's capital city.



1574



1676



1798



1800



1918



1950



1959



1979



Today

### Mediterranean Conference Centre - Valletta - Malta

**1574** - Work on this vast edifice started during late 1574 during the reign of Grand Master Jean de la Cassiere (1572-82) and was extended several times over the years. The "Old Ward" which is the main attraction was extended into the "Great Ward" during the years 1660 to 1666 under the rule of the Cottoners. This hall measuring 155 metres in length, was at that time one of the largest in Europe and was described as "one of the grandest interiors in the world". The Sacra Infermeria was considered to be one of the best hospitals in Europe and could accommodate 914 patients in an emergency.

**1676** - In 1676 Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner (1663-80) founded the School of Anatomy and Surgery at the Infirmary. This school was to be the forerunner of the Medical School of the University of Malta. Surgeon (Later Sir) David Bruce discovered the undulant fever germ (Brucellosis) in 1887, when the

Hospital was used by the British Military Forces as the Garrison Hospital (1800-1920). During World War II the building suffered serious damages and approximately one third of the complex was destroyed.

**1798** - When the Order of St John of Jerusalem left the Maltese Islands, the French took over the Infirmary in June 1798, just after the occupation of the Island by General Napoleon Bonaparte. The Infirmary now became known as "Grand Hopital" or "Hopital Militaire". The French carried out various structural alterations to improve the ventilation, sanitation, and lighting of the hospital. The uprising of the Maltese against the French occupiers on 2nd September 1798 meant the decline of the hospital as drugs, fresh meat, and fruit were no longer available at the hospital. The situation in the hospital and indeed in the whole island was so bad that General Calude H.B. Vanois, the commander in chief of the French forces surrendered the island on 5th September 1800 to the English forces.

**1800** - From 1800 till 1918 during the British Rule, the Centre served as a Station Hospital. Situated very near to the Grand Harbour, the hospital was within easy reach of the sick and wounded servicemen as hospital ships brought them in. For this reason the Station Hospital was mainly used as a sorting base and also as a centre for dangerously ill patients that could not be moved any further.

**1918** - The end of World War I saw the end of the Station Hospital. The Infirmary's Hall was turned into the Police Headquarters as from 1918 till 1940. During the ensuing bombardments of Valletta, during World War II, the Mediterranean Conference Centre received four direct hits. 1945- Part of what remained standing of the Long Ward was the Entertainment Centre for the allied troops and became known as the Command Hall, as from 1945 till 1950.

**1950** - Between 1950-1951 it was turned into a the Children's Theatre.

**1959** - From 1959 the Centre served as a School and Examination Hall.



**1979** - Several attempts at restoration and reconstruction of the derelict building were made in 1959 and 1975, with a final effort during 1978 when the building was transformed into the present Mediterranean Conference Centre. The Centre was inaugurated on the 11th February 1979 and was awarded the coveted Europa Nostra Diploma of Merit for the "superb restoration of the Sacra Infermeria and its adaption for use as a conference centre."

**Today** - Since its inception as a conference centre an ongoing restoration and maintenance programme has kept the unique historical character of this national monument, while providing a modern venue able to handle major international conferences, exhibitions, banquets and theatrical events. The MCC, the flagship of conference venues on the Island, is now renowned for its outstanding services and facilities.

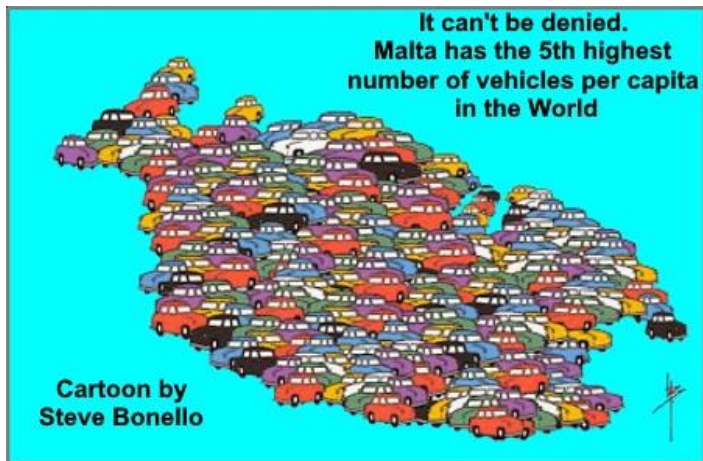
**Since we have been reading this eNewsletter we have learnt so much about Malta and its culture. We always take time to read it but we read it from cover to cover. Every article is very interesting and informative. We urge other to subscribe too. It's free. J & T Formosa**



OPINION: Josanne Cassar

## Some home truths on a changing Malta

**I seriously see no benefit in having money pouring out of our ears while everyone is fuming with rage on our gridlocked roads packed like sardines with too many cars**



It is no secret that Malta's demographics have been changing at a rapid pace due to various factors from EU membership to refugees and, of course, the Citizenship scheme.

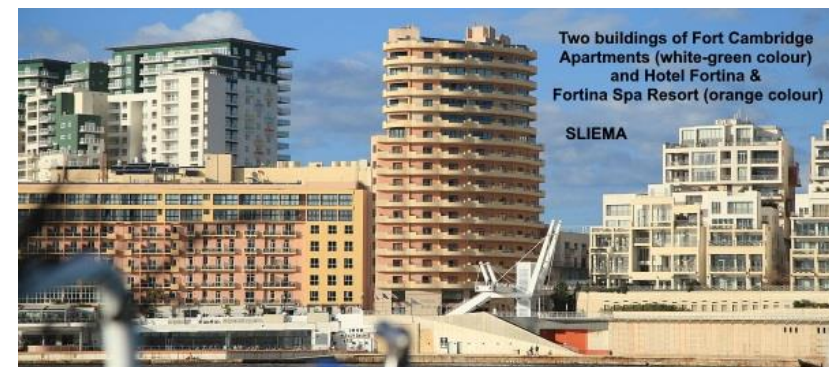
The result is a country which has undergone a series of jolts and shocks in a relatively short span of time, and it is natural that a period of adjustment was required for many to get used to the changes. For, let us not forget that up to 14 years ago when we became EU members, there was a certain hegemony which we were all used to. Non-Maltese nationals living here were the exception rather than the rule, and many did so through marriage, or in the case of many British nationals, upon retirement. They were assimilated into our culture in a natural process over the years and there was hardly a ripple of disturbance.



Over the years, however, the momentum changed and the gradual trickle felt like someone had suddenly flung open all the gates and a gush of people was suddenly pouring in. Of course, it wasn't just a one-way street. Freedom of movement to work and study in any European country meant that many 20 and 30-somethings took the opportunity to pack up and leave as they had always yearned to, but it also meant that the opposite was bound to happen as well (although many who voted for the EU seemed not to have read the fine print on this point). Economic migration has opened the floodgates as people leave their countries where unemployment is

sky high, in search for a job, any job. Those seeking asylum as refugees fleeing war in their countries have also added to the numbers, as they have throughout Europe.

A more multi-cultural Malta has thus emerged, much to the consternation of many who cannot quite adapt to this phenomenon. The resistance to this is understandable, because as I have pointed out in the past, one cannot simply force people to integrate or to feel comfortable with new ethnic groups and cultures just



by snapping one's fingers. It takes time, and sometimes, generations. The resentment is often there, just below the surface, especially when the proximity of swarms of people in a small space leads some to snap, with tempers flaring, ready to lash out at whoever is nearby.

That Malta as a people was not ready for these changes is obvious. But it is also patently obvious that Malta as a country, from its infrastructure to its

bureaucracy, was not ready for this either. From real-life experiences recounted on social media, to daily information from news reports, the picture which is painted is of an island which is trying to grapple with a constantly-changing landscape but which has found itself woefully unprepared for it.

For example, not a day goes by that I don't read a number of complaints from one of the ex-pat groups about the difficulties of getting one's basic affairs in order once one moves here. From opening a bank account, to negotiating the maze of renting an affordable apartment from a decent landlord and being put on the correct tariff for the water & electricity bill, it all sounds like a deliberate obstacle course guaranteed to put off anyone who is in the least bit fainthearted.

And yet, a recent news report tells us that there are almost 43,000 foreigners currently employed on the island. Within another five years it is being estimated that 30% of the workforce will be made up of non-Maltese nationals. So, despite the fact that moving and settling in here is not as straightforward as it could be, we are told that the country needs to "import" more and more workers, which is presumably why there is all this unfettered construction of towering blocks of apartments. According to a report on TVM, "There are sectors such as gaming, financial services, IT and pharmaceuticals for which we do not have enough Maltese workers, and no matter how many new people qualify in these fields there will still not be enough to keep up with the demand. On top of these, one needs to add those sectors which "are no longer attractive to Maltese workers"

## Strong winds drop walls in Sannat

Protected tree badly damaged in overnight wind storm



Bricks came tumbling down - and onto a parked car - in a Sannat road Gozo's windswept Sannat bore the brunt of weather damage on Sunday night, as howling winds lashed Malta and Gozo.

Strong winds caused significant damage to an old Norfolk pine tree [*Awrikarja kbira*] in the town's St Margarita square, local council secretary Jason Curmi told *Times of Malta*.

The tree, which is among Gozo's biggest and was already weak, lost several large branches to the strong winds and its long-term survival

now hangs in the balance.

Two boundary walls also failed to hold up in the violent weather and collapsed, with limestone bricks from one of the walls on Ras in-Newwiela causing significant damage to a car parked right by the wall and blocking the street entirely. Another wall on Triq it-Tempju tal-Imramma also collapsed in the high winds. Malta and Gozo experienced strong south-easterly winds with gusts reaching 18 metres per second on Sunday night and early Monday morning, according to data provided by Windy.com.

Sannat was not the only town badly hit by inclement weather but several other villages in Malta and Gozo. In St Julian's, a woman had a narrow escape when a sheet of corrugated iron and a water tank lid landed just metres from where she and her dog were standing.



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## Malta Maritime Museum – Vittoriosa, Birgu



*Restaurant and steeple of the Maritime Museum  
of Vittoriosa Birgu*

The Malta Maritime Museum displays a collection of model ships and marine equipment

The Malta Maritime Museum is located in [Vittoriosa](#) and is spread out over 2,000m<sup>2</sup> with one hall focusing only on the Royal Navy in Malta, another one to the Order of St John era and a third one, the Anadrian Hall exhibiting the engine room machinery of the Anadrian.

The newer Marine Engineering exhibit opened in October 2003 and it attracts many visitors. There is also a Merchant

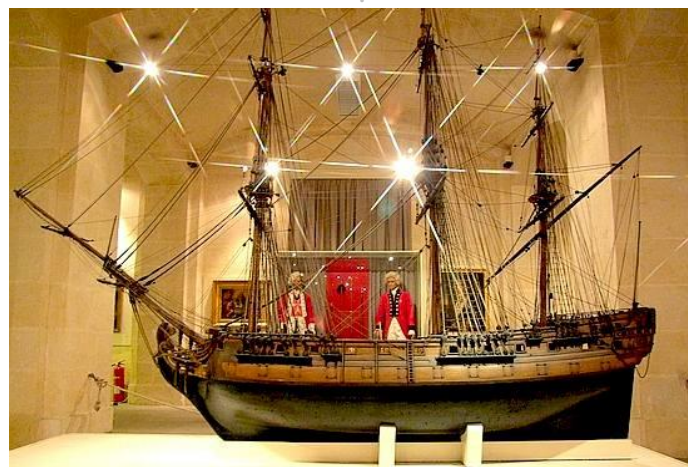
ion on the first floor and an **entire hall** dedicated to the [Knights of St John's](#) period where you can see intriguing paintings and several models of boats.

Temporary exhibitions are also arranged in various halls with something new and interesting to see to time at the **Malta Maritime Museum**.

Malta conducts guided tours of the museum at 11.00 am daily.



**A selection of  
exhibits at the  
Maritime  
Museum in  
Malta**





## CITADELLA VISITORS' CENTRE WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD IN AMERICA

*H.E. Mr Pierre Clive Agius, Ambassador of the Republic of Malta to the United States of America, along with Ross Magri, Managing Director of Sarner International receiving the award*

Gozo's Cittadella Visitors' Centre has received a prestigious TEA Thea Award for Outstanding Achievement, during a ceremony in the USA.

The themed entertainment industry's top honour – a TEA Thea Award for Outstanding Achievement – was presented in front of an audience of nearly a thousand themed entertainment professionals at the Disneyland® Hotel in California.

This is the third international award for the Cittadella Visitors' Centre. In July last year it was named as Best Visitor Attraction Project at the annual InstallAwards 2017. This was followed in September with the award for Entertainment Venue of The Year, at the AV Awards ceremony in London's West End.

This latest award was accepted on behalf of the Cittadella Visitors' Centre by special guest, H.E. Mr Pierre Clive Agius, Ambassador of the Republic of Malta to the United States of America, along with Ross Magri, Managing Director of Sarner International.

H.E. Mr Pierre Clive Agius said that he was delighted to be able to accept the award on behalf of the Ministry for Gozo, commenting, "we are all very proud of the Cittadella and I want to personally congratulate everyone involved, not only for receiving this award but for the beautiful work you all did."

"The Visitors' Centre brings the history of the island to life and has considerably helped increase tourism to Gozo. It's a real honour to be here to accept this award which goes to each and every person that was involved in the project," he added.

The Minister for Gozo Dr Justyne Caruana welcomed the announcement of this prestigious award honouring the Cittadella Visitors' Centre.

The first year has seen in excess of 240,000 visitors to the attraction, situated in the heart of the island. The award, which recognises outstanding achievements in the creation of compelling places and experiences, specifically honours the owners and operators while at the same time acknowledges the contributions of individuals and companies who invent, create and produce the attractions and events. Gozo's rich history and natural beauty, woven in with local customs and traditions, were key factors in creating this award winning tourist attraction. Sarner worked with the Ministry for Gozo to create the visitor centre within the walled 'Cittadella,' utilising the architecture of the reservoir – the high ceilings and vast spaces.

Sarner said that the result is a visually striking walk through exhibition that draws the visitor deeper and deeper within the building whilst highlighting the characteristics of this unique site. Sarner used drama to add to the tension by building on the interactivity and technology within each of the nine multi-language zones. And the visitors' culminate their journey in the dramatic 360° Cittadella Show set within an impressive theatrical space created by the reservoir.

"This ingenious combination of history and technology, cleverly balancing the old with the new, made a material impression on the TEA Thea Awards Committee and helped lead to Cittadella Visitors' Centre being named for this prestigious award." The Thea Committee stated that "what makes this project so special is the combination of traditional exhibition techniques, exceptional storytelling and the 360° show finale, within the unique setting." **gozonews.com**





## 76th ANNIVERSARY of the BATTLE of the CORAL SEA

As fitting as it is not to forget April 25 and what it stands for, it is as important and appropriate that we should never forget those conflicts especially like the **Battle of the Coral Sea** in **May of 1942**, that was fought right on our door steps.

The **Battle of the Coral Sea**, fought during 4–8 May 1942, was a major naval battle in the Pacific Theatre of World War II between the Imperial Japanese Navy

and Naval and Air Forces from Australia and the United States of America, resulting in a strategic Allied victory and which reversed the tide of World War II in the Pacific.

How fortunate we are today that if it was not for the Seamen, Crewmen and Airmen that fought and successful defeated the Imperial Japanese Navy we could have possibly lost our great Country Australia?

*May we Never Forget – They have no grave but the cruel sea;  
No flowers lay at their head, A rusting hulk is their tombstone;  
A fast on the ocean bed, they shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;  
Age shall not weary them, not the years condemn,  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning;  
We will remember them*

We invite you again to join us for these important events that will Commemorate the “**Battle of the Coral Sea**” and this significant date in our Australian History.



### COMMEMORATION SERVICE

**Date:** Sunday, 6 May 2018

**Time:** 11:30 for a 12:00 start Afternoon Tea provided

**Where:** Shine of Remembrance St Kilda Road VICTORIA

I truly hope you can join. Regards Always

**Sam CJ Muscat JP**

**President - Australian American Association (Vic)**

*“To foster friendship and understanding between the people of Australia and the United States of America”*



## THE BATTLE OF IWO JIMA

Recently, I returned from the 73rd anniversary commemorating the battle for Iwo Jima, and unfurled the Maltese Cross atop Mt. Suribachi. I believe this is the first (and probably the only) time the Maltese Cross has ever flown here. I went there to pay my respect and honour the 6821 Americans who fought and shed their blood on this remote tiny island. Quite a moving and memorable trip.

Dear Frank, keep up the awesome work on the Maltese Newsletter as it is a source of history, culture and character of Malta and the Maltese race. **FRED AQUILINA**

## BIRGU – VITTORIOSA

### THE FIRST HOME OF THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA



**Birgu**, or **Città Vittoriosa** is one of the oldest city on the Island, and it played an important role in the Siege of **Malta** in 1565. 2,633 people inhabit the 0.5 km<sup>2</sup> city located on the south side of the **Grand Harbour**. Birgu was once a main city and has a long history of military and maritime activities.

Birgu's position in the **Grand harbour** was of great importance and several military leaders wanted to take over the city. Therefore, the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans Byzantines, Arabs, Normans and the Aragonese all shaped and developed Birgu. Yet, no one did more for the city than the **Knights of St. John**,

who arrived to Malta in 1530 and made Birgu the **capital of Malta**.

Birgu is a unique city surrounded by **fortified walls**, ancient history, monuments and places that one can visit. The entrance to Birgu is via the [Couvre Porte](#), while the parish church is dedicated to St. Lawrence, whose feast is celebrated annually on the 10th of August. Brass bands clubs, processions and fireworks are among the attractions in such festivities.



**The Parish Church:** The parish church of St. Lawrence was the **Conventual church** of the Knights of St. John.

**Inquisitor's Palace:** The Inquisitor's Palace was the seat of the Inquisition in Malta from 1571 to 1798. The Palace has now been converted into a museum but before, it had its own chapel, library and rooms. However, once can still see the dungeons and the courtyard. The Museum is open every day and houses the national **museum of ethnography** collection.

**Malta Maritime Museum:** Exhibits maritime history from ancient to more recent times. The collections are unique and outstanding, especially those concerning the **warships of the Knights of St John**. There are also paintings, weapons, uniforms, anchors, maps and models dating from 1530 to 1798.

**Notre Dame Gate:** Grandmaster Fra Nicola Cotoner built this historical gate in Birgu in 1675. At the time it was built, it was the highest building in the region and from its terrace and roof there was an excellent view of a good part of the island. Today Notre Dame Gate houses the headquarters of Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna – the Malta Heritage Trust.

**Malta at War Museum:** The Museum holds an exciting exhibition about the II World War in Malta, with an underground air raid shelter. There is also a viewing of a 30-minute original **wartime documentary**. The museum exhibits a collection of wartime mementos, underground tunnels and audiovisuals. Open daily between 10:00 and 16:00.

**Fort St. Angelo:** After the Knights of Malta chose to settle in Birgu they made Fort St Angelo the seat of the Grand Master. This is a historical piece of military architecture with its fortified walls. Some parts of the fort were leased to the Order of the Knights of St. John, forming an **independent state** over which Malta has no jurisdiction over. Other parts of the fort were trusted in the hands of Heritage Malta, who plan its restoration in the near future.