



# MerHbA

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

MHA Newsletter

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

August 2020

Dear Members and Friends of the MHA,

I think that 2020 will be remembered as the year that we prefer to forget. At the start of this month, Melbourne went into Stage 4 restrictions in response to the second wave of COVID-19 cases: mandatory masks, online schooling; written permits for essential workers; no visitors except for intimate partners; only one hour of exercise once a day within a 5km radius; only one person from a household shopping at a time; and a curfew between 8 pm and 5 am. Harsh though these measures seem, they are working, as the number of new cases has dropped.

Malta, no stranger to plagues throughout her history, had brought in strict restrictions at the start of the pandemic and brought the disease under control. Surprisingly, Europe lifted travel restrictions early in August, and it was no great surprise that there was a resurgence in the number of cases. Malta was no exception, as some revellers ignored basic health precautions. The introduction of measures such as the closure of nightclubs and bars, a 15-person limit, and mandatory masks, appears to be effective in reducing the number of new cases. As of 21 August, coronavirus has claimed its 10<sup>th</sup> victim, with 36 new cases, 52 recoveries and 682 active cases. 168,793 swab tests have been carried out since the start of the pandemic. A day by day breakdown can be found [here](#).

The MHA was shocked to hear of the demise of Joe Bonett, who attended lectures regularly. When we last saw him, he seemed in excellent health. Our sincerest condolences are extended to his family and friends. A tribute is found on Page 2.

August 15<sup>th</sup> saw the Feast of the Assumption, of special significance to the Maltese. It coincided with the 1942 arrival of the Ohio, the last ship of Operation Pedestal, known to the Maltese as the Santa Marija Convoy. The crippled Ohio was towed into harbour, bringing lifesaving supplies to Malta in the darkest hour of WWII. The convoy is our feature article on Page 5.

The Nativity of our Lady on 8<sup>th</sup> September, also known as Our Lady of Victories, is also special to the Maltese. For many years, the feast has been celebrated at the Star of the Sea church in West Melbourne. This will be the first time in many years that the commemoration will not be held. It celebrated the end of the Great Siege of 1565, and the surrender of Italy in 1943 in WWII, but more on that next month....

On a lighter note, illustrating the ever resourcefulness of the Maltese spirit, the MCCV has reinstated the much-loved Bingo, albeit online by Zoom. The first session on 22<sup>nd</sup> August was a great success, and another will be held on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Register by emailing [admin@mccv.org.au](mailto:admin@mccv.org.au).

Thank you, Clive Dickinson, Mario Bonnici, and John Bonnice, for responding to Jason Lee's request for information. The required Street was Triq La Sengle, and the church was the Immaculate Conception in Cospicua. Jason and his family will be thrilled to visit his wife's family home when they visit Malta. Thank you Paul Vella and Dr Clemente Zammit for your contributions (See page 2) and Mario Bonnici, who sends us links to relevant and interesting Times of Malta articles (Page 3), and a special thank you to all those who provide support and encouragement in these difficult times.

Warm Regards,

*Charlie G* for the MHA

**Due to COVID restrictions,  
MHA 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)

## Vale Joseph Bonett



It is with great sorrow that the MHA notifies you of the death of Joe Bonett. Joe was a long-time member of the MHA. He always arrived early to help set up the tables and chairs for our lectures. He was very friendly, and we will greatly miss our chats. The MHA offers its deepest condolences to his family and friends. May his soul rest in peace.

Paul Vella shares this touching tribute:

*Today was the funeral of our friend Joe Bonett. This was held at St. Paul's Chapel, Parkville. The celebrant was Fr Edwin Agius, MSSP. Because of the Covid-19 restrictions, the funeral could only be attended by some of the close relatives, as only 10 people could be in attendance. Sad, very sad.*

*Joe did a lot of voluntary work with Caroline Springs George Cross Soccer Club.*

*He was an active member of the Maltese Literature Group and used to attend all our meetings. It wasn't the first time that he read some of his poems. He was always there when his assistance was needed.*

*He was also member of the Reskeon Maltese Association Seniors Group and once again his help was always there. He used to attend all the meetings of the Maltese Historical Association of Australia at the Maltese Centre and always found the talks very interesting.*

*He loved Malta and everything that is Maltese. He never missed our Maltese programs on 3ZZZ, and he was a member of the Maltese Programs of 3ZZZ.*

*We are going to miss his visits to our place when he used to stop for an hour chat over a cup of coffee or something stronger.*

*Joe will be missed by one and all.*

*We offer our condolences to his wife Catherine and the whole Bonett family.*

*Oh God, grant him eternal rest.*

### Our Lady of Tal-Ħerba.

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August was the feast of Our Lady of Tal-Ħerba. Dr Clemente Zammit generously shares this [online flip booklet](#) he published in 2018, bringing together his memories and links to the Sanctuary in Birkirkara, Malta, where it can be found behind St Helen's Basilica. It is credited with miraculous healing properties. The booklet is in Maltese, accompanied by excellent photos, but there is a summary in English in the last few pages. Enjoy!

### The Show Must Go On!

Paul Vella is very dedicated to the Maltese Community, in many ways. He informs us that, although Radio station 3ZZZ has been closed since March 27, the Maltese Broadcasting Group still manages to produce three programs a week for their listeners.

With the participation of the other two broadcasters, Liz Phillips and Mario Sammut, Paul has been recording the programs at home and sending them electronically to the Manager to lock them into the system every week. So, despite COVID, we can still listen to the Maltese programmes on 3ZZZ at the usual times, Mondays and Fridays at 5 pm, and Saturdays at 10 am. They are also available [online](#).



## Times of Malta articles

Mario Bonnici shares these links to Times of Malta articles:

A series of 3 pictorial articles about postcards, by Giovanni Bonello.

[Part 1.](#) *Old Maltese postcards and the unusual things they were used for.* In the early 20th century, postcards were a form of Victorian Facebook.

[Part 2.](#) *A history of Maltese postcards.* The first Malta picture postcards only appeared in 1898, almost 30 years after they started in Europe. They soon became very popular.

[Part 3.](#) *A postcard for anything.* Postcards became a collectors' item. Together with Graham Smeed in London, the author, Giovanni Bonello, published *Malta Picture Postcards, 1898-1906*, which set off to a tricky start! More recently, Anthony Abela Medici has published splendid volumes.



[It happened in August: Mgr Pietro Dusina's arrival in Malta in 1574](#) by Joseph F. Grima.

Mgr Pietro Dusina was the first of 62 inquisitors of Malta to be appointed directly by the Holy See. He replaced the local bishop in his inquisitorial duties, as the bishop was in conflict with the Knights. Dusina held his office from 1574 till 1575, in which time he heard 26 cases. He visited every parish, church and village and kept detailed records, which have been an invaluable resource to historians.

[Queen honours Neil Agius for 'exceptional voluntary service'](#) Swimmer and activist, Neil Agius, who has recently completed a record-breaking 100 km swim from Sicily to Malta, received the Commonwealth Point of Light award for his volunteer work with "Wave of Change", aiming to reduce plastic waste. Social media encourages young people to pick up three pieces of rubbish and challenge their friends to do the same.

[The night the ferry from Sicily ran aground](#) - by Christopher Scicluna. In the early morning of 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1955, the MV Star of Malta ran aground in thick fog on the Merkanti Reef, about 80 metres off Paceville. It capsized, killing two of the 57 passengers.

***Defending Mellieha during World War II - Pillboxes and other field defences built before and during WWII*** -

A three-part series by Charles Debono

[Part 1](#) [Part 2](#) [Part 3](#)

Pillboxes were used in both world wars, but many have been demolished. Fortunately many of those in Mellieha have survived. Even before the start of WWII, the Italian Navy realised the importance of capturing Malta in the event of war. The Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, prompted the building of pillboxes and other field defences in Malta by the Royal Engineers. Nearly all had a rubble wall camouflage. With the invasion of



Czechoslovakia in 1939 and the threat of imminent war, this style was replaced by the simpler box type. If camouflaged, they were painted to look like a rubble wall or a farmhouse. Nearly all had four rectangular machine-gun portholes in the four corners of the structure, an observation turret, and enough ammunition for several days. Vulnerable bays were also defended by obstacles laid in the sea and on the beaches. These defences may have been part of the reason why the planned invasion of Malta did not take place. Read on!

[Twannie Aquilina murder: stigma lingers on 60 years later](#) by Claudia Calleja. Relatives of the brutally murdered eight-year-old speak of their pain.

[How a Mattia Preti painting returned to Malta 200 years after it disappeared](#) by Claudia Calleja



## Interesting Videos

[Malta fil-Gwerra](#) (28:41) Video from TVM in Maltese. No subtitles. Some excellent footage, with links to other episodes.

[Why did houses have Maltese crosses painted on their facade during WWII?](#) (29:10) Video from TVM in Maltese. No subtitles. Before WWII, about 85,000 people lived in Valetta, Floriana, the Three Cities and areas surrounding the dockyards and Grand Harbour. In the first few days after hostilities began, it is estimated about a third sought refuge further inland, creating a logistical nightmare for the authorities. Many were hosted in private homes, and permission was given to display a Maltese Cross for every family they took in. This also enabled officials to assess any possible vacancies.

[Xenografija tat-Teatru Rjal](#) (31:09) - Prof. Vicki Ann Cremona. YouTube. In Maltese with English subtitles.

The Royal Opera House was built in 1866, burned in 1873, and rebuilt with an even bigger stage, before being destroyed with great loss of lives by a bomb in 1942. It is now an open-air theatre.

Designed by Edward Barry, who also designed the theatre in Covent Garden, it differed from the Baroque style of Valletta. Five storeys high, it attempted to reach all people with cheaper seats on the top storey, and it also offered matinees. It was also used as a ballroom.

In this programme, Professor Cremona discusses the scenography, the art of backdrops and scenes. She introduces Daniel Formosa to explain the mechanisms that held the scenes in place and allowed them to be raised and lowered. At the back was the *fondale* or backdrop, usually a beautiful scene. Next was the *principale* or false proscenium, usually perforated to allow actors through. The *fianco* or standard flat, basically a side scene, followed, then there were scenes placed directly on stage.

Professor Cremona discusses some books from the National Library of Malta. Mikelang Borg wrote a history of theatre in Malta, as well as running a publishing house and theatre company, and being a founding member of the Maltese Labour Party. Books of posters detail performances, and a series of books by Alfred George Miceli describes what happened in every season. A compilation of the theatre gazette, *'Il Biricchino al Teatro'*, includes reviews and articles about the actors. The Library also contains 2 volumes by Alfred Miceli about the history of Opera in Malta from 1631 to 2000, and *The Royal Opera House of Malta* by Joseph Bonnici and Michael Cassar.

Prof Cremona then examines some actual scenes. Many were relocated when the Royal Theatre collapsed, although some were discarded. She asks people to contact her if they know of any others. She concludes by discussing the styles of scenography and preservation issues.



# The Santa Marija Convoy/ Operation Pedestal

It was the summer of 1942. After two and a half years of relentless bombardment, Malta was in ruins. Her people were starving. Fuel and ammunition were running out. Surrender was imminent. Britain would lose her base in the centre of the Mediterranean.

In desperation, it was decided to send a Convoy of supply ships from Britain. The largest convoy ever, 78 ships and 23000 sailors, sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar and across the Mediterranean. They fought their way through mines, against fierce attacks from air, sea and underwater. More than 500 Merchant and Royal Navy sailors and airmen were killed; 34 aircraft and 13 ships were lost. Only five of the 14 merchant ships reached Malta. The last ship to arrive was the badly damaged Ohio, carrying much needed aviation fuel. She was towed into Grand Harbour to cheering from huge crowds. It was the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1942, the feast of the Assumption, hence the popular Maltese name, the Santa Marija Convoy.

Malta was saved. The following year, she would be the springboard for the Allies to invade Sicily, and march on through Italy into Germany.

A detailed, day by day account, of Operation Pedestal can be found on [Wikipedia](#). Follow the day by day progress of the Convoy on Malta War diaries [here](#).

## Audiovisuals

[The story behind Santa Marija](#) (1:42): A lovely video on Facebook from Lovin Malta.

[The Santa Marija feast day changed the history of the Maltese people](#) (2:41) by TVM. Excellent footage. The commentary is in Maltese, but there is a written translation in English.

*WW II Battle for Malta Rare Color Film* by Ralph Laurino. [Part 1 of 3 \(1940\)](#) (7:44), [Part 2 of 3 \(1941\)](#) (7:52), [Part 3 of 3 \(1942\)](#) (7:11)

[Malta Convoy - Short - Sound](#) (9:29) Movietone – Some amazing footage, narrated by a participant.

[Santa Maria and the Miracle of 1942](#) (4:12)

[Malta Convoy Battle](#) (1942) (4:31) British PATHÉ – Live footage

[Malta Convoy - Further Pictures](#) (1942) (3:58) British PATHÉ - One can only wonder at the bravery of the photographers!

[Operation Pedestal Convoy To Malta A short film](#) (3:59) A War Thunder film, including a re-creation of a dogfight over Malta

[Malta Convoy, The Ohio](#) (1:03:17) Some of the participants discuss the convoy

[Operation Pedestal: The Convoy That Saved Malta](#) (9:42) by Historigraph.

[Malta Convoy - HMS Eagle](#) (31 August 1942) (4:03) Sound only, by Rupert Brabner The War at Sea 1939-45 © 2009 CD41 Recordings, describes the sinking of the Eagle.

[Malta Bomb Damage - September 1942](#) (1942) (2:59) British PATHÉ. No sound but amazing scenes of the devastation of Malta

[Convoy to Malta \(1951\)](#) (13:11) British PATHÉ

Here is a link to the [George Cross Island Association](#), formed to honour veterans of the siege of Malta and their families

The King's Own Royal Regiment Museum has some interesting [photos of Malta](#) during the war. 8th Battalion, King's Own in Malta 1941-43



**Photo © [IWM GM 904](#)**



## [Villa Guardamangia can now be toured in 3D without leaving home](#)

Through the *Times of Malta*, Heritage Malta brings the [Queen's youthful home](#) into your living room. Created with the help of Dhalia Real Estate Services, the [3D virtual tour](#) of the villa allows people to explore the villa's rooms, and also provides a record of its present condition, before renovations restore it to its former glory. Built in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century in the baroque style, the villa fell into a state of disrepair before it was purchased by the Government of Malta on 5th June 2020 and entrusted to Heritage Malta.



### 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](#) is based in New South Wales but 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](#): is a platform 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. If you miss a scheduled programme, you can catch it [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](#)