



# MerHbA

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

MHA Newsletter

[www.mha.org.au](http://www.mha.org.au)

July 2020

Dear Members and Friends of the MHA,

What a year this has been, and what a long time until it will be over! I trust that you and all your loved ones have been well in these difficult times. This is the second time that we have moved to stage 3 restrictions in and around Melbourne. Apart from a brief period in between, public gatherings were prohibited, and now we must wear masks outside. Here is the latest information in [English](#) and in [Maltese](#).

The MHA committee cancelled the lecture scheduled for Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March, the day before the first restrictions became effective. Georgina Scillio, one of our members, a regular attendee at lectures, a retired teacher and a published author, had been prepared to run an interactive session on *Growing up In Malta after WW2*. She had planned to recreate post-war experiences by reading some of her short stories based on real events and inviting the audience to contribute their memories. It would have been amazing! I hope that once restrictions are lifted, Ms Scillio may be persuaded to give this presentation. Her collection of short stories, "A Dandelion on the Roof", won the 2008 Northern Writers competition and was published by Clouds of Magellan Press. It is available on [Bookdepository](#) and on [Amazon](#).

Meanwhile, yours truly went into semi-isolation in the country, as I have many animals to look after. Limited off-grid electricity, internet and computer facilities meant that I could not produce the newsletter. However, I was able to send emails, with various attachments and links, to our members and friends at least once a month. Emails were sent on 17<sup>th</sup> March 30<sup>th</sup> March, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 9<sup>th</sup> May, and 6<sup>th</sup> June. It was wonderful to receive positive feedback from so many of our members. Thank you so much! Difficult times often bring out the best in people. I am upgrading my systems and with a bit of luck I will be able to produce a newsletter each month.

I was saddened to hear of the passing of Marlene Grech this week. An email with links to her memorial page was sent to all members and friends. A tribute follows on the next page.

Charlie G for the MHA

Charles Gatt  
MHA Secretary  
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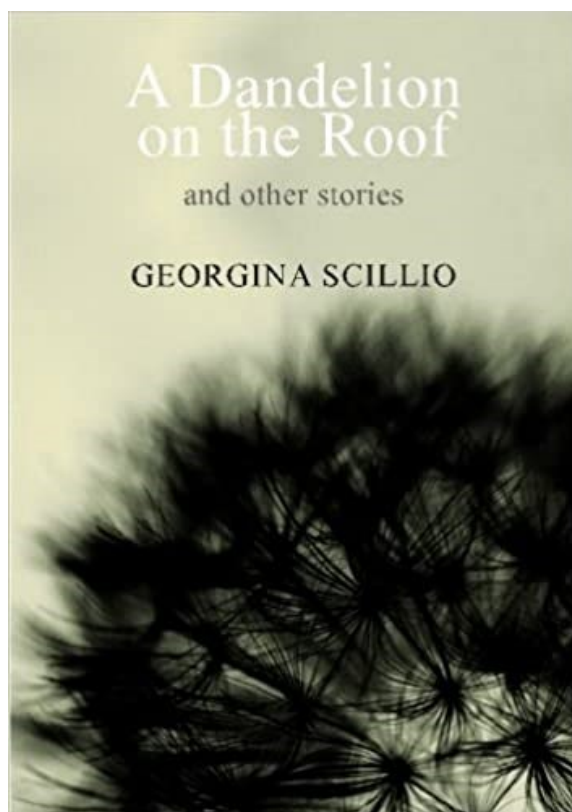
## Next MHA Lecture

**All lectures are cancelled  
until further notice**

Members and friends of the MHA are invited to contribute experiences and anecdotes, photos and articles to this newsletter.

Please send to:

[secretary@mha.org.au](mailto:secretary@mha.org.au)



## In Memoriam Mrs Marlene Grech (nee Pace) (1934-2020)

I was deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Mrs Marlene Grech, who frequently attended MHA lectures. She always had a cheerful word to say, and her smile brought joy to all those around her. She frequently gave positive feedback on our lectures and the newsletter. She resigned from the MHA about 6 weeks ago. Her last email to us indicates the sort of person she was. It concludes as follows:



Photo: Doreen Lotter

I have loved being part of MHA! Many thanks to you all for your several historical, interesting work over the years and the love you devoted to us. I am very grateful that I have met you all and you are all a great group. I wish you all the best, will never forget you all and may God bless you and keep you and your families safe. Many thanks to you all, affectionately, Marlene Grech xxxxxxxxxxxx

Mrs Grech's funeral was held online. Her son Andrew spoke highly of his mother, the importance of her family, the closeness of her sisters and their families, and growing up together. She was super organised and kept the house immaculate. She supported her husband, Alex, in business and entertained his clients, and was devoted to him when he was ill. She welcomed newly arrived Maltese to her home. She spoke several languages, went to university in her 50s, and wrote her memoirs. She was proud of her grandchildren and built on their strengths. She was close to St. Virginia and the Oak Park parish. She had a strong faith and lived it by always looking for the good in people. The MHA extends our deepest condolences to her family and friends. She will be greatly missed. Her tribute wall can be found [here](#)

God bless you, beautiful lady. May you rest in peace and love, in the company of God and His angels.

Charles Gatt.

## Culhat al belt! Sette Giugno Riots

### *"Everyone to the city! 7<sup>th</sup> June Riots"*

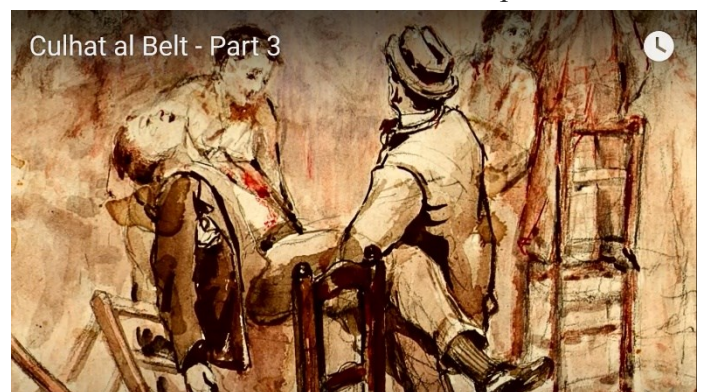
Much has been written recently about the Sette Giugno riots of 1919, with the 100-year anniversary occurring last year. Now we have a documentary. Mario Bonnici sent us these links to *Culhat al belt - Sette Giugno*, a TVM (Television Malta) program, which is available on YouTube in four instalments. It is in Maltese but has English subtitles. It is very detailed and well researched. Thanks Mario!

[Episode 1](#) (37:52). The first episode of 'Culhat al Belt' examines the root causes of the 'Sette Giugno' riots: from the loss of dockyard jobs after the first world war, inflation and the steep rise in prices, to the Maltese claims to self-government.

[Episode 2](#) (37:08). Several months before the 7<sup>th</sup> June riots, the National Assembly had met to seek greater autonomy. Workers took to the streets against the millers and the merchant classes. Students protested in the streets of Valletta.

[Episode 3](#) (34:58). Huge crowds gathered to support the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Assembly on the afternoon of Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> June 1919. British soldiers disobeyed orders and opened fire against the angry Maltese protestors. Within half an hour, 3 men were killed and several injured. Mobs rampaged on the streets of Valletta, with the number of victims increasing as the hours went by.

[Episode 4](#) (42:42). Ransacking and looting continue on the 8<sup>th</sup> June, with a criminal element now involved. British soldiers use their bayonets against the crowds. Maltese politicians try to calm the situation. The British administration appoints a new Governor, Lord Plumer, who negotiates with the Maltese politicians to quell the violence. The 'Sette Giugno' riots would lead to the Self-Government Constitution of 1921.





## 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Malta's Entry into WW2

At 6 pm on the 10th June 1940, [Mussolini declared war](#) on Great Britain and France. Despite previously declaring that he would not attack Malta, the very next day three bombing raids caused the deaths of 16 civilians and 13 military personnel. Malta's heroic refusal to surrender would bring unparalleled suffering and destruction to the tiny island but was instrumental in turning the tide of the war. [Malta: War Diary: Story of a George Cross](#) chronicles a day by day account of these times.

This Times of Malta article, [Remembering the first RAF pilot lost in Malta's defence 80 years ago](#),

commemorates the first pilots killed in Malta during WW2. On 16<sup>th</sup> July 1940, Flight Lieutenant Peter Gardner Keeble, piloting a Hawker Hurricane P2623, was shot dead. He was found lying beside his blazing aircraft in a field near Marsascala. Nearby, an Italian Fiat CR42 lay mangled on the ground. The Italian pilot was still alive but died of his wounds shortly after. He was Sotto Tenente Mario Benedetti, 24, son of the Commissioner of Police at Genoa. He was buried with full military honours at Mtarfa that afternoon. Flight Lieutenant Peter Keeble was the first of many Allied airmen to lose their lives during the Battle for Malta. He is buried at Kalkara Naval Cemetery. Many others who followed him have no known grave and are commemorated at the War Memorial, Floriana.

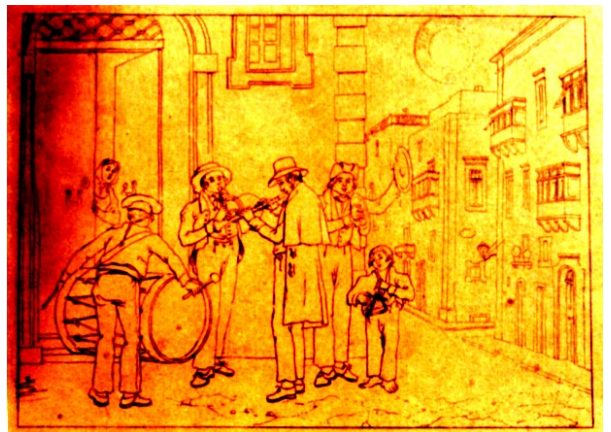


### From our Members and Friends

Dr Stephen Gatt (SMOM) from Sydney shares an article about a [Church in Florence](#) with a strong connection with a Maltese family. The church of San Jacopo in Florence was founded in 1206. It belonged at one time to the Knights Templar, then the Knights of St John, before being confiscated by the state. It eventually became the property of Monsignor Caruana from Cospicua, who left it to his niece Orsola. She married the Noble Alessandro de Piro (1849-99) in 1868, and their first child was born in the house attached to the church. Amongst their many other children was Monsignor Giuseppe de Piro (1877-1933), the founder of the Missionary Society of St. Paul (MSSP). The full article by Albert Storace, with photos, is in two parts: [Part one](#) [Part two](#).



Our president, Joseph Borg, shares this article. [Musicians in Malta prior to the Establishment of mid-nineteenth Century Bands](#) by Anna Borg Cardona describes the influences that led to the development of the Maltese Bands we know today. Ottoman bands (Mehter) accompanied Turkish attacks, introducing many new instruments. Different instruments were used for different purposes, at different times of the year. Drums were favoured at carnival; the zaqq and tanbur on Christmas eve; stringed instruments celebrated weddings and dances; guitars accompanied song; brass instruments were used in churches; drums and trumpets announced the Grandmasters. Maltese musicians were employed by the Kghths, and some served on the galleys. Many towns had militia regiments with a drum and fife band on soldiers' pay, with extra bonuses. Itinerant musicians would knock on doors when they knew a family



celebration was taking place. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, written music introduced new styles: waltzes and quadrilles. Soon wind, brass and percussion bands, as we know them today, would be found in every town and village.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bands continue to evolve. Tate Papworth's article, [\*United by Music\*](#), in The Brimbank Star Weekly, north-west of Melbourne, reports on the MMG Concert Band of Victoria. This local Community Marching and Concert band has constructed a virtual performance of a Maltese march called Ma Tagħmlu Xejn (also known as First Anniversary) while in isolation. Each member recorded their own piece at home and sent it through to the conductor, who weaved it into the virtual performance! Brilliant! The article contains a link, so you can listen to the piece. Bravo!

\*\*\*\*\*

Mario Bonnici shares a Times of Malta article, [\*In pictures: Trades of another time\*](#), which depicts traditional trades in a set of photos from the Shield Collection. Links at the end of the article allow you to comment and take you to other photos in the Shield Collection curated by Heritage Malta. You can view the entire Dr Peter J. Shield collection [here](#).



Ċensa Vella  
Photo: Daniel Cilia

Mario also shares these articles from the Times of Malta:

[\*The Last Ghonnella\*](#), by Angèle Ann Andrews and Yvonne Borg, is a pictorial essay about Ċensa Vella, who could still be seen meandering the streets of Victoria, Gozo, in her ghonnella until early 1991. The authors describe a lifestyle that is now gone.

[\*Unseen Gozo... at the turn of a century\*](#), by Giovanni Bonello. Old photos of life on Malta's sister island, a hundred years ago. This is the first of a three-part series.

[\*Unseen Gozo: a lost island in photos\*](#) by Giovanni Bonello. Early photographers such as Mikiel Farrugia ('il-Badiku'), who was active from the early 1900s, captured images of an island that has changed beyond recognition.

[\*Gozo: an island in a bygone era – part 3\*](#): by Giovanni Bonello is the third and last in the series. It briefly describes Gozo's unique contributions to the Maltese islands, with a couple of excellent old photos and links to Part 1 and 2

[\*Tracing the roots of a family and the story of their village\*](#): Joe Zammit Ciantar, whose father was from the Gozitan village of Xewkija, reminisces about his paternal family and their connections, the nicknames, their village, the feast of St John the Baptist, and the rotunda which replaced the parish church.

[\*The loss of Fort St Elmo, 1565\*](#) was written for the Times of Malta by Joseph F. Grima, retired casual history lecturer and Assistant Director of Education. Built in 1552 at the tip of the Sceberras peninsula, Fort St Elmo commanded the entrances to both Grand and Marsamxett Harbours. Though much maligned, in the Great Siege of 1565 it held back the mighty Ottoman forces for 31 days until 23<sup>rd</sup> June. Almost all the defenders were killed, but the Turkish losses were catastrophic, and the Knights gained time to reinforce the main defences at Birgu, Senglea and Fort St Angelo. Excellent reading with some great visuals!



[\*Educational reforms in Malta in the late 1830s\*](#): by Hilary Spiteri describes the many changes in the Education system at that time. Although Malta had inherited the Collegio from the Order of the Hospitaller Knights, the British acknowledged the need to build a new educational system. The University of Valletta was set up in 1834 with faculties of Theology, Law, Medicine and Philosophy or Arts. By 1838, the University of Literature, Lyceum, Bibliotheca, Botanical Gardens, and Anatomical Theatre were established, teaching a broad range of subjects. Despite opposition from the Catholic Church, secular primary schools following the British model were opened and provided free education to the largely illiterate population, though not compulsory till the age of 14 until 1946.

Read about the [\*history of the University of Malta\*](#) from its beginning.



[Tale of a church and a priory - Urgent works needed on Mascioni organ](#) by André P. DeBattista.

Accompanied by a number of magnificent photographs, this Times of Malta article describes the church of St Mark and the adjacent Augustinian priory. Established by the Augustinians at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century on the outskirts of Rabat, close to the gates of Mdina, the original priory was demolished in 1551, for fear of occupation by invaders. The new church and convent were designed by the famous Maltese architect Girolamo Cassar and completed in 1588. The exquisite baroque church served as a prototype for St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta. The convent was upgraded in 1740, and served many functions, including a refugee shelter, boys' school, and warehouse in World War 2. It was a model for the Auberge de Castille in Valletta. Amongst the many treasures in the complex is a Mascioni organ installed in 1959 but in urgent need of repair.

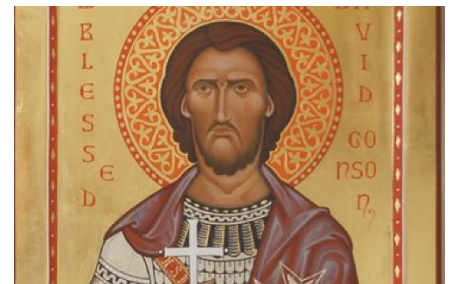


[Neil Agius completes epic Sicily-Malta swim in record-breaking time](#) This last link to Times of Malta articles is history in the making. Swimmer and anti-pollution activist Neil Agius has completed the swim between Sicily and Malta, a distance of 103 km, in a record-breaking 28 hours, 7 minutes and 27 seconds.

Charles Anastasi sent us [this video clip](#) (16:04) by CVC Media via the Maltese Living in Australia Facebook group. It shows the Restoration of the Victoria lines by the Restoration Directorate (in Maltese):

WATCH: [Summer solstice in Malta, also observed in many countries](#) from TVM, narrated by Heritage Malta curator, Katya Stroud, at Imnajdra Temples. The first rays of the sun reach the stones about the 30-minute mark

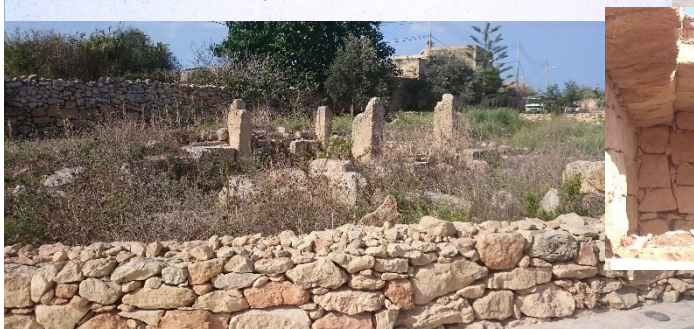
Joseph Borg shares [this article](#) from the Order of Malta (Australia). The 12th July is the feast day of Blessed David Gonson (Gunston), Martyr of the Order of Malta. Sir David was received into the Order at the English Auberge on Malta in 1533. He returned to England in 1540, at the time that Henry VIII was confiscating the Order's property. He was accused of denying the authority of the king in spiritual matters and was hanged, drawn and quartered on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1541.



## TAL BAQQARI AREA

The area known as Tal-Baqqari (or Bakkari) is rich in archaeological remains, as well as other ruins of times gone by. There seems to be cart-ruts, dating to the Bronze Age, while a number of megaliths could have been part of a ruined prehistoric structure. From the Roman times, we find the remains of a round tower, one of a number of such towers probably erected during the 4th century. During the Medieval times, this site was a small hamlet. The population was substantial, as it provided a number of males for coast guard duty at the beginning of the 15th century.

It is documented that this hamlet had at least two small churches, believed to date to the 12th or 13th century. One of them was dedicated to the Annunciation of Our Lady, and the other one, to St Catherine of Alexandria. Little details have survived from these churches, although they shared a parvis and abutted each other. It is believed that they were interconnected through an inner door, a common practice during medieval times. By the late 16th century, these churches were already abandoned.



Photos C. Gatt





## Interesting links:

[MCCV Facebook Page](#) Keep up to date with the news and interact with the MCCV with 3000 followers.

[MHA Facebook Page](#) 👍 1812 likes and 1843 followers. Keep in touch!

[Voice of the Maltese](#) based in New South Wales contains many articles relevant to Maltese around the world.

Frank Scicluna's [e-newsletters](#) are always a good read.

Lots of great photos can be found on [Bay Retro's facebook page](#):

[Malta Underground's facebook page](#) has many interesting articles.

[Temple Rescue's facebook page](#): aims to raise awareness of the lesser known archaeological sites on the Maltese Islands, in the hope of inspiring the public to take action to preserve them.

## TV and Radio Programmes

**3ZZZ** 92.3 FM Melbourne Ethnic Community Radio - *Maltese*. Mondays 5-6 pm, Fridays 5-6 pm, Saturdays 10 -11 am. Catch ip [here](#) by clicking on "LISTEN TO A SHOW" and scrolling down.

STEREO 974 97.4 FM Wednesdays (Maltese Magazine) & Thursdays (Merħba): 6.00pm to 8.00 pm  
Co-ordinator –Ray Anastasi

98.9 Northwest FM [Showcase](#): Fridays 6 pm – 7 pm with Emmanuel Brincat, and [Here, the Maltese Heart](#): Mondays 7 pm – 8 pm with Emmanuel Brincat.

SBS Radio [Maltese programmes on demand](#).

**SBS MALTESE NEWS: L-Aħbarijiet** on SBSTV twice a week nationwide; Sundays 8.00 am on SBS2 (Chan. 32), and Thursdays at 8.00 am on SBSTV32. Also [on demand](#).

Watch the latest programmes, news, and radio from Television Malta [TVM programmes on demand](#).  
And the [latest news in English](#)

## Help!

*I have received the following email and requests:*

Hello,

My wife Melissa's paternal grandparents migrated to Australia from Malta in the 1950's before settling in the Latrobe Valley area in Victoria. Melissa's father, Michael *Buhagiar* was the youngest and only child to be born in Australia. Sadly he passed away last July. He never traveled to Malta despite his plans to do so in retirement.

Next week Melissa and I had booked to spend 6 days in Malta but due to Covid-19 our travel plans were cancelled. We still hope to visit Malta as soon as this pandemic passes. We would love to visit the houses of her grandparents.

We were recently lucky enough to locate some original documents relating to Melissa's grandparents Anthony and Josephine Buhagiar. One document lists an address of Anthony's which I read to be: 16 La Senglia St M'seala. I have tried to google this address and cannot find anything similar. This is why I am contacting you, looking for help from some possible local knowledge as to this address. I have attached a photo of the document with the address and also Anthony and Josephine's wedding certificate. Can you please also confirm which church they were married in as we would love to see it. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards

Jason Lee

*If you can help, please pass on any information to me at [secretary@mha.org.au](mailto:secretary@mha.org.au).  
Sahħa u Sliem, Charlie G*

