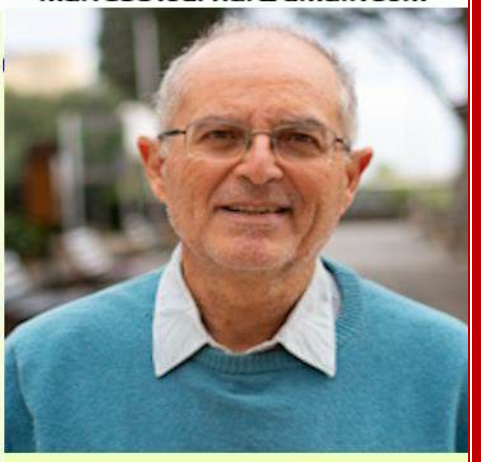
THE MALTESE E-NEWSLETTER

Journal for Maltese Living Abroad
Editor - Frank L Scicluna OAM (Aust) MQR (Malta) Email - maltesejournal@gmail.com

MALTA GENERAL ELECTION 30 MAY 2026
Maltese Living Abroad will follow the race



PROF. ARNOLD CASSOLA
Maltese in Corfu
1815 – 1831

REMEMBERING WW 2

EVERY MALTESE LIVING ABROAD HAS A STORY
Read inside

COUNCIL FOR MALTESE LIVING ABROAD

Malta in the World

THE MALTESE E-NEWSLETTER

Journal for Maltese Living Abroad

The Maltese Living Abroad Unit seeks to promote and protect the rights and interests of Maltese living abroad. It aims to:

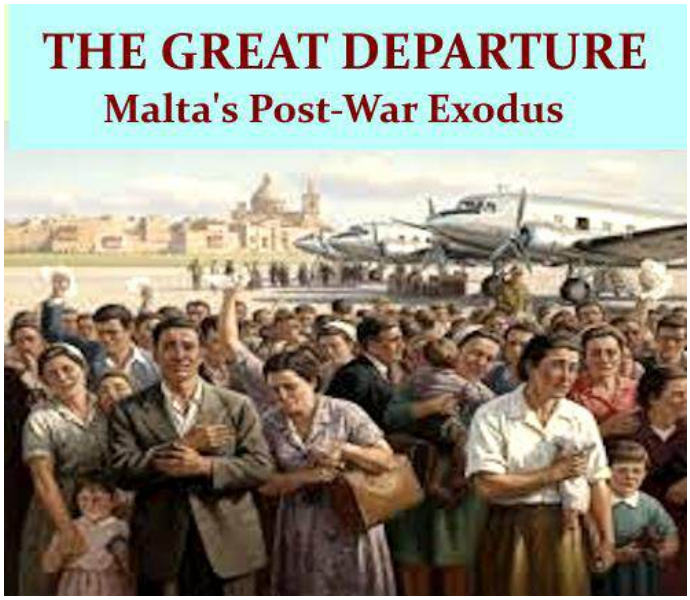
- Protect and promote the rights of those living abroad whilst also increasing interest in Maltese culture and Identity
- Serve as the focal point for information, advice and co-ordination to Maltese living abroad Serve as the focal point for information, advice and co-ordination to any association or non-governmental organization representing Maltese abroad
- Ensure the implementation of the decisions taken by the Council for Maltese Living Abroad as regulated by Chapter 515 of the laws of Malta Maintain strong communication links with the Council of the Maltese Living Abroad
- Maintain updated records of the Maltese Living Abroad Register comprising of the Notification forms D, V, and O
- Create effective communications and collaboration frameworks between Malta and its citizens living abroad Enhancing engagement through the Consul-on-the-Move program

Key Council Members (2025/2026 Appointees):

1. **Chairperson - Hon Ian Borg – Deputy Prime Minister**
2. **Secretary -** Christopher Muscat was appointed Secretary to the Council of Maltese Living Abroad in November 2025.
3. **Australia (Victoria):** Ms Amie Cardona, Ms Judith Buhagiar
4. **Australia (New South Wales):** Mr Antoine Mangion, Ms Miriam Friggieri
5. **Australia (General):** Mr John Vassallo, Alexandra Micallef
6. **United Kingdom:** Dr Edgar Brincat, Mr James N. Casha
7. **Canada:** Ms Sarah Meli, Ms Giselle Sherri-Migliore, Ms Doreen Gatt
8. **United States:** Prof. Sandro Galea, Ms Debbie Gatt Ghiglieri
9. **Europe (Excluding Malta):** Mr Matthew Ciantar, Mr Umberto D'Amico
10. **Asia:** Mr Bernard Portelli
11. **North Africa:** Mr Philip Mamo
12. **United Arab Emirates:** Mr David Galea.

Given that the Council and the Maltese Journal share identical objectives and goals, I would like to extend an invitation to the Council to provide us with information concerning the Maltese residing overseas. This will enable us to keep the members of the Maltese Diaspora and readers of this Journal informed about developments in Malta, Gozo, and other countries. Frank L Scicluna - Editor

COLLABORATION ENHANCES OUR STRENGTH.
BUILDING BRIDGES NOT WALLS



This image depicts a poignant moment in the history of the Maltese Islands, highlighting a period of significant migration following World War II. **The Great Departure**: The image illustrates **"Malta's Post-War Exodus,"** a time when thousands of families had to leave Malta and Gozo due to severe economic hardship, unemployment poverty and devastation following the war.

Migration Journeys: Many Maltese individuals emigrated to countries like Australia,Canada, USA and UK seeking better opportunities and a life free from the devastation they were experiencing at home.

Harrowing Scenes: The scenes at the Grand Harbour, Valletta and Luqa airport in the 1950s, 60s and 70s were often filled with tears and emotion as families said their goodbyes, frequently not knowing when they would see each other again.

Historical Impact: This era etched itself into the collective memory of Malta, representing a profound shift in the nation's demographics and history.

Successful assimilation – Maltese living abroad made Malta proud, preserved their language, heritage, faith and culture and the second and third generations excelled in many professional fields including, law, medical, education, arts and many other sectors.

End of an era – These last few decades we lost a large percentage of Malta-born migrants living in Australia, Canada, USA, UK and many other countries. Everyone of them contributed to the colourful history of Maltese Great Exodus.

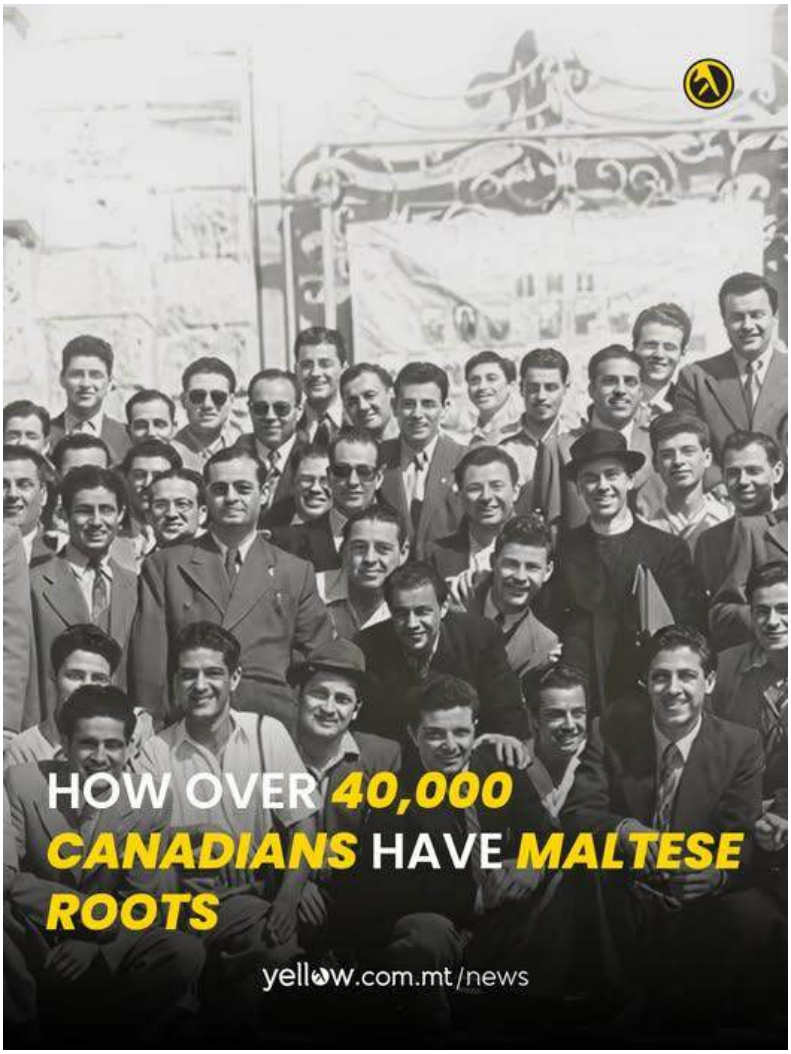
HEALING AND HONOUR: FROM GALLIPOLI TO MALTA, THE ANZAC STORY

South Australia's History Festival

May 13, 2026 10:00 am - 12:00 pm (South Australia time)

MR JOHN CALLEJA from Adelaide will be presenting lecture on **SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS' CONNECTION WITH MALTA DURING WWI** at the History Festival Event organised by the Prospect Council

We invite you to join us to explore the remarkable connection during WWI between the tiny island of Malta, and the wounded ANZACs. Free. During WWI, Malta earned the title 'Nurse of the Mediterranean', providing vital care to thousands of sick and wounded ANZAC soldiers evacuated from Gallipoli. Many ANZACs who could not be saved were laid to rest in Maltese cemeteries Book online - www.prospect.sa.gov.au/explore/events/events/healing-and-honour



MALTESE IN CANADA

In Toronto there is a neighbourhood called Little Malta. It has a park named after the island. It has a church the Maltese built themselves in 1930, because they could not confess their sins in English. It has a stretch of Dundas Street where you can still buy pastizzi and hear Maltese spoken. The Maltese community in Canada goes back further than most people think, and it is larger, prouder, and more rooted than the history books have bothered to record. If your family is part of this story, this is for you.

James Schembri
My parents are Maltese, I was born in Canada. I am proud to be Canadian but I am even more proud to be Maltese, and the values I was brought up with being the son of hardworking Maltese immigrants.

Tony Zammit
Growing up in the 50's can remember Vesuvios and it was Carmenu's pastizzi back then. The street has changed with lots of Maltese spreading their wings especially in Mississauga.

Louise Grech Weglarz
My Maternal grandfather, Peter Sapiano, came to Toronto, Canada from Malta in the early 1900's after he settled he sent for my Grandmother, Domenica Sapiano and his parents and siblings. My Mother, MaryAnn Sapiano Grech was born in Toronto along with her 2 brothers, Paul and John. My grandfather came to Detroit to work at FordMotor Co. his wife and children came too. His parents and siblings remained in Toronto., most of them lived on St Johns . We visited often and I still have cousins there. I remember gong to St Paul's for weddings and funerals

Chris Fox
My dad came to Canada in the 1950's in his late teens. He told me if too many people (probably young men) gathered outside the church after the service, the police would come and move them along

Charles Aquilina
My father is the founder of Melita Travel and has helped settle much of the Maltese community. I'm very proud of him.

Wendy Williams
Maltese are all over the world my ex husband who was mMaltese used to joke if all the Maltese came home to Malta. Malta would sink . Now its home to every race going not much room for those Maltese heading home . The first Shipyard in Canada was build by a Maltese named Scicluna.

Martin Debono

I was wondering if someone in Canada remembers Father Caruana who left our Saint Vincent De Paul parish in Morwell, Victoria, Australia in the early 1960,s and was relocated somewhere in Canada, not sure where possibly Toronto , here is a picture of him in the back row far left as part of our Melita Soccer Team in Morwell.

Judy Ann Preston

My grandparents came to Toronto in the twenties . My mother was the first child to be baptized in the newly built st Paul's. She had several names ...to honour the first priests in that parish.

We lived at Markham and Dundas and every Sunday evening my grandparents had all their Maltese immigrant friends come to the house. I was a young girl in the fifties and I loved listening to these wonderful families. The Zammits, Micallef's, Camilleri, Borg, so many names I remember. Cherish those memories. My grandparents were Vincent and Mary Assunta Micallef

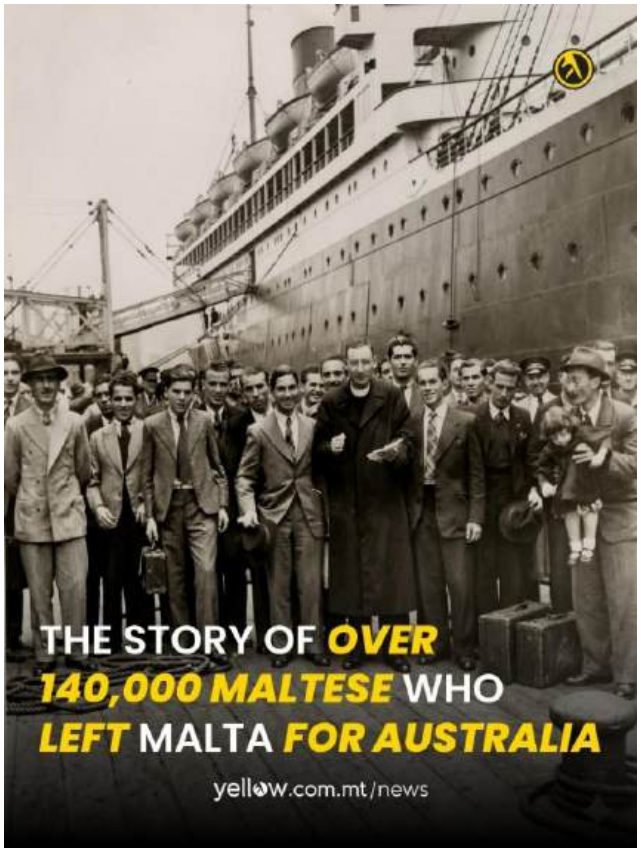
RV Guy Herman

There are more Maltese people spread around the world as there are in Malta. I was born in Malta in 1962, moved to Canada in 1967... wish I could afford to move back home.

Marija Fatima Agius

I came to Toronto in 1965, going to 61 years soon. I was one of 8 children, plus our parents. It was not easy at first. At the age of 16, I left everything behind me in Malta and I had to go to New school, new friends, new country and the weather was very hard to adjust to. In spite of all that we found a Maltese Community and we lived in the Junction area. It was so nice to connect with people from Malta. We went to the Maltese church, I got involved in the choir and later I became a Lector and Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. It was so nice to be part of this community. I got married to a Maltese man from my home town of Mosta. My husband played soccer with Melita Soccer . Life.back then around fifty years ago life was great in Malta Village. Unfortunately, today it has taken a change. As we all age many have left us to meet with the Lord. Others like myself moved to many other parts of Ontario Canada. St Paul the Apostle church lost all Maltese priests and eventually the church was handed back in the care of the Archdiocese of Toronto. One mass is still celebrated in both Maltese and English thanks to a Deacon to stepped up to help keep the Maltese Mass going. Clubs who use to have a big number of membership have gone down but thankfully still going on. We have socials that we enjoy together. My fear is what will happen in ten to twenty years when my generation will be all gone. Our children have grown and have families of their own and no time to get involved and I am afraid that our Maltese Community will be very small or maybe close to nothing. This country has been good to all of us. Many Maltese have moved on to occupying great jobs, businesses etc. and very successful in their careers.

98.9 NORTH WEST FM
Community Radio - Melbourne, Australia
THE HEART OF OUR MALTESE COMMUNITY
Emmanuel Brincat – Producer / Presenter
Programs Mondays / 7pm – 8pm Fridays / 6pm – 7pm
https://www.northwestfm.org/



Your grandparents may have been on one of these ships. In the 1950s and 1960s, Malta quietly emptied itself. Nearly 100,000 people boarded ships at Grand Harbour and sailed for Australia, four weeks at sea, one suitcase, and no guarantee they would ever come back. Some went for the work. Some went because the dockyard had just let their father go. Some went because everyone else was going. This is the story of the greatest emigration in Maltese history: the ships, the farewells, the suburbs of Melbourne they made Maltese, and whether their grandchildren still know the words of Il-Innu Malti.

Lisa Yvonne

Yes it was a huge exodus at the time, driven by poverty i imagine. My dad migrated to Australia in 1964, 16 years of age, with my Nannu and his 3 older brothers, then my Nanna and the other 7 kids came later, they settled in Ascot Vale in Melbourne, my dad never went back not even for a visit...he married my mum who was an Ausie, so we spoke English at home, sadly us kids only learnt a few Maltese words, I can remember some, plan to learn it properly, so I can pass it on...I hope to visit Malta one day.....

Paul Degiorgio

When Dad came to Australia in 1950 to set up for the arrival of Mum and my 2 oldest brothers 3 months later, he came with a vision to create a better life for his then, 2 young sons. Going on to have another 4 boys in Sydney made it 6 sons. We moved to Melbourne in 1971 when I was 9. I am the 5th son born out of the 6 boys.

We have now sadly lost both parents to old age but, our parents had NO regrets on the migration to Australia and they embraced the Aussie culture, becoming very proud Australians with a Maltese background. My parents never returned to Malta, not even for a holiday. Instead, they became the family pioneers and eventually, all of Mum and Dad's family migrated to Australia over 15 years to around 1965 when my Dad's youngest brother, my youngest uncle Rev. Dr. Dominic Degiorgio (catholic priest) came to live in Australia. Not enough credit is given to these people for their courage in helping build Australia into the incredible country it became.

The migrants these days have different expectations of our generosity and our culture.

My parents assimilated from day one and respected the values of pure Australians and for that, they were very well respected by all that crossed their paths. I have been to Malta and I love it there..

Karen Barton

My dad was 9 when he came to Australia on one if these ships with his family. He turns 80 this year and has been going back every year to visit for the last decade. My Aussie born mum loves Malta and so do I. I'm going with him this year for my third visit. It's a place my soul is drawn to!

Eliza Cassar

My 92 year old Nunna is still in sunshine in the same house since she got here in the 1950s. She will tell a story she experienced as though it happened yesterday. Always thankful to be able to listen to her stories.

Ann Nuttall

And live in the Wentworthville area of nsw. There is a memorial tree near the bridge over the creek in. A park at Pendle hill with all the names of Maltese who came here

Tony Bonnici

Me, Mum, Dad, Nanna, Nannu, Uncle Aunty and three cousins arrived in Melbourne in May 1964 sailing on the Roma.. We need to tell our stories more because it wasnt just the Greeks and Italians at the time

Rose Gear

What a good read. Both of my parents came out to Australia, and landed in Melbourne when they were around 13 years old. My Dads mum brought out nine siblings on the ship, as my Dads Dad come out earlier with his eldest brother to work before they all came to Australia.

My Mums family did the same, actually on the same ship, but with only seven siblings. This trip would have been hard. My siblings and I are disappointed that we didn't ask them about growing up in Malta as kids. Dad and Mum never spoke of the war growing up, it must of been terrible.

My Dads family name is Caruana and my Mum's, Boltichino. I have been to Malta for the first time towards years ago, it like you belong there. We got the chance to go into the home that was their birth place. We are so grateful that out Grandparents made the big decision to come to Australia.

I could go on and on in what our parents made of the life and us kids, very grateful.

Kate Pace

This is the story of my family! And what a journey I've been told it was. Apparently there were two lines for immigration in 1955-1956 at the time my family were looking to sail out - one for Australia and one for Canada. Our larger extended family split and half joined the line for Canada, my uncle and aunty have always said my grandfather remained in the Australia line as it was shorter and he hated waiting in line haha. In the end, My family migrated from Malta, to Australia in 1956. My mum was 3yo at the time. My oldest uncle and my grandfather migrated first with my great uncle to secure housing for both large families. (they ended up finding a house in Carlton, Melbourne) and also to secure employment. Once this was finalised my grandmother, mum, aunty and two uncles came across with my great aunty and her young children to join them in Australia. The ship my mum came on was the Casta Felici, I believe?? I love hearing about our family's journey.

Tony Gauci

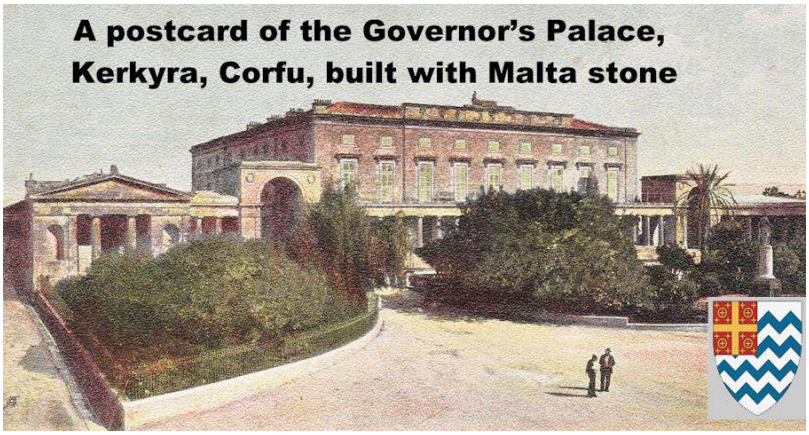
My parents and myself were born in Alexandria, Egypt were a large number of Maltese people lived but in 1947, after the war due to the unrest in Egypt along with many Maltese from Malta emigrated to Australia. We settled in Perth, WA where we made our home. I was lucky a couple of years ago to finally visit the land of my heritage with my English born wife, our son, born in Australia and his family and meet up with a cousin of my late father. Such a beautiful country and wonderful and memorable experience.

Yvonne McDonald

My mom left Malta 1945 as a war bride, coming to Canada. I saw Malta in 2002 and my daughters are going to see Malta the first time this June.

Mary Portelli

I came out here in 1950 is was 6years old with my Mum 2 brothers and mum Sister Aunty Carmen and her 5 children, our cousins We settled in Pendle Hill as our dad was living he came in 1949 Aunty Carmen went to live in Coffs Harbour. Where her Husband Uncle Charles was living for a while It took us 6 weeks on the boat and finally arrived in Sydney safely. That was 76 years ago



THE FIRST MALTESE SETTLERS IN CORFU

Prof. ARNOLD CASSOLA

Maltese have been documented on the Greek island since at least 1815

6 June 2025| Arnold Cassola An old postcard of the monument to Governor Sir Thomas Maitland in Kerkyra, Corfu, built with Malta stone. Photos: Spiros P. Gauci

For the past years, I have been doing research work concerning the migration of Maltese people to the Greek island of Corfu in the first decades of the 19th century, both at the Catholic Diocese Archives and at the Greek State Archives in Kerkyra.

Sir Thomas Maitland was appointed governor of Malta on July 23, 1813, during the reign of George II. A couple of years later, in 1815, the Greek Ionian Islands were declared a British protectorate and, consequently, Maitland was appointed as Lord High Commissioner for the Ionian Islands, which included Corfu, Paxos, Cephalonia, Lefkas, Ithaca, Zakynthos and Cythera.

Maitland continued to serve as governor of Malta until January 17, 1824. Corfu, instead, remained under the protection of the British Crown until 1864 (Gauci 2007).

Till now, Maltese scholars and the Maltese government had established the year 1819 as the year in which the first Maltese landed in Corfu and settled down there. In 2014, Bernard Vassallo wrote: "The origins of this small [Maltese] community began in 1819, when the British governor of the Ionian islands, Sir Thomas Maitland, decided to build the palace of St Michael and St George."

In October 2019, then minister Carmelo Abela marked in Greece the 200th anniversary of the first Maltese immigrant arrivals in Corfu.

The surviving registers at the Catholic Diocese Archives at the bishopric in the old town of Kerkyra belie this dating, since the presence of Maltese in Corfu has been documented since at least 1815.

The first Maltese person one encounters in the Corfu diocese registers is Paolo Pace, son of Silvestro. On April 23, 1815, Pace is recorded in the baptism register as the godfather of Catterina Bianchini, whose father, Luigi hailed from Bassano del Grappa, in Italy, while her mother, Rosa Agorastò was a native of Corfu. One would assume that, to qualify as a godfather, one would have to be quite a close acquaintance of the parents.

It would seem, therefore, that a few weeks after having set foot on the island, the Maltese were already intermingling with the other inhabitants of Corfu.

A second Maltese person registered as the godfather of a child born in Corfu was "il Sig. Dr Giuseppe Schembri", son of Giacomo. On November 17, 1815, Schembri is registered as the godfather of Maria Antonia Giuseppa Ruggeri, born on April 11, 1815, daughter of the Neapolitan Luigi Ruggeri and Angiola di Pietro, from Valdina, in Sicily.

Could this Dr Schembri have been the surgeon Giuseppe Schembri who, after having been in the service of the Knights of the Order of St John, joined the British services in 1801 and then took part in the Egyptian expedition as part of the British contingent? According to Michael Schiavone (2009: 1437), Schembri was taken prisoner by the French in the island of Capri in 1810. He died in 1835.

Could it be that, after his release by the French, Schembri ended up in Corfu? If this were so, it would confirm that a small nucleus of Maltese, among whom Paolo Pace and Giuseppe Schembri, could have already established itself on the island before the landing in Corfu of the British

governor Maitland, who arrived there in February 1816. Eventually, Maitland brought over a sizeable group of Maltese, quite a number of whom, but not all, were involved in the building trade. Whatever the case, apart from the Catholic religion, the possible common link between these two Maltese and the Bassanese, Corfiots, Neapolitans and Sicilians to whose children they acted as godparents must have been the Italian language which, in Malta, Corfu and the various regions of Italy, was the common language of culture.

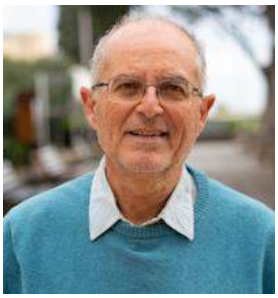
Another person, quite possibly of Maltese origin, is also already recorded in Corfu in the summer of 1816. In fact, on July 29, 1816, a safe passage certificate was issued by the British authorities for Antonio Vella to travel safely from the Ionian island to Venice "per affari suoi". Vella is described as the 23-year-old "Signor Antonio Vella da Corfù", with physical features denoting a "statura ordinaria, capelli castagni, occhi castagni, naso regolare" and a "bocca media".

Interestingly, one child of Maltese origin, Antonio, Francesco, Luigi Farrugia, was born in Corfu before the arrival of Maitland in 1816 and at least three years before the first marriages involving Maltese were recorded.

Antonio was born on July 28, 1815, and baptised on July 30, 1815. His parents were the Maltese Mattio Farrugia, son of Pasquale, and the Sicilian Anna Costanzo. His only godfather was Antonio Salemi, son of Vittorio, from Messina, in Sicily (Baptism Register, vol. 1778-1817, f. 254v.). This would evidently mean that the first Maltese giving birth to their offspring in Corfu must have already been previously married, either in Malta or in Sicily.

This also means that the presence of at least five Maltese – Pace, Schembri, Vella, Antonio and Mattio Farrugia – had already been recorded in Corfu even before Maitland had ever set foot on the island in 1816.

But that is not the only new thing about the findings of my research. Between 1816 and September 1819, 13 Maltese men and one Maltese woman had been issued with a 'clean bill of health' certificate by the authorities in Malta to travel to Corfu; between 1817 and 1818, two Maltese youths and an Anglo-Maltese woman married in Corfu; the Maltese Michiel Attardi was one of the two witnesses at the marriage between a Genoese and a Corfiot in June 1819; and nine 'Maltese' babies were born in Corfu between 1815-1819, the official year of the first Maltese presence on the island, till today.



Corfu: over a hundred people of Maltese descent attend launch of Cassola book

On 22 April, 2026 a packed audience was witness to the launch of the book The Maltese in Corfu 1815–1831, by Arnold Cassola at the "Evi Laskari" hall in the library at the English barracks of the Old Venetian Fortress of Kerkyra, Corfu . The event was held under the auspices of the Catholic Archbishop of Corfu, George Attouvas.

The book, which examines the early years of Maltese immigration to Corfu, was discussed by Yianna Athanasopoulou, Associate Professor in the Department of History & Digital Humanities at the Ionian University, and the author, in the presence of the Library Durector, Christos Koulouridis. The event was moderated by Dr Spiros P. Gaoutsis, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Malta in the Ionian Islands.

The event created a great interest amongst the audience, in particular the various sixth generation of Azzopardis, Micallefs, Gaucis, Sciuerefs, Vellas, Muscats, Schembris, Buhajars, Elluls, Bonellos etc., of clear Maltese descent.

The Maltese Franciscan sisters of the convent established in Corfu in 1907 were also present in occasion of the Cassola book launch.

FEEDBACK

What an amazing edition you've published on the ANZAC history. (Number 595) I was glued to the edition from the very first page, and though I really did not have time to read the entire twenty pages, the reading was so interesting that I could not put it down till I finished the entire edition. Well done and so informative! I learned quite a lot about the legendary Gallipoli campaign and even more about the "Nurse of the Mediterranean".

We were fortunate enough to be in Perth some years ago on ANZAC day and our hotel window overlooked the parade grounds where the ANZAC parade concluded. There were bleachers there which were across the street directly under our window. So we were able to attend the ceremonies from our room and listen over the loud speakers to the presentations. After all the dignitaries spoke, a Spitfire in RAAF livery,"pedal to the metal" flew a mere feet off the deck in front of the bleachers and then exited the ceremony with a victory roll. The Spit was actually so low that from our window, we were looking down at the fleeting Spit. What a sight! I felt a twinge go up my spine and the event left an indelible memory enjoyed to this day. Regards, Fred Aquilina

What a great issue filled with so much history and images. It almost brought tears to my eyes ! We Maltese should be very proud of our ANZAC past, though initially we were deemed not welcome by Australian authorities, but not the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who were very grateful and thank full for the welcome and medical assistance they received in Malta. Thank you Frank for this really GREAT issue. Carm Galea

A great ANZAC Day Souvenir Maltese E- Newsletter edition - well done Frank .
History will always be remembered especially to our senior generation gap, however, the ANZAC DAY Souvenir brings all age gaps together on ANZAC Day.
Many thanks and God Bless – Regards – John Calleja – Adelaide, Australia

I'm writing to express my disappointment. Last year I discovered by accident that there are memorial statues outside the Prospect RSL commemorating Malta and the Maltese.
I don't remember that there has ever been a formal Maltese ceremony there of commemoration either around ANZAC Day or even the George Cross Day commemoration.
A few days ago on Facebook there were several items on the George Cross and Malta, and the date is so close to ANZAC Day. I can't understand why no formal ceremony has (I believe) ever taken place at Prospect. Our parents and older generation who went through the war have gone and we are much older too but the younger generation will never know if all interest has been lost. Could you please also continue to me send your newsletter. Thank you Theresa (Tess) Raggio

We have gained extensive knowledge regarding the history of the ANZACS in Malta. I will cherish the Special Anzac edition and share it with our Australian friends to discover the extent to which Malta supported the Australian and New Zealand soldiers during the First World War. Thank you, Frank. You amaze us with your ability to create such a professional publication. Charles and Amanda Grech

I want to thank you so much and congratulate you most sincerely on the production of this Special ANZAC DAY edition of the Maltese E-Newsletter.

We have so much to thank our service men and women for what they did, achieved and gave during not only WWI but WWII. However ANZAC DAY is to commemorate all of those who took part in the battles of WWI

My grandfather, Charles PRESSEY, was in the 9th infantry and was wounded at Gallipoli. He was sent to Malta to recuperate, and it was there where he met my Maltese grandmother, Maria DOUBLETT, (daughter of Paolo DOUBLETT and Donna Vittoria INGUANEZ), who at then time, was a VAD – and only very young at the time.

All my life I was told the story of the 'love at first sight' attachment which was formed between my grandparents – my grandmother who, being from royal family connections (INGUANEZ), could speak very little English but even so, the love story began and after only a very short time, my grandparents were married in Valletta, in 1915.

My grandfather, once he had recovered, was sent back to the front, where he fought in many battles, Pozieres, the battlefields of Northern France, Amiens, Fromelles, Mouquet Farm, Villers Bretonneux, Lochnagar Mine crater at La Boiselle and more. As if having been shot, suffered from the effects of the mustard gas and having much shrapnel in parts of his body, my grandfather signed up for WWII. How he could possibly have had the bravery to accomplish that but, he, fortunately, did not have to serve the total length of WWII. He just was not well enough.

After my grandparents were married in Valletta in 1915, my grandmother, after a time, went to live with her brother in England for a short while and then found lodgings elsewhere until my grandfather had leave in England. There they 'remarried in Bournemouth' and my grandmother then made her way to Australia as a war bride and was joined by my grandmother at the end of WWI.

Sadly, my grandfather was never a well man following his injuries from both wars, the ill health he incurred from spending much time in the trenches, suffering from 'trench feet', and the dysentery, just to name a few of the effects of the difficult situations. He was unable to manage any difficult working positions after his service in both conflicts, but he did manage to carry out the duties of a 'lift man', always needing to sit on a stool, and take people up and down the floors in his 'lift' it was called – elevator.

He did also manage to carry out work on the property he acquired after the war and I remember his caring for chickens, horses, some cows, goats and his beloved blue cattle dog, Blue – such a typical name for an Australian Blue Heeler. Blue followed him everywhere, and as I was only a child at the time, and have come to understand situations better, I feel Blue provided him with a soothing companionship which demanded nothing but love and care and this my grandfather supplied in abundance.

My grandfather was a loving, caring and very quiet man, born into a farming situation outside Bundaberg, Qld, but like so many of these brave returned service men and women, he was never able to discuss the war, the situations he experienced in the war, or of his comrades who gave the ultimate sacrifice for the country of their birth.

You would think we all – in every country – would have learned valuable lessons from all of the wars gone by but no, we will never learn, but we who are safe in our countries, at present, should learn, respect and value what we have and strive to keep peace throughout the world and thus keep – where we are able to make a difference – safe places for our children and grandchildren whon also need to treasure the stories and the traditions of ANZAC DAY.

Thank you so much again, Frank, for this wonderful newsletter and I just love my copy of THE NURSE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN. It means so much to me.Kind regards, Marion Atkinson = Queensland, Australia

Photo : Dr Charles Daniel Saliba with members from the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies (left to right): Prof. Svetla Stoeva, Ms. Darina Katsarska, Prof. Galina Evstatieva, Dr Charles Daniel Saliba, Prof. Simeon Evstatiev, Prof. Ekaterina Dokleva And Prof. Stoyan Doklev

ERASMUS+ MOBILITY STRENGTHENS ACADEMIC TIES BETWEEN MALTA AND BULGARIA

Dr Charles Daniel Saliba, an academic at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Gozo Campus, has completed a week-long Erasmus+ job shadowing mobility at Sofia University 'St Kliment Ohridski', the oldest and most prestigious institution of higher education in Bulgaria. He was hosted by the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies within the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology.

Saliba met with Prof. Gergana Petkova, Dean of the Faculty, Assoc. Prof. Galina Evstatieva, Arabist and Vice-Dean of the Faculty, and Prof. Simeon Evstatiev, Head of the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies. Throughout the week, he was accompanied and assisted by Senior Assistant Prof. Stoyan Doklev.

Prof. Evstatiev invited Saliba to deliver a public lecture to students enrolled in undergraduate and Master's degree programmes in Arabic or Middle East and Islamic Studies. In his lecture, titled 'The History of the Maltese Language', Saliba provided an overview of the historical developments that led to the formation of the Maltese language, while comparing and contrasting its lexicon, morphology and phonology with Arabic.

Saliba commented: "It was an honour to be invited as a speaker at this world-renowned university during my Erasmus mobility. It was also very exciting to see a vibrant community of Semitic language students and scholars interested in hearing about

Maltese—the only Semitic language recognised as an official language in the EU." Saliba also presented a copy of Level A1 of the Maltese for Foreigners series to the department library, as well as a copy of the trilingual book Provérbios Europeus/European Proverbs/Proverbji Ewropej (written in Portuguese, English and Maltese), that he co-authored with Prof. Rui Soares, President of the International Association of Paremiology, to serve as a reference for students studying Modern Standard Arabic and Arabic dialects for further immersion in the Maltese Language.

This experience was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU, underscoring MCAST's commitment to internationalisation and professional excellence.

For further information, please visit: https://www.uni-sofia.bg/ or https://mcast.edu.mt/

The Franciscan Sisters of the Heart of Jesus with their new provincial superior, Sister Marika Agius (front row, fourth from left) at Ta' Pinu shrine. PHOTO: CHARLES SPITERI

FRANCISCAN SISTERS' NEW PROVINCIAL SUPERIOR

The Maltese Province of the Franciscan Sisters of the Heart of Jesus celebrated their sixth provincial chapter at Dar Madre Margerita in Xwejni, Marsalforn, Gozo. Present for the chapter was the general superior of the congregation, Sister Giuseppina Zammit. During the chapter Sister Marika Agius was elected provincial superior, Sister Josephine Xuereb provincial vicar, while Sisters PierMarie Zammit, Marion Debrincat and Josephine Schiavone provincial councillors. The chapter was concluded with a Eucharistic celebration by Fr Joe Gugliano at Ta' Pinu sanctuary, Gozo..

On August 15, 1880, Dun Ġużepp, a humble but bright priest from Victoria, and a group of pious youths that he had guided spiritually for various years, gathered in a house that he called Casa di Carità. They were to become the nucleus of the future Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Heart of Jesus. Soon afterwards, the direction of the group was taken over by Margherita De Brincat, a holy youth from Kerċem, who along with Dun Ġużepp, are considered as the co-founders of the congregation.

Step into history and strategy this May, with a unique chess experience set in one of Malta's most iconic prehistoric sites, the Ħal Tarxien Prehistoric Complex.

On 16th May 2026, Heritage Malta will host a Rapid Chess Tournament, starting from 13:00 onwards. Open to players of all ages and skill levels, this event welcomes anyone familiar with chess rules, making it the perfect opportunity for both seasoned competitors and families looking for a fun and engaging afternoon. In collaboration with XYChess, the tournament will follow a 5-round Swiss system with a 10+5 time control, ensuring dynamic gameplay throughout.

Participants will compete for prizes awarded to first, second, and third place, adding a competitive edge to this friendly and inclusive event. Your ticket also includes general admission to the Ħal Tarxien Prehistoric Complex, allowing you to explore this remarkable UNESCO World Heritage site. Tickets can be purchased online or from any Heritage Malta museum or site.

Whether you're aiming for victory or simply looking to enjoy a memorable day combining culture and strategy, this chess tournament promises a truly distinctive experience in an extraordinary setting

Police Orchestra of Malta with Pope Francis on his 88th birthday (17 December 2024)

CONCERT IN MALTA TO REMEMBER POPE FRANCIS

A musical oratorio marking the first anniversary of Pope Francis' death was performed in Mdina, Malta, with proceeds supporting a Church-run home for persons in need.

A commemorative concert in memory of Pope Francis took place on 24 April at the Metropolitan Cathedral of St Paul in Mdina.

Organized by the Malta Police Force in collaboration with the Maltese Embassy to the Holy See, proceeds from the event will be donated to Id-Dar tal-Providenza, a Church-run home supporting persons in need. The programme featured the two-hour musical oratorio *"Francesco: Shepherd of Mercy,"* reflecting on the pontificate of Pope Francis.

The libretto was written by Malta's Ambassador to the Holy See, Mr. Frank Zammit, while the music is composed by Maestro Anthony Cassar, conductor of the Malta Police Force Orchestra. Among present were Malta's Police Commissioner Angelo Gafà, Archbishop Charles Jude Scicluna, representatives of the Apostolic Nunciature, and other civil and religious authorities.

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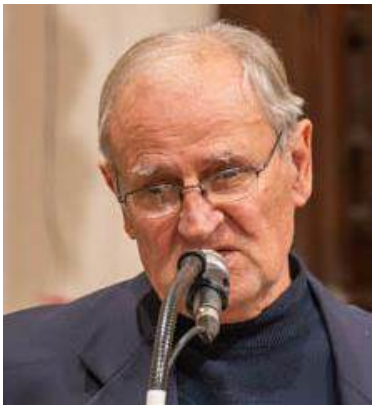
RAPPORT BIL-MALTI MILL-KORRISPONDENT TAGHNA L-KAV. JOE M ATTARD



Dan l-aħħar kont preżenti fil-Konkatidral ta' San Pawl fl-Imdina għall-Oratorio 'Francesco' li kiteb bl-Ingliż l-Ambaxxatur ta' Malta fil-Vatikan Frank Żammit fuq mużika ta' Mro Anthony Cassar bis-sehem tal-Banda tal-Pulizija ta' Malta fil-preżenza tal-Arċisqof Metropolita l-E.T. Mons Charles J. Scicluna u knisja mimlija nies. Kienet biċċa xogħol b'mużika mill-aqwa biż-żewġ narraturi Valerie Farrugia u Manwel Cauchi u bis-sehem taż- żewġ solisti bravi – sopran u tenur. Nażżarda ngħid li dan ix-xogħol forsi ħa ħin iktar minn dak mistenni u li kont nippreferi nisimgħu bil-Malti, li forsi l-awtur seta' kitbu wkoll bit- Taljan biex ikun jista' jiġi ppreżentat f'xi belt Taljana fejn Papa Francesco kien jgħix kemm dam Papa. Imma kollox fuq kollox kienet serata pjaċevoli u Mro Anthony Cassar ħaqqu kulltifħir għal mod kif ikkompona mużika ferrieħa u mexxejja li żammet udjenza numeruża msammra fuq is-siġġijiet tal-Katidral ta' San Pawl għal fuq minn sagħtejn u nofs. Tgħid hemm ċans li biċċa xogħol prestiġġjuża bħal din tittellgħa f'Għawdex ukoll, għax naħseb li fl-Imdina kienu biss ftit Għawdxin preżenti li stajt tgħoddhom fuq is-swaba ta' id waħda!

MANWEL DIMECH: THE MALTESE CRIMINAL AND NATIONAL HERO

Manwel Dimech is one of our country's greatest heroes. Dimech was not only fearless; he was also a social reformer, a poet, a novelist, a philosopher, and a journalist, fighting to make Malta a better place for everyone. He was born in humble beginnings in 1860, fighting his way through the prison system to educate himself and become a champion for the most vulnerable in the country.

Dimech was considered a very dangerous figure — he challenged political structures, encouraged women to fight for their rights, and roared for freedom and independence from our oppressors.

Born in Valletta in 1860, Manwel Dimech had a troubled youth. Between complicity in murders, and fraud, by the age of 37, Manwel had spent more years in jail than as a free man.But instead of coming out of prison a hardened criminal, he became fluent in six languages and emerged as a new man.

In 1898, this linguistic ability led him to start "The Flag of the Maltese" newspaper. Dimech wanted to raise awareness among the Maltese public on what he thought was wrong with the country's British administration.

He started to push the idea of organised worker associations. Eventually, Dimech set up an association of Maltese citizens to promote progress in education and improve Malta's social conditions. Manwel Dimech addressed a lot of issues in his writings. But his ultimate criticism was towards what he called the "small-mindedness" of the Maltese population.

Frank and plain-spoken as always, Dimech's point was that large swathes of the Maltese population unquestioningly accepted whatever they were told.

The Church took exception to what Dimech was writing about the role of women in public life, the attitude of some members of the clergy, and how people should look at civil and religious authority. In response, Dimech stated that he was faithful to the Catholic teaching, but it was the Church which was not being faithful to the teachings of the Gospels.

In 1911, Maltese Bishop Sir Pietro Pace excommunicated Manwel Dimech on the accusation of preaching the Illuminism philosophy, which was condemned by the Church at the time. The aggressive religious campaign against him reached its peak in 1912 when he was almost stoned to death by the public while trying to give a speech in Qormi. The fact that the masses were now turning against him, ironically, served to prove his point.

Dimech strongly opposed the colonial system. After 1911, he spoke out publicly in favour of independence from the UK. He also had a great appreciation for the Maltese language as an instrument of national identity, at a time when the dominant narrative was whether our main language should be English or Italian.

In 1914, during WWI, the British saw Dimech as "agitating the Dockyard workers". Thousands were employed at the Dockyard at the time, and mobilising them against the government would have had dire consequences for the British administration. Soon enough, Dimech was permanently exiled to Egypt, where he died in 1921.

Few people have matched the impact that Dimech had on the Maltese national identity. His preachings turned many heads, but the emancipation of women and compulsory education are widely accepted today. Dimech planted the seeds which decades later blossomed into a willingness to fight for a free and independent Malta.

The traditional Maltese fishing boat, known as the Luzzu, remains one of the most enduring symbols of the Mediterranean. Its history is a vibrant tapestry of ancient maritime traditions, practical engineering, and protective customs that have survived for millennia. These brightly coloured vessels are not merely tools of a trade but are floating embodiments of Malta's cultural identity.

Ancient Origins and Design Continuity

The design of the Luzzu is widely believed to date back to the Phoenicians, who occupied the Maltese islands around 800 BC. The double-ended hull and sturdy timber construction have undergone remarkably little change over the centuries, proving the efficiency of this ancient maritime architecture.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Luzzu is the pair of eyes painted on the bow. This tradition stems from ancient Egypt and Phoenicia, representing the Eye of Horus or Osiris. These eyes were intended to protect fishermen from evil spirits and ward off misfortune. From a practical standpoint, they were also said to help the boat navigate through treacherous storms and rocky coastlines.

Diversity of the Traditional Fleet Whilst the Luzzu is the most famous member of the fleet, it belongs to a broader family of traditional Maltese craft designed for specific maritime needs.

Luzzu: A larger, sturdy, double-ended vessel pointed at both the bow and the stern, built to withstand rougher open seas.

K**ajjik:** Similar in appearance to the Luzzu but featuring a flat stern, typically utilised in calmer harbour waters.

Frejgatina: A small wooden rowing boat used primarily for light fishing or ferrying passengers within the harbour.

Symbolism in Colour and Craftsmanship

The aesthetic of a Luzzu is governed by strict traditions passed down through generations of shipwrights. The colour palette is usually a vibrant mix of mustard yellow, red, bright blue, and green. These choices are rarely arbitrary. The "moustache"—the painted band across the bow—often indicated the boat's port of origin. For instance, a reddish moustache traditionally signalled that the boat was built in St Paul's Bay, whereas yellow was more common in the fishing village of Marsaxlokk.

The craftsmanship involved in building these vessels is equally traditional. Historically, they were fashioned from oak and mulberry for the internal frames and pine for the hull. Although modern materials like fibreglass have been introduced, many local fishermen continue to favour wood, believing it offers superior stability and maintains the vessel's unique character.

The Modern Luzzu and Cultural Preservation

During the early 20th century, the boats transitioned from the use of sails and oars to diesel engines. Despite the significant modernisation of the wider fishing industry, the Luzzu remains the primary vessel for local fishermen in communities like Marsaxlokk. These boats are now protected cultural icons, with regulations often dictating how they should be maintained to ensure the traditional aesthetic remains intact for future generations.

The Luzzu is more than a fishing vessel; it is a national icon that has appeared on former Maltese currency and remains central to the islands' heritage, representing a bridge between a modern nation and its deep maritime roots. (E. Ferrante)

HUGH AND KEETS CASSAR -USA

He left Malta at 15 in the aftermath of World War II and migrated to USA. Today, at 89, Hugh "Hugo" Cassar owns a $34.9 million estate in California.

The Maltese entrepreneur built his fortune in the US through persistence and business savvy, growing from modest beginnings into a leading importer of cigars and smoking accessories.

He recently made headlines after a video surfaced showing him trying to sell his sprawling Lake Sherwood property.

The Malta born Hugh Cassar is a life-long entrepreneur, a Chartered Accountant, and business graduate from The University of Toronto. He is the founder and Chairman of Kretek International, Inc. Corporate offices are located locally in Moorpark, California. For the past 14 years Hugh has served as the Honorary Consul General of Malta.

Hugh and his wife, Keets, focus their philanthropic efforts in the Conejo Valley where they reside, as well as many other communities. Local charities include Casa Pacifica, Cancer Support, New West Symphony, Cabrillo Music, and The Alliance for the Arts. Hugh is presently on the Dean's Executive Council for the School of Managment at California Lutheran University as well as the Executive Board of Directors of California State University Channel Islands. He is a long-time resident of Westlake Village (since 1970), and has been fortunate to raise his 6 children here in the Conejo Valley.

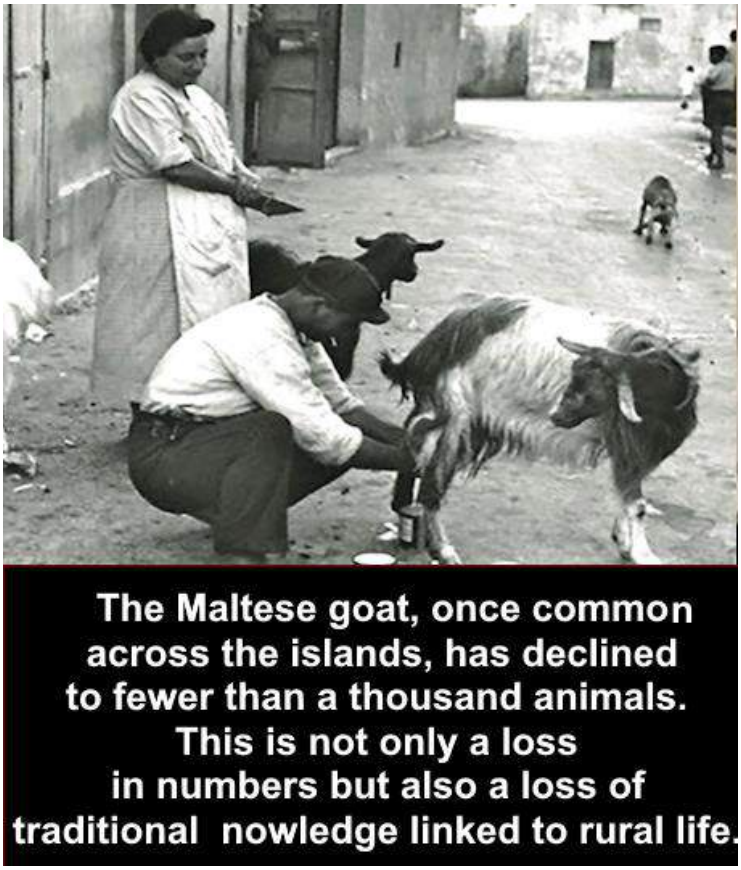
"I always wanted a castle, and I have everything else, so why not buy one," says Hugh Cassar, 89, founder of Kretek International, a cigar- and tobacco-import company. "I always want something no one else has."

Cassar purchased Chateau Plaisance in Lake Sherwood Country Club, which is part of the Westlake Village area in Thousand Oaks, California, from his friends, the original owners, in 2022.

"I was born in Malta and have traveled everywhere, and every time I went to a castle I would think 'I would love to have something like this,' he says.

While castles in other parts of the world are often associated with royalty or are part of a multigenerational family legacy, owners of castles in the U.S. are more likely to be making a statement about their individuality. Like Cassar, they want something unique that will serve as a landmark for their family members, friends, and their community.

"The Cassars are known as the biggest donors to a variety of causes in the Conejo Valley," says Sher Toor, a real estate agent with Compass in Westlake Village, California. "This castle has been the setting for fundraisers and board meetings for all kinds of organizations and causes related to alleviating poverty, supporting transitional housing, and other local and national causes." Castles can be traditional or modern, but consistent elements include distinctive architectural details, especially a turret or two.



Malta has a number of indigenous species that are either facing extinction or have actually become extinct over the last couple of decades. Some of these are farm animals that are unique to these islands and have been present here for thousands of years. They are, without doubt, part of the local heritage.

The Maltese cattle and the Maltese goat are two such animals. The Maltese bull, in particular, epitomises Mediterranean culture and early man's use of land for survival and it is also a symbol of fertility.

These species are so synonymous with our islands that it is hard to believe that they are in a very precarious state and might soon be extinct, such has been the speed of their disappearance. They represent unique genetic pools which would be the equivalent of, say, the entire temple culture disappearing irretrievably, should they become extinct.

In the past, goats were valued for their variety and adaptability, and herdsmen used a practical vocabulary to describe their differences. Much of this knowledge is now fading as the population continues to shrink.

Recent initiatives have aimed to raise awareness and reconnect people with this heritage. At Malta AgriFair 2026, the Breeds of Origin Conservancy organised an exhibition centred on the Maltese goat. Through the work of artist Twanny Darmanin, the display showed the natural variation of the animals, with each goat boasting a unique look and personality. The initiative also included direct public engagement. In collaboration with Coffee and Strangers, visitors were given the opportunity to taste Maltese goat milk, which was once widely consumed but is now rarely found. This was supported by breeder Renay Mifsud, whose work continues traditional practices. Children took part through drawing activities organised with Art Club 2000, encouraging observation and engagement with the subject in a simple and accessible way. The Maltese goat remains a part of the country's heritage, but its survival depends on continued recognition and practical support rather than passive awareness.

These are the bank details if you would like to send a donation

Bank - Commonwealth (Australia) BSB - 065106
Account No. - 00502597 Name - Frank Scicluna

40 YEARS OF SERVICE AT THE HEART OF OUR MALTESE COMMUNITY

By our correspondent Emmanuel Brincat

It is with great pleasure that, in my first contribution to this well-loved Maltese e-newsletter, the journal for Maltese living abroad, I share the story of someone many of us in our community know and respect — a dear friend of my wife Mary Anne and myself, Ms MIRIAM CASSAR.

Miriam is no stranger to our Maltese community here in Melbourne. Many of us have crossed paths with her over the years, often at times when we needed guidance, support, or simply a helping hand. Born in 1959 in Ħamrun, Malta, to John and Josephine Cassar, Miriam grew up alongside her sister Elizabeth, who, like her parents, has sadly passed away.

She remains very close to her two nephews — Bradley, who is married to Amanda and lives in Mellieħa, Malta, and Keith, who resides in the United Kingdom.

Her schooling took place in Ħamrun and Ħal Qormi, where she built the foundations for what would become a life of dedication and service. In 1981, Miriam made the life-changing decision to migrate to Australia and she made Melbourne her home. Like so many in our community, she embraced new opportunities, furthering her education in Information Technology and Graphic Design, and earning a Diploma in Business Administration from Victoria University.

In 1986, Miriam began working at the Malta Consulate in Melbourne — a role that would grow into a lifelong commitment. This year, she celebrates an incredible 40 years of continuous service.

Over those four decades, Miriam has worked alongside nine Consuls General, from Mr Frank Consiglio to the current Consul General, Dr Gioconda Schembri LLD. Through all these years of change, one thing has remained constant — Miriam's dedication to the people she serves.

Ask anyone in our community who has dealt with the Consulate, and chances are Miriam was the person who helped them. From my own experience, whenever I have reached out on behalf of others, she has always been there — patient, knowledgeable, and genuinely willing to assist.

There are many who, for various reasons, find it difficult to make contact with the Consulate. In those moments, I have often stepped in to assist, and without exception, Miriam has always done her very best to ensure that no one is left without support.

Whether it's organising appointments or helping resolve concerns, her approach has always been one of understanding and care.

The feedback I continue to receive from members of our Maltese community is always the same — appreciation, respect, and gratitude for the way Miriam carries out her work.

Beyond her professional role, Miriam is also known for her warm and kind nature. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening — perhaps a reflection of the patience and care she shows in all aspects of her life.

For 40 years, Miriam has been more than just a staff member at the Consulate — she has been a familiar and reassuring presence for generations of Maltese-Australians in Melbourne.

While official recognition may not always come quickly, within our community her contribution is deeply valued and widely acknowledged.

On behalf of all of us, we thank Miriam for her years of dedication, her kindness, and her unwavering support and we wish her continued good health and happiness in the years to come.

LEST We Forget

RICHARD GAUCI by Godwin Gauci

Richard Gauci was born on December 20, 1921, in Birkirkara, Malta, as one of eleven children to Mr. Charlie and Mrs. Bernadette Gauci. Growing up in a large family, he faced a lack of clothing and food, had no toys to play with, and found school to be unengaging. In 1935, at the age of fourteen, he left school to enlist in the Maltese Army as a Messenger Boy.

Riding his bicycle, he delivered messages between Army posts across Malta. After three years of service, he transferred to the Royal Navy and was sent to Portsmouth, England, for his naval training. His initial assignment was as a cook on the destroyer HMS Tiger, where he served for several years before being reassigned to a newer destroyer, HMS Lion.

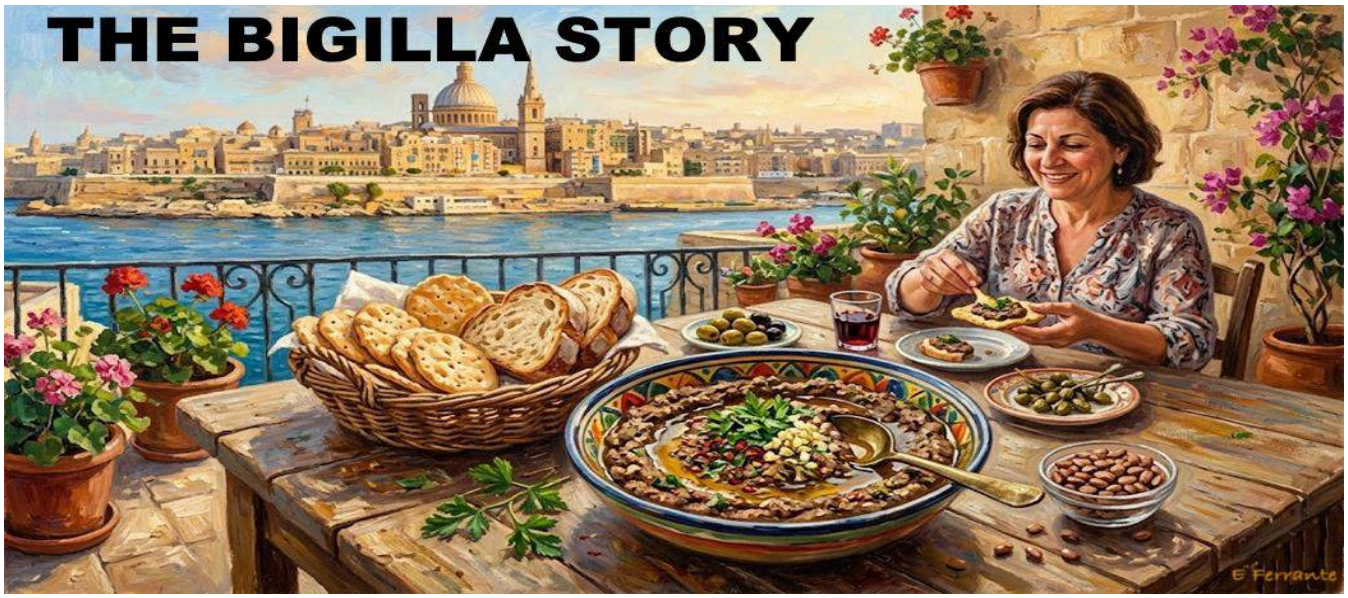
When Germany declared war on Britain, the Royal Navy took action by seeking and destroying enemy ships and U-Boats. HMS Lion sailed into the Mediterranean Sea and entered the Maltese Harbour to defend the island and locate enemy submarines. While on shore, he was assigned to the anti-aircraft guns at Fort St. Angelo, where he shot down German and Italian bombers as they flew overhead at night. Later, Richard was reassigned to a much larger battleship, HMS Birmingham, where he served for the remainder of his time in the Royal Navy. He achieved the rank of Chief Petty Officer, and on numerous occasions, he and some of the other cooks prepared special dinners for the Admiralty and the Royals back in England.

Over his twenty-two years in the Royal Navy, he sailed around the globe and visited many ports until he resigned in 1960. Upon returning home to his family, which included his wife Josephine, son Godwin, and daughter Bernadette, he cherished spending time with them. However, the following year, the family emigrated to Adelaide, Australia. His medals include the Africa Star 1939 – 1945, Star Medallion 1939 – 1945, Long Service and Good Conduct Medal, George Cross 60th Anniversary Medallion, and End of War Medallion. The Maltese people were awarded the highest honour for their gallantry.

JOHN BAPTIST PORTELLI

John Portelli was born in the late 1920s in Malta. At a young age, he, along with several other men, was sent to Portsmouth Naval Base in England for his final training and was subsequently assigned to a Royal Navy ship. Throughout his naval career, he served on various ships, ranging from frigates to destroyers, and during the Second World War, he was stationed on battleships. Shortly after the war, he resigned from the Royal Navy and emigrated to Australia. John arrived in Adelaide and secured employment at Woomera in the outback.

Later in his life, he met Helen Borg, and they were married. He received two medals: The African Star and the War Medallion (1939-1945).



In many ways, the story of Bigilla is the story of Malta itself—a tale of resilience, resourcefulness, and the blending of cultures over centuries. To understand the origins of this humble bean paste, one must look past the modern kitchen and into the deep history of the Mediterranean.

Ancient Foundations and North African Roots

The use of broad beans (fava beans) as a staple food date back thousands of years in the Mediterranean basin. In ancient Egypt and Rome, beans were a primary source of protein for common citizens and soldiers, valued for being easy to grow, store, and transport.

The specific variety used for bigilla, the tic bean or *ful ta' Ġirba*, provides the strongest clue to its lineage. These small, dark beans are historically linked to the Tunisian island of Djerba. Malta's proximity to North Africa led to centuries of maritime trade and cultural exchange, particularly during the period of Arab rule (870–1090 AD). Probably, the technique of drying, boiling, and mashing these specific beans arrived in Malta during this time, making bigilla a cousin to dishes like Egyptian ful medames.

A Dish of Necessity

For much of its history, bigilla was a food born of necessity rather than culinary flair. Before the age of refrigeration and global supply chains, dried legumes were essential for survival.

During periods of scarcity—whether caused by poor harvests, prolonged sieges, or the blockades of World War II—dried beans were often the only reliable source of protein available to the Maltese people. Bigilla was favoured because the dried tic beans were incredibly cheap, and when prepared, they provided substantial energy for manual labourers and large families. It was a dish that could be stretched to feed many, requiring only water, garlic (which grew wild), and olive oil to become palatable and nutritious.

The Bigilla Man and Local Tradition

By the early-to-mid 20th century, bigilla had cemented its place as a staple street food. Its history during this period is inextricably linked with the memory of the tal-bigilla (the bigilla seller).

In an era when most food was prepared at home, the Bigilla Man offered one of the few ready-to-eat meals available. He would navigate the cobblestone streets of villages like Rabat and Qormi, often pulling a cart or driving a modified vehicle. Inside, a massive metal pot wrapped in thick insulated cloth kept the bigilla piping hot. Sellers were famous for their distinctive, melodic cries, which alerted housewives and workers that fresh, hot bigilla was nearby. Customers would emerge with their own ceramic bowls (zabbiera) to purchase the paste by the scoopful.

This tradition not only provided sustenance but also reinforced a sense of community, as the arrival of the bigilla vendor became a daily social ritual in many neighbourhoods.

Evolution to an Appreciated Classic

As Malta modernised and became more prosperous in the latter half of the 20th century, the landscape of Maltese food changed. Cheap meat became widely available, and global fast-food chains arrived. For a brief time, traditional foods like bigilla were seen by some as old-fashioned remnants of past hardship.

However, a cultural resurgence began in the 21st century. Maltese cuisine was celebrated once more, not just as fuel, but as a crucial part of the national heritage. Bigilla transitioned from being a food for the poor to a universally beloved appetiser. The Bigilla Man may be rare today, but his legacy lives on in every supermarket, restaurant, and village feast (festa) where this rich, brown bean paste is proudly served.

Servings: 4

BIGILLA RECIPE

Ingredients

- dried fava beans 1 cup
- 750 ml water 2 cups
- 30 ml olive oil 2 tbsp
- 1 tsp salt
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 1 tsp chili flakes
- 1/2 tbsp parsley chopped

To garnish

- 1 tbsp parsley chopped
- 1 chili pepper
- 1/2 tsp chili flakes
- olive oil drizzle

Instructions

1. Start by soaking the dried fava beans from a day before you plan to cook the bigilla. In a large bowl place the dried beans and cover with water. Let it sit for a day whilst checking if more water is needed.
2. The next day, rinse the beans and add the beans to a large pot with the water. Bring the beans to a boil. While it is boiling, you'll notice some foam on the surface. Remove the foam with a slotted spoon.
3. Cover and let it simmer for about an hour. Check the beans if they need more water. Let it cook for another 30 minutes and check for doneness. If the beans are still a bit hard let them cook for another 30 minutes.
4. Once the beans are cooked, remove the excess water. Do not discard the water in which the beans cooked in for now. Add the beans to a food processor.
5. Together with the beans, add two tbsps of the water in which the beans were cooked in, olive oil, salt, garlic, chili flakes and parsley. Pulse together until all the beans are broken and you have a thick paste. Add more water if the consistency is too thick.
6. To serve, simply place the dip into a bowl and top with parsley, chili flakes and a diced chili pepper. Finally drizzle a good quality olive oil on top. Serve with warm bread or galletti.