



MerHbA

Maltese Historical Association (Aust) Inc
(Għaqda Storika Maltija (Awstralija) Inkorporata)

MHA Newsletter No. 4/2015

www.mha.org.au

May 2015

MerHbA! Welcome to all our members and friends.

This issue of MerHbA contains an introduction to our next lecture by Joseph Borg on the situation in Europe and the Middle East, leading up to the Great Siege of 1565; a summary of our previous lecture on Malta and the Anzacs by Mario Bonnici and articles on the Malta GC commemoration, the unveiling of the mural at the Maltese Community Centre in Parkville, and the Sacred Infirmary, once the biggest hospital ward in the world; Nino's page; an email from one of our members, and numerous links and photos.

If you have anything you would like to share, please contact me by phone or text on 0425 708 830 or by email at secretary@mha.org.au

Charles Gatt (MHA Secretary)

MHA May Lecture

The political situation in Europe and the Middle East leading to the Great Siege of 1565

7.30 pm Tuesday 19 May
Maltese Community Centre
467 – 477 Royal Parade Parkville
(Enter from levers St)

This year we celebrate and remember the Great Siege of Malta of 1565. Accordingly we have planned to discuss this subject in greater depth. Our speaker, Mr. Joseph Borg will be presenting three lectures on the subject. The first one will be exploring the political situation in Europe and the Middle East before the siege. There were many factors involved, starting with the 4th Crusade, the Corsair wars, the Reformation, the discovery of the New World, the spread of the Ottoman Empire and many more.

The speaker will be using a PowerPoint presentation to describe all these issues.

Please tell your friends and bring the younger generation of Maltese along, so that they will have a better understanding of their Maltese Heritage

The Federation of Australian Historical Societies

The FAHS emails their e-Bulletin about every three weeks and provides recent information and notices of coming events within the history movement generally. The articles are relatively brief and usually relate to Australia, although occasional overseas articles are included.

Topics for April were:

No. 136 14 April 2015

- 1) News from the Federation
- 2) Cyark 500 project in Queensland
- 3) Deen De Bortoli Award for Applied History
- 4) Rothschild Prayer Book at National Library of Australia

No. 135 3 April 2015

- 1) Guides on FAHS website
- 2) Historical society resources for the Australian Curriculum
- 3) 2015 Heritage Address with Kristal Buckley: World Heritage – a decade in review
- 4) 2015-16 ACT Heritage Grant applications
- 5) Kununurra Historical Society, WA
- 6) Bonds Spinning Mills, Pendle Hill, Sydney
- 7) Former naval building, No.8 Revy at Darling Island, Sydney
- 8) Burial of Richard III in Leicester Cathedral

Other bulletins can be accessed here:
<http://www.history.org.au/E-Bulletin.html>

The book "*Publishing history: a guide for historical societies*", by Helen Doyle and Katya Johansen, was published by the FAHS in 2006 in hard-copy format. It may be downloaded free of charge as a PDF file (925 KB) by clicking on the following link:

http://www.history.org.au/Documents/publishing_history.pdf

Alternatively, one of the few remaining hard copies may be ordered by sending a cheque for \$12 (postage and packing included) to the [FAHS](http://www.fahs.org.au).

<http://www.mccv.org.au/anzac-centenary-to-be-commemorated-in-malta/>

Malta George Cross Commemoration

Shelter of Peace 12 April 2015.

Photos: Charlie Portelli



It was a beautiful sunny day, on 12 April, when we gathered at the shrine of Remembrance to commemorate the 73rd anniversary of the Award of the George

Cross to Malta by H.M. King George VI on 15 April 1942, at the height of the hostilities in World War II.



Neither Joseph Borg, the MHA president, nor Mario Bonnici, our treasurer, was able to attend. George Portelli, our Vice-President, was representing the Bank of Valletta, so I was delighted to attend on behalf of

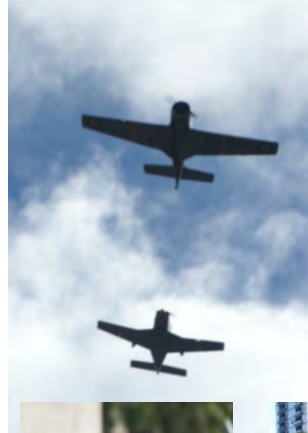
the MHA. It was a little disappointing to see so few Maltese at first, given the presence of so many dignitaries, but there were many other events on the same day.



Pipe major Hawthorn Agnew led the Cadets and Scouts, the Official Party, Honoured guests, the Ex-Service Associations and Maltese Community Associations to the Cenotaph, where wreaths were laid by Mr Benedict Soler, president of the Maltese Australian Association, accompanied by the Shrine representative, LCDR Chris Le Marshal (RANR), and the RSL representative, Brigadier Geoff Christopherson AM.



A Flypast by the RAAF museum, the Last Post, a minute's silence, Rouse, and a prayer



led by Squadron leader J. Delia completed the ceremonies at the Shrine. We then headed over the



road to the Shelter of Peace, where we were seated and the proceedings were hosted by Mr Wes Turnbull.

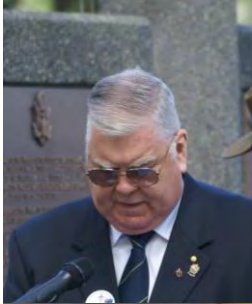




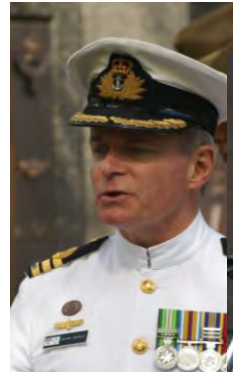
Mr Soler welcomed everyone. Legatee Daryl pinner led the Prayer of Peace, CMDR D Goble, RAN, read the Royal Warrant of the George Cross to Malta, Mr George Portelli, rep BOV, spoke about Malta's horrific experience in the War, Mr Pratt GC read the Citation of the George Cross, I read the Homage to Malta in English, which was then followed by the

refreshments in the Shrine. Tiny little Malta, only three times the size of Philip Island, has survived two of the greatest sieges in history. She and her people have risen above adversity to become an advocate for Peace, not only in the EU but also around the world.

Lest we Forget.



Homage in Maltese. Ms N Suleiman, MP, gave a Commemorative Speech and SQNDLR J. Delia, RAAF, led us in prayer. We then laid wreaths to the sound of the pipes. Mr Mike O'Meara led the Requiem of the Second Siege of Malta. This was followed by the Last



Post, one minute's silence, the Rouse and Ms Isabelle Seychelle with Malta for Peace. We then sang the national Anthems of Malta, the UK, and Australia. Ms Rose Vella, Sec MAA thanked us. The



Catafalque Party, Cadets and Flags marched out to the sound of the Piper and we adjourned for



MHA April Event

World War I: Malta, Australia and the ANZACS

Mario Bonnici



On Tuesday 21 April, Mario Bonnici gave a fascinating talk to the Maltese Historical Association. We saw how the assassination of the Archduke of Austria started the Great War. The main combatants were, on one side, the Allied Powers, which included France, Russia, Britain and later Japan and the United States, and on the other, the Central Powers, which included Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Malta was part of the British Empire but it was not directly involved in World War I. However, there were about 30,000 Maltese enlisted in the Royal or Merchant Navies and many Maltese civilians were engaged at the Malta Dockyard, as the Mediterranean fleet was partly based in Malta. Most of the Maltese in the Navies were employed as stewards, cooks, stokers, firemen and bandsmen. As many worked below deck, they lost their lives when the ships were sunk by enemy torpedoes. A large number hailed from the Grand Harbour area.

We also saw how Britain had asked for help from the colonies. Australia answered the call by assigning its Navy to Britain and initially sending 20,000 troops. Among these was Charles Bonavia, who was born in Sliema and had migrated to Australia. He went missing in action at Gallipoli. Other Maltese-Australians lost their lives, particularly on the Western Front in Europe. About five hundred labourers were recruited from Malta to dig trenches, especially in Suvla on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

During this time Malta was nicknamed 'The Nurse of the Mediterranean' as around 58,000 servicemen were housed in hospitals around the Island. Many Maltese doctors and nurses, together with other international medical staff, provided care for the injured who arrived from Gallipoli and the Western Front.

Malta's Role as the Nurse of the Mediterranean

- Around 58,000 servicemen were housed in hospitals around the Island.
- Tent hospitals had to be erected to cover the demand.
- In total there were 27 Field Hospitals with 25,000 beds.
- The total number of men treated was about 125,000.
- 300 doctors and consultants from Britain and Canada headed to Malta.
- Many Maltese girls, school staff and medicine students at the University volunteered their services. The medicine course at the University was suspended at this time.

Some of these servicemen succumbed to their injuries in Malta and were buried in several cemeteries on the

Island. The Pieta Cemetery, where the annual Anzac Commemoration is held, is the resting place to 274 Anzacs, 202 are Australian and 72 New Zealanders.

The Main Cemeteries

- The Pieta' Cemetery
- The Kappucini Naval Cemetery in Kalkara
- The Addolorata Cemetery in Paola
- About 2,000 service men and women are buried in cemeteries around Malta.
- Of these 202 are Australians and 72 New Zealanders.
- There are also 26 Turkish prisoners buried at the Turkish Cemetery in Marsa
- A few others are buried at Mtarfa and Pembroke Military Cemeteries

To entertain the soldiers while they recovered from their injuries, the Australian Red Cross collected two thousand pounds in Australia to build Australia Hall in Malta. The activities held in this building included movies, bingo, variety shows and others. Unfortunately, this building now is in a dilapidated state.

Australia Hall During a Social Gathering



Other interesting facts we discussed included:

- the grenades used in Gallipoli were manufactured in Malta from jam and milk tins,
- there were 1,600 prisoners of war held in various camps around Malta,
- Japan joined the war in 1917, and kept 14 destroyers and a cruiser in the Maltese harbours as a convoy escort against German submarines.

After the Battle of Amiens in France, the Allied Powers took the upper hand and the Central Powers gradually retreated. An Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918 and all hostilities ceased on that day.

Mario then showed us an excellent BBC Video clip titled *Malta: The Nurse of the Mediterranean*.

The feedback from the audience afterwards was very positive.

Mario's full talk can be downloaded here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/v0kyfxk1mohac7a/Malta%20and%20the%20Anzacs.docx?dl=0>

His PowerPoint is here:-

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/klj3h209j1mro1a/Malta%20and%20the%20Anzacs3.pptx?dl=0>

and the BBC video clip can be found at:-

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-29650147>

Unveiling of the Mural in the Hall of the Maltese Community Centre in Parkville



The mural in the MCC Hall

Photo Nino Xerri

On Sunday 3 May 2015, 140 guests, including the Maltese Consul, Mr Victor Grech, attended the unveiling of the new mural in the main hall of the Maltese Community Centre in Parkville by the Victorian Minister of Finance and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. Mr Robin Scott.

Mr Victor Borg, President of the MCCV welcomed everybody and then proceeded to talk about the history of the MCCV and the services it provides to the Maltese Community. He also mentioned the Frail Aged and spoke about the new MCCV Resource Handbook that has recently been brought up to date and published. Members of the MHA took part in this project. The purpose of this publication is to guide retirement homes with Maltese guests by giving information about Maltese history, culture, cuisine and services provided by the MCCV. It also includes common expressions in the Maltese Language for those who have reverted to their mother tongue.

Mr Borg then presented a copy of the resource handbook to the minister. The minister responded by paying tribute to the MCCV and the Maltese Community in general for their industriousness and their effort in making Australia, especially Victoria, the harmonious society that it is today. A presentation was also made to Mr Emanuel Spiteri for services rendered to the Maltese Servicemen Association.



Audience at the Unveiling

Photo: Nino Xerri

Mr Borg then proceeded to unveil the clerestory mural to the acclaim of all present. The windows behind the main stage have been replaced by double glazed windows, to prevent inconveniencing neighbours during functions at the Centre. The translucent sections of the mural were inserted between the glass sheets of the windows.

Both the manufacturer of the mural and the artist, Mr Peter Toyne, were present for this occasion. Mr Borg thanked them for the mural and the artistic manner in

which it was made. The mural is an artist's impression of the City of Valletta from the Marsamxett Bay side. It starts off with Fort St Elmo on the left hand side and shows the entire profile of the city as one moves his eyes across the window towards the right. It includes an expanse of water with the typical Maltese fishing boats rocking on the waves. It also depicts a buoy with two pennants, one showing the logo of the MSSP and the other the logo of the MCCV.

Presentations were then made to the artist, Mr Peter Toyne, for his work. Peter has followed many careers, including scientific research, teaching, community development work and a ten year stint in Parliament, before taking up his lifelong love of art and design. He explained the meaning of the mural and his interpretation of the view. After consultation with the MCC project community and much research, Peter felt that a panorama of Valletta would provide a powerful reminder of Malta.

The resulting design carries three story lines.

Firstly, the city is drawn as a romantic dream to represent its rich history as well as a sense of place. Peter was thrilled that the audience identified with landmarks in his panorama.

The second story is that of the sea. Malta's close connection to the sea is symbolised by the traditional fishing boats. The water is also used to reflect the colour and form of the city, lending vibrancy and movement to the design.

The third and perhaps most important story is that of emigration. The mural includes the point at Fort St Elmo, the last place in Malta that migrants passed as they left to resettle in their new chosen countries. This place has witnessed the flow of people with their talent, energy and ambition that they gifted to other countries, such as Australia. Many would have contributed tears to the waters of the harbour in memory of those they left behind.

All present commented favourably about the mural and enjoyed the rest of the afternoon.

By Victor Borg, Joseph Borg, Mario Bonnici, Charles Gatt



Qolla il-Bajda Battery Qbajjar Gozo: Also known as Xwejni battery, it was built between 1715-1716. This battery is the last vestige of a chain of fortifications built around Marsalforn Bay to avoid any enemy landing in this area. The only other surviving battery on Gozo is Saint Anthony's Battery in Qala.



Malta Country Pathway: The arid Maltese country during the summer months is still magnificent in its beauty. Photographed from the Bastions of Mdina.



Casino Notabile: Built in 1887 on Saqqajja Hill for the "elite society" of Mdina & Rabat. After years of dispute as to which Council this falls under, (Mdina or Rabat), finally in October 2014, Mdina Council has issued Tenders for the renovations and left options open for its use.



New Breakwater Bridge: Originally built in 1903 and destroyed by an Italian attack in 1941, it has now been fully restored, however with only one span instead of the original two. It was inaugurated in July 2014. One can still see parts of the old bridge.



Street Art Malta Style: "Art" as part of the now Annual Sliema Street Art Festival, allowing Maltese & Overseas budding artists of all descriptions to showcase their work.

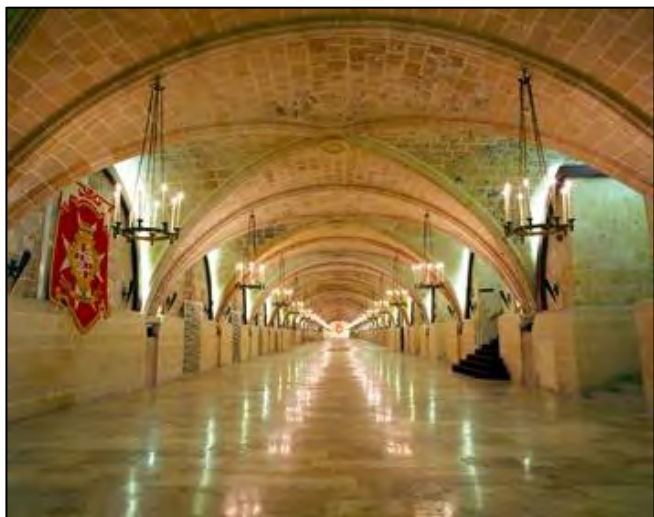


Tigne Point: Malta's newly established exclusive residential, shopping and business area overlooks Marsamxett Harbour towards Valletta.

The Sacra Infirmieria



The Sacra Infirmieria or Holy Infirmary was founded by the Knights of St John Hospitaller in 1574, high above Grand Harbour, in the new city of Valletta. The Great Ward was 155m long and 10.5 m wide, the world's longest hospital ward, and a serious architectural feat in its day. It held 563 beds and could take 914 in an emergency.



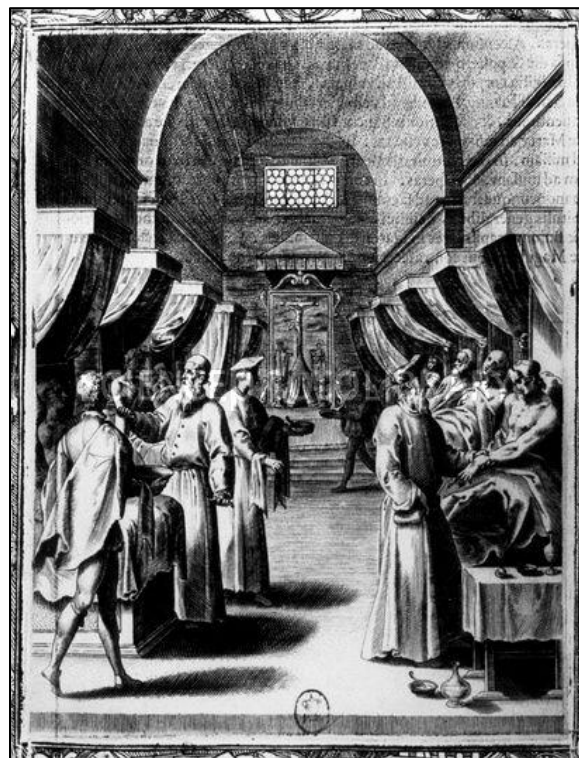
Each patient had a woollen mattress, and a bed to himself, rather than three to a bed, which was customary at the time. Also unusual was a lavatory by each bed. Meals were served on silver plate by the Knights themselves, even the Grand Master taking a turn. The patients were referred to as "masters" and food was the best available. The silver plate was known to have antibiotic properties and wounds were treated with honey. The beds were covered with canopies of wool in the winter and cotton gauze in the summer. In winter, the ward was hung with 131 tapestries for insulation and in summer with paintings by Mattia Preti. All classes and nationalities were treated, albeit in different wards. Non-Catholics wishing to stay in the Long Ward for more than three days had to accept religious instruction but there is no record of any conversions. Women were cared for separately in the Holy Infirmary in Vittoriosa.

In 1676 Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner founded the School of Anatomy and Surgery at the Infirmary and this school would become the forerunner of the Medical School of the University of Malta.

By the late eighteenth century the Infirmary had sunk into decline, along with the general affairs of the Knights. It was described by Howard in 1786 as being dark, dirty and so smelly that, "the physician had to keep his handkerchief to his face while doing his rounds... the patients.... were served by the most dirty, ragged and unfeeling and inhuman persons". During the French occupation (1798 – 1800), the Infirmary became a military hospital and some improvements in ventilation and sanitation were made. However, it was looted of 1600 kg of silver plate, which was melted down, only to sink with Napoleon's flagship in Aboukir Bay, never to be recovered.

The infirmary continued as a military hospital under British rule. Medical history was made here in 1887 with the discovery of the brucellosis bacteria, *B. mellitensis*, by David Bruce. The infirmary was used mainly as a sorting base and for treating severely ill patients that could not be moved any further. Casualties from the Gallipoli landings were brought here in 1915. Shortly after World War I, the British turned it into Police Headquarters.

Four direct bomb hits in World War II reduced parts of the infirmary to rubble. Restoration was shelved in 1960 due to lack of funds but resumed in 1974 and the building was reopened in 1979 as the prestigious Mediterranean Conference Centre. The main Republic Hall and adjacent rooms were rebuilt in 1987 after a fire caused by a laser beam ignited the main stage curtain.



*Knights Hospitaller hospital ward.
Engraving from 1588.*

For more information and pictures, please see:

<https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/the-sacra-infermeria/>

From our Members:

The MHA has received this lovely email from Theresa Grima:

Thanks Charlie.

If there is anyone from the Association or wider community who is from Birzebbugia who knew the Grima family (ta' Spiru, ta' Matti). I seem to recall speaking with someone at one of the MHA nights who knew our family. Could you let them know that my Ziju Pawlu died on 7th April. He was the last surviving of Spiru and Gerite's children.

<http://tributes.heraldsun.com.au/notice/145302039>

I've attached a link to the Herald Sun notices and two photos. My Dad (Ninu), Uncle Paul and their brothers were sailing racers. There's a photo of them in the boats. And another of them with trophies. Of course, most of the time they didn't keep the trophies. The boat owners did. Front left is Pawlu. Next to him Manwelli (in Australia known as Jim). Back left is my Dad, Ninu. Next to him Uncle Joe.



I thought the Birzy people might like to see these. And the MHA might like this little piece of Malta history. I have an oral history with dad which I recorded many years ago for a programme I used to work on at 3CR. About the war years, the dockyard, British colonialism, the GWU. I should send a copy through to the Association.

Sahha
Theresa



You couldn't do that today! Soldiers based at Fort Rinella in Kalkara sit on top of Malta's famous 100-ton Armstrong Gun in 1914. Source: Bay Retro



On Sunday May 3, 2015 the Australian American Association (Vic) commemorated the 73rd Anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea at the Shrine of Remembrance. Not only was that the day we turned the Japanese away from entering our shores, it was the day that truly indicated, cemented and forged our relationship with the United States of America.

The aim of the Association is, "To foster friendship and understanding between the people of Australia and the United States of America" If you would like to join the group, contact the president of the association:

Sam CJ Muscat JP .

Telephone: +61 3 9363-7502

Email: samcjm@bigpond.com

Mobile: +61 3 0419-381-479

Fax: +61 3 9363-7502



Maltese Literature Group Inc.
Grupp Letteratura Maltija Ink.

Kull korrispondenza għandha tinbagħat lis-Segretarju f'dan l-indirizz:
MLG, 477 Royal Parade, Parkville, Victoria 3052

FOLJU T'AHBARIJIET
Numru 228 :: MEJJU, 2015

Editor: Paul Vella
paul.vella44@gmail.com

This newsletter, written in Maltese, contains many articles of interest. If you would like to receive the newsletter or join the group, email Paul Vella on paul.vella44@gmail.com

You can also listen to Paul's programme, "Qatt m'Int Wahdek" (You're Never Alone), every Friday from 5 pm-6 pm on 3ZZZ

British Pathé Film Archive

www.britishpathe.com is an archive of over 90,000 historic clips from all over the world, some over 100 years old. A search for Malta yielded many clips from before, during and after World War II. I had to drag myself away from this amazing footage or you would never have received this newsletter! CG

<http://www.britishpathe.com/search/query/malta/>

End of World War II

With all the commemorations of the 100th Anniversary of Anzac Day, the end of World War II in Europe 70 years ago seems to have been overlooked.

VE day occurred on 8 May 1945. To commemorate and celebrate this occasion, British Pathé have put together a page:

<http://www.britishpathe.com/workspace/s/page/victory-in-europe-day>

The road to the new parliament building - in pictures:

Malta's first purpose-built Parliament House was inaugurated on 4 May 2015. It was built on Freedom square, which was created when the Malta railway terminal building was destroyed in WWII. An article and pictures can be found on the Times of Malta website: <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150504/local/the-road-to-the-new-parliament-building-in-pictures.566676>

Vassallo gives more detail:
<https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/parliament/>

At 101, Salvina proves age is only a number

Another article from the Times of Malta about 101 year old Salvina Formosa from Gozo, now living in Sydney <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150504/local/at-101-salvina-proves-age-is-only-a-number.566657>

Cospicua's Dock No. 1 and what it replaced

This in depth article by Stephen Serracino Inglott in the Malta Times of Sunday, May 3, 2015, describes the changes that took place in Cospicua, when its thriving market area, fisherman's haven and base for merchant shipping and corsairs was replaced by the dry dock facility in 1844.



An early 19th century view of the market building in Cospicua prior to the construction of the dock and, below, after construction of Dock No 1.



<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150503/life-features/cospicuas-dock-no-1-and-what-it-replaced.566622>





Cittadella, Gozo

Photo: Fred Erick

Frank Scicluna is currently in Malta attending the Convention of Maltese Living Abroad. He is presenting a paper on the importance of retaining the Maltese Language and Culture among the Maltese Diaspora. He also intends to discuss the problems associated with the biometric Maltese passport, an issue he raised five years ago, during the Convention for Maltese Living Abroad in 2010. Currently Maltese citizens living in South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand must travel to NSW, ACT or Victoria to have their fingerprints taken in order to obtain a passport. Why should the Consulates in all the states not be given the necessary equipment to assist thousands of Maltese citizens to apply for their rightful Maltese passports?

Regarding the MALTA AND THE ANZACS book, he says that it should be available shortly.



The tapestry chamber, former council chamber of the knights




Valletta's beautiful Royal Opera House on Kingsway just months before it was devastated by a fire in 1876

Source: Bay Retro



Sliema. Source: Bay Retro



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Address: Shop 10,
204 Warrandyte Road,
Ringwood North Vic 3134

Phone: (03) 9876 7688

Fax: (03) 9011 9698

email: claudia@thetravelhaven.com.au

ABN: 83156081015

Lic. No. TA-0033041

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