



MINISTRY FOR TOURISM



TRITON SQUARE AND
BISKUTTIN AREA
EMBELLISHMENT PROJECTS



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JANUARY 2018

Hon. Konrad Mizzi
Minister for Tourism



Triton Fountain Square has now been developed into a pedestrian area after the completion of this regeneration project costing €8.5 million. This spectacularly enhanced location can presently be enjoyed by the general public, host large events and stand for another major landmark in Valletta and Malta. For increased accessibility, the main public transport hub has also been moved into a much better designated area. The possibility of hosting different social, cultural, recreational activities plus diverse events will immensely complement Valletta's rich historic and cultural offer. This square was completed just in time to welcome Valletta 2018, 'European City of Culture', whilst forming part of the four main squares in Valletta. This occurrence and many more will meet the standard as one of the main attractions in Valletta, which will definitely create interest for thousands of people around the world.

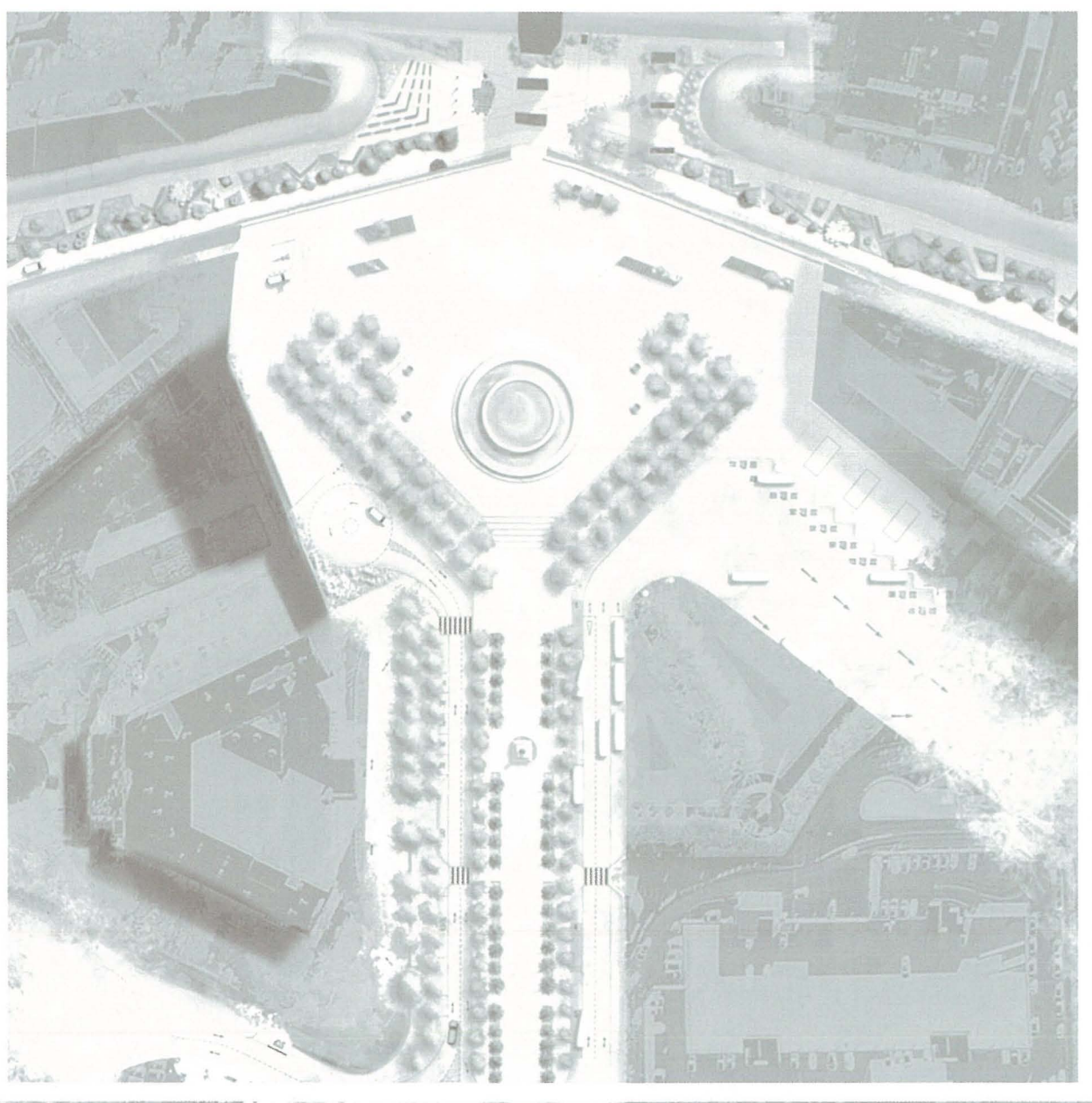
This project has been spearheaded by the Ministry for Tourism, through the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation. This whole project includes paving, tree planting, water reservoirs and historical showcases, all of which include the

preservation of original Valletta fortifications. The latter include also accessibility features and tactile paving following consultation from different stakeholders.

This project also entails restoration of the traditional city gate balconies, benches and various lighting structures, compiled to blend in with the surrounding regenerated buildings. Works have also been done in parts of Floriana, including the area known as 'Biskuttin'. Certain phases of the project have included the upgrade of several roads plus a new traffic management system in Great Siege Street, that leads up to the Education Building, King Edward Street and Nelson Street.

We are complementing these works by a further €24 million EU funded project intended to rehabilitate the lower region of the city.

This country is experiencing new records in every aspect. Malta has become an all year round destination, with more people choosing Malta as their destination of choice for both cultural and entertainment purposes.



Dr Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi MP
**Chairman,
Grand Harbour Regeneration
Corporation**



On approaching the main landward entry to Valletta, one cannot help but noticing the dramatic change that took place in the landscape over the past few years. This prime area of national importance was reinvigorated through the successful restoration of the historic bastions and fortifications, which have been returned to their former glory.

This project was aimed at beautifying an area which is part of the daily commute of thousands of people, yet was not at par with the splendor of a walled capital city.

The area contiguous to the city walls developed in an organic fashion over time and it was high time for its transformation in an open space which lends itself better to the city's spectacular bastions.

Keeping the aesthetic element in mind, the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation embarked on a project that sought to beautify the area as well as rendering it into a majestic square.

To this end, the corporation launched a thorough consultation exercise which touched base with the widest spread of stakeholders. This enabled the corporation to broaden its vision for this area and incorporate fresh ideas into its designs, which were meticulously executed in order to provide accessibility to all.

The end result is for all to see. The Triton Square and The *Biskuttin* area are being returned to the public as a reinvigorated, elegant albeit contemporary open space as well as an attraction on its own merits.

Generations to come will enjoy the fruits of this project. I am pleased that the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation was instrumental in accomplishing such an impressive result.

My gratitude also goes to the consultants, entities and contractors who worked in a concerted effort to achieve this wonderful result.



Charles F. Von Brocktorff, 1835c, *Porta San Giorgio constructed in 1633 after the design of Tumas Dingli.*

Source: Malta National Library.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE BUILDING OF VALLETTA

The extensive archives bequeathed to Malta by the Order of St. John reveal that the construction of a fortified city on the Xiberras Peninsula (also known as 'Xebb el Ras') was first proposed in 1524, when the Order sent a commission to inspect the Maltese Islands prior to taking possession in 1529. The only fortification on the peninsula was then a military watchtower built by the Aragonese in 1488. This tower was strengthened by the Order of St. John in 1533, although work on the city itself was not then

envisaged. This was because the Order, under Grand Master de l'Isle Adam, had given priority to strengthening and extending the fortifications of Birgu's *Castello al Mare* (Fort St. Angelo), its first place of settlement.

When in 1551 an Ottoman force raided Malta, sacked Gozo, and moved on to capture Tripoli, the Order established a commission to improve the island's fortifications. The Aragonese watchtower was demolished in 1552, and Fort St. Elmo built in

its place. This fort not surprisingly played a significant role in the Great Siege of Malta of 1565.

The first stone of the new city was laid by Grand Master Jean de Valette on 28 March 1566, and named Valletta in his honour. Although there were a number of earlier engineers such as Bartolomeo Genga and Baldassare Lanci, both of whom contributed plans for the new city, the accepted design was that of the celebrated Francesco Laparelli de Cortona, Pope Pius IV's own personal military engineer. He in turn was succeeded by the Maltese architect, Glormu Cassar. The city walls were among the first structures to be built and were largely complete by 1571. Some changes were made during construction, and in the end only two Cavaliers were built. Fort St. Elmo, which had been severely damaged in the 1565 Siege, was rebuilt and later integrated into the city walls (in the late 1680s) to prevent any seaborne landing.



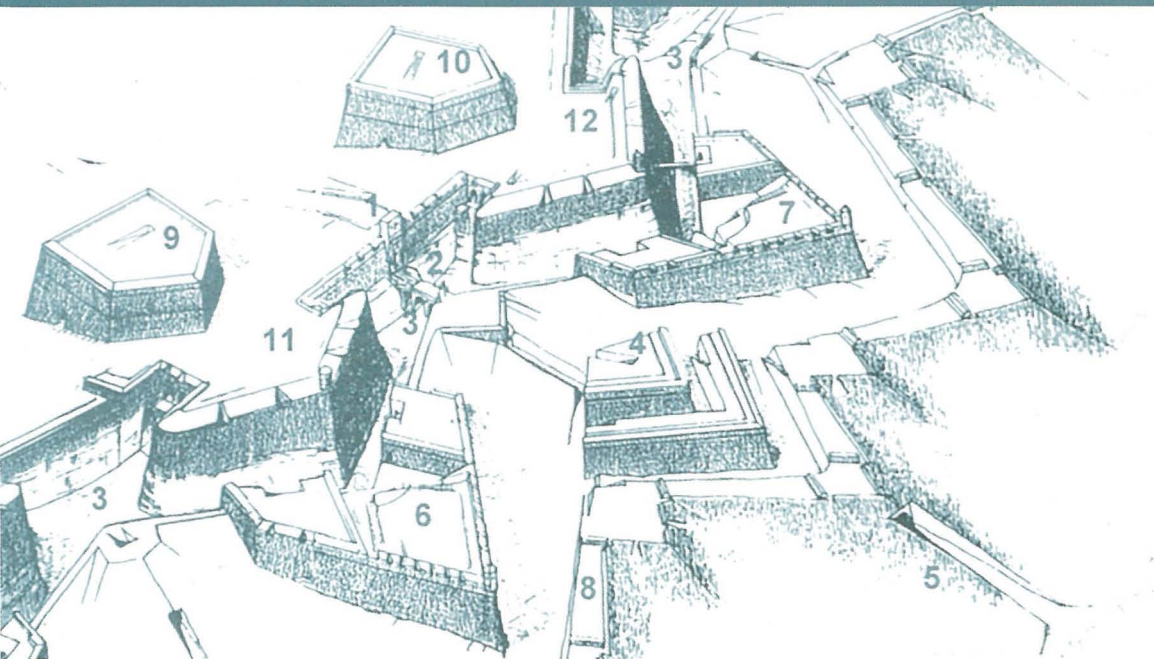
Kingsway, Porta Reale or Putirjal, 1853, Designed by Francis Ringler Thomson, Royal Engineers

Source: Department of Information.



The modernist City Gate or Bieb il-Belt, 1965, Designed by the Italian architect Alziro Bergonzo.

Source: Department of Information.



Artist's impression of the Valletta landfront fortifications.

Source: Fortress of the Cross – Dr Stephen C. Spiteri.

LEGEND

1. *Porta San Giorgio*
2. *Bridge*
3. *Valletta Landfront Ditch*
4. *St. Magdalene's Ravelin*
5. *Entrance to ditch*
6. *St. John's Counterguard*
7. *St. James' Counterguard*
8. *Covertway*
9. *St. John's Bastion*
10. *St. James' Bastion*
11. *St. John's Cavalier*
12. *St. James' Cavalier*



Early 1950s aerial photo of the Valletta landfront, City Gate and Landfront Ditch, former Bus Terminus, the *Biskuttin* Area.

Source: DOI



The Valletta fortifications and bus terminus in mid-1950s prior to the construction of the Triton Fountain

Source: Martin Attard Collection..

THE VALLETTA *ENCEINTE*

The landfront fortifications of Valletta, or '*enceinte*', take up the entire width of the peninsula. They begin at the Demi-Bastion and Counterguard of St Michael on the Marsamxett side and end with the S.S. Peter and Paul Bastion and Counterguard overlooking the Grand Harbour. The *Porta San Giorgio* (later *Porta Reale*) was located at the mid-point of the landfront, between the two Cavaliers.

The main Valletta landfront fortifications were separated from the remainder of the outerworks by a deep ditch, also referred to as the Laparelli Ditch. As directed by the *Veneranda Congregazione della Fortificazione*, all masonry required for the building of the fortifications was to be excavated on site. When construction began, the ditch proved indeed to be an excellent quarry.

Between *Porta Reale* and its covering ravelin, was the *Piazza d'Armi*, a small open space for parading or the rallying of troops.

An Ottoman return attack being feared, Laparelli was instructed to make haste and complete the walls of the new city within three months. His plan for the landfront was to consist of two central bastions flanked by two demi-bastions and strengthened by a number of cavaliers. By mid-1567, the fortifications on the landfront began to take shape, and a year later they were in an advanced stage. Laparelli left Malta in 1569 and the work was entrusted to Glormu Cassar. Most fortifications were complete by 1571. Within the short space of five years, therefore, the workers, their number at times exceeding 8,000 a day, had managed to complete the imposing fortifications and bastions around Valletta, most of which survive to this day for us to enjoy.

During the 17th century, Valletta's fortifications were strengthened with the construction of various outworks. These comprised of four counterguards along the landfront, as well as a covertway and a glacis. Although the city's fortifications had been strengthened and modified already, it became clear that the Valletta *enceinte* was still not strong enough to withstand a long siege. Accordingly, a new set of fortifications, about a kilometre beyond the existing ones, were commenced in 1635. These

were named the Floriana Lines after Pietro Paolo Floriani, the military engineer who designed them. Further work, but of a lesser nature, took place in the 18th century.

During British rule many alterations and additions were made to the fortifications of Valletta. Alterations included the addition of batteries and concrete gun emplacements. All three original Hospitaller gateways to Valletta were demolished, and two of them were replaced by larger gates. The British also proposed the demolition of the outer fortifications a number of times during the 19th century. In 1853, there was a proposal to demolish St. James Cavalier, and in 1872, the demolition of the city's outworks was considered. Even more extreme was the suggested demolition of the entire landfront in 1882. Eventually, the fortifications were left virtually intact. Another plan that did not materialise was the building of a citadel on the high ground of the Valletta landfront and its surrounding area.

The fortifications of Valletta were included on the Antiquities List of 1925, and in 1980 UNESCO granted Valletta world heritage status.



ST. MAGDALENE'S RAVELIN

The stretch that is currently occupied by the former bus terminus, the Triton Fountain and much of the *Biskuttin* area was originally occupied by St. Magdalene's Ravelin, built in the 17th century. A small ditch separated the ravelin and the bonnet on its front. The road leading to *Porta Reale* passed through a sally port under the glacis and covertway, around the ravelin, through a caponier, onto the *Piazza d'Armi* and finally across the bridge into the city.



View of St. Magdalene's Ravelin from St. James or Reale Curtain.

Source: Department of Information.

The St. Magdalene's Ravelin served as a primary defensive post in front of the *Porta Reale*. Its purpose was to deflect any direct attack or bombardment of the main gate and also to delay any hostile entrance into the city. In times of peace, the Ravelin was used only by local people, i.e. those arriving at the city from Mdina or the surrounding rural areas. This was because most travel and commerce were conducted by sea. This meant that the *Del Ponte* and the *Marsamxetto* Gates were in fact busier than *Porta Reale*.

Late in the 19th century, the St. Magdalene's Ravelin was the only major defensive structure to be demolished. All its connected fortifications

were cleared, its shallow ditch filled in with the rubble, and the area levelled to a gentle slope running towards *Porta Reale*. Some sections of the counterscarp and minor traces of outworks are still visible, particularly along the western section of the landfront. Others were recently uncovered during structural works in the grounds of the Phoenicia Hotel.

Porta San Giorgio was replaced by *Porta Reale* in 1633, designed by Tomaso Dingli, while the British had replaced it with another in 1853. This gate was also demolished in 1963 and its replacement demolished again in 2011 as part of the Renzo Piano Project.



THE *BISKUTTIN* AREA

Beyond the landfront ditch and glacis of the Valletta fortifications, now within the confines of Floriana, is what was once a vast no-man's land. This area, now commonly known as the *Biskuttin*, is an avenue lined with benches and trees that bisects *Vjal ir-Re Dwardu VII*. It also incorporates the imposing bronze statue of Christ the King by Antonio Sciortino. The kneeling figure at the base of this monument represents allegorically the devotion of Malta to the Christian religion. It was erected to commemorate the XXIV Eucharistic Congress held in Malta in 1913.

What a strange name! It could have originated either from the fact that it abutted the Mall, which by then had become a heavily planted garden and which many referred to as '*boscottino*' (little garden), or from its elongated shape, which somehow reminded people of the popular *biskuttin* or sweet biscuit, very popular at the time.

Adjacent to this garden is the Phoenicia Hotel, the building of which was commenced in the inter-wars period to become Malta's leading Deluxe hotel, much favoured by the British until the late 1960s. On the other side, between *Vjal ir-Re Dwardu VII* and *Vjal Nelson* stands, another towering monument: The Malta Memorial. This commemorates the almost 2,300 airmen who lost their lives in the Mediterranean during the Second World War whilst serving with the Commonwealth Air Forces. Unveiled by HM Queen Elizabeth II on 3 May 1954, the memorial was designed by Sir Hubert Worthington, R.A., while the eagle which surmounts the column is the work of the sculptor Charles Wheeler, R.A.



Royal Air Force Memorial, Floriana.

Source: Department of Information.



Post card showing the Biskuttin Area prior to the erection of the Christ the King monument in 1913.

Source: Martin Attard Collection.



A later post card showing the *Biskuttin* Area, trams and the Christ the King monument.

Source: Martin Attard Collection.



The Triton Fountain, *Biskuttin* and bus terminus from *Porta Reale*, 1965.

Source: Department of Information.



DESIGN CONCEPT
**TRITON SQUARE,
THE *BISKUTTIN* AREA**
EMBELLISHMENT PROJECTS

TRITON SQUARE AND *BISKUTTIN* AREA PROJECT SCOPE

The embellishment and upgrading which formed part of the Triton Square project were intended to satisfy a number of objectives, namely:

- a to re-establish the Square as a majestic square with the central fountain as the main attraction,
- b to convert the square into a central meeting point for social, cultural and entertainment activities and events,
- c to revive the historical backdrop of the square, in particularly the bastions and ditch,
- d to reinstate the square as a pedestrian area from the *Biskuttin* to City Gate,
- e to make this pedestrian passage fully accessible for all
- f to allow the operational requirements in and around the square for buses, taxis, cabs and other service providers in an organized and safe way.

The design of the Square reflects all these requirements.



Artistic impression of part of the *Biskuttin* area towards Triton Square .GHRC.

IMPORTANT MONUMENTS AND BUILDINGS IN TRITON SQUARE AND 'BISKUTTIN' AREA'

Valletta fortifications:

Triton Square is the open space in front of the City Gate and it derives its name from the Triton Fountain standing there. For decades, it has served as Malta's main bus terminus.

City Gate project (Architect Renzo Piano):

The City Gate Projects and Parliament Building were constructed using local hardstone as its main building element.

Both of these elements are important. They are also flanked by two majestic hardstone St. James' and St. John's staircases.

The Triton Fountain (Sculptor Vincent Apap):

This is the focal point of the Square.

The Kristu Re Monument (Sculptor Antonio Sciortino):

The Kristu Re Monument is located in the 'Biskuttin' area and is a monument of artistic and historic importance. It stands on a granite plinth within a circular low-lying flower bed.



Christ the King monument,
Antonio Sciortino, Floriana. GHRC

ISSUES ADDRESSED DURING THE EMBELISHMENT OF TRITON SQUARE AND 'BISKUTTIN AREA'.

TRITON SQUARE

In addition to creating an open space for all to enjoy and frame a clear view of the Valletta *enceinte*, a primary objective of the project was to remove vehicular traffic, particularly route buses from Triton Square.

A new bus alighting platform was constructed along the *Biskuttin* in *Vjal ir-Re Dwardu*, and bus parking

bays on the opposite side of the same road and at other locations on the side of the square and along *Vjal Nelson*, to complement the bus terminus located in the ditch along the St. James Counterguard.

Other traffic management issues concerning most transport systems including tourist coaches, open



Demolition works of old and derelict kiosks. GHRC



Demolition works of old and derelict kiosks. GHRC

top tourist buses, taxis and *karozzini* were also attended to and spaces for the use of each have been created.

The design also ensured that pedestrians, including persons with particular needs, could easily access the entire square. Moreover, the locally innovative, introduction of directional hardstone paving is intended to facilitate pedestrian access for persons with visual impairment.

The old shabby kiosks located along the sides of the square were all demolished. Twelve new kiosks, all of a modern design, will be installed by the first quarter of 2018 along the two sides of the square, with ten intended for private operators as per allocations by the Lands Authority.

A tourist information center and a taxi booking booth will also be introduced. In addition to the kiosks, toilet facilities will also be included.

The '*Ficus Nitida*' trees located in the Triton Square, and which were creating extensive damage to the underground structures of the ravelin, were transplanted to areas at Ta` Qali. They were replaced with more than fifty new indigenous Holm Oak trees symmetrically planted to enhance and accentuate the axiality of the square.



Planting of Holms Oak at Triton Square. GHRC.



Groundworks in progress at Triton Square. GHRC

The trees will be irrigated from 20 underground reservoirs purposely built to harvest rain water from the Square. In total these reservoirs hold around 1,000 cubic metres of water.

The paving materials used in the design of Triton Square and the Buskuttin Area, covering an area of around 13,500m² is mainly local hardstone from a



Installation of PVC pipes for services. GHRC.

Gozitan quarry, matching the material used in the City Gate Project from a quarry in Gozo. The large hardstone paving blocks and paving slabs of Triton Square reflect the underground forms of the former St. Magdalene's Ravelin and outworks that had existed in this area and were lost in time.

Another interesting feature is the hardstone staircase that leads to Triton Fountain, which also outlines the trace of the former ravelin.

The paving, lighting and street furniture are all designed to frame City Gate and its imposing fortifications and directs us towards Valletta proper.

The Triton Square and the *Biskuttin* Area, which until recently were two distinct locations, have now become one urban pedestrian space. Vehicular access will only allow for the occasional vehicles; such as carnival floats, emergency vehicles, official cars, etc.



Surface excavations and other groundworks. GHRC.



Clean gravel in two of the planter pits. GHRC.



Paving and installation of rain water collection system. GHRC



Final phases of works at Triton Square. GHRC



An artistic impression of part of the Triton Square and the approaches to City Gate Bridge. GHRC.

THE *BISKUTTIN* AREA

The design is dictated by the existing axiality of the '*Biskuttin*' area, the dominant Triton Fountain and the important matter of 'orientation' – namely the direction of all paths and lines of sight towards the fortifications, City Gate, and Valletta beyond. The avenue in the direction of Triton Square remains lined with the existing palm and '*Ballut*' trees. Various restoration interventions were made to the circular base surrounding the *Kristu Re* Monument, and the monument itself was also restored. This Monument is the main point of reference along this avenue (as it has been ever since 1917).

This avenue now links pedestrians directly to Triton Square without any vehicular interruption. Existing trees along the *Biskuttin* Area, consist of palms (*Sabal Palmetto*, *Washingtonia Robusta*, *Phoenix Canariensis* and *Phoenix Dactylifera*) and Holm Oak or '*Ballut*' (*Quercus Ilex*). All these trees formed part of the original design for this area and hence, they were retained and identical species were planted in any voided spaces.

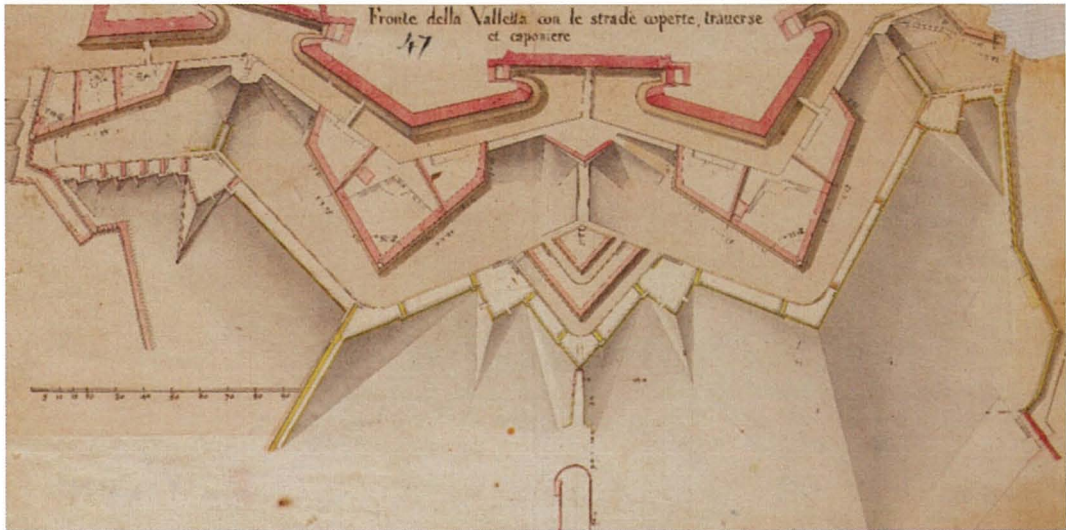
The traffic management in this area has also been revised. In addition, a roundabout was constructed in front of the Education Department (down the road along the secondary façade of Phoenicia Hotel – an area outside the project footprint). This has facilitated traffic management along Great Siege Road, as well as the entrance to *Belt is-Sebh*.



Workers repairing WWII bomb damage adjacent to Christ the King statue, c1948. DOI.



Polishing of hardstone paving slabs at The *Biskuttin*, GHRC



Contemporary plan of the Valletta landfront fortifications. MNI, Valletta (Catalogue No. V7)

Source: Dr Stephen C. Spiteri.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND OTHER FINDINGS

Part of the process of groundworks during the implementation of the embellishment works of Triton Square, required numerous excavations. Foundations, services, reservoirs and other requirements were needed to be placed underground.

Ahead of works, all active and disused services

were mapped to be removed or replaced, yet this is not always the case as uncharted and defunct lines and cables were encountered in the course of the works.

As expected, remains from the previous fortifications commenced to come to light during

ongoing excavation works. Although disturbed and even partially demolished by previous interventions particularly during the British period, foundations of previous structures belonging to the Order of St. John as well as installations of the British era that were demolished towards the end of the 19th century began to appear in the disturbed ground.

All excavation works were under the close supervision and monitoring of archaeologists, who in turn were in constant liaison with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage.

The first findings were heavily disturbed foundations of the old tram depot, kiosks, garage and other minor structures, built during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Fig. 1). Next to

come to light were sections from the base of the old Knights' fortifications (Fig. 2). Some of these were rock hewn and others constructed of large blocks, through which unfortunately, trenches for services were dug into them in the past. These resulted to be part of the *Piazza d'Armi* (Fig. 3) and a section of drop ditch (Fig. 4).

A curved wall, which once formed part of the upper section of a ramp leading to one of the ditches, was also uncovered (Fig. 5). Part of this wall has been left exposed as an archaeological pit. Further towards the *Biskuttin*, another section of the rock-hewn bonnet was uncovered in which is also a narrow tunnel (Fig. 6). A section of the vault of the old railway tunnel was also encountered during the excavation works and adequately documented and preserved.



Fig. 1.

A certain amount of infill consisting of rubble from properties destroyed during the Second World War was encountered. All sherds and fragments considered of importance were duly recorded by archaeologists and consequently submitted to the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage.

All these finds have since been restored and either cordoned by railings or exposed under glazed structures so that this once forgotten part of our patrimony can be viewed and enjoyed by all.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

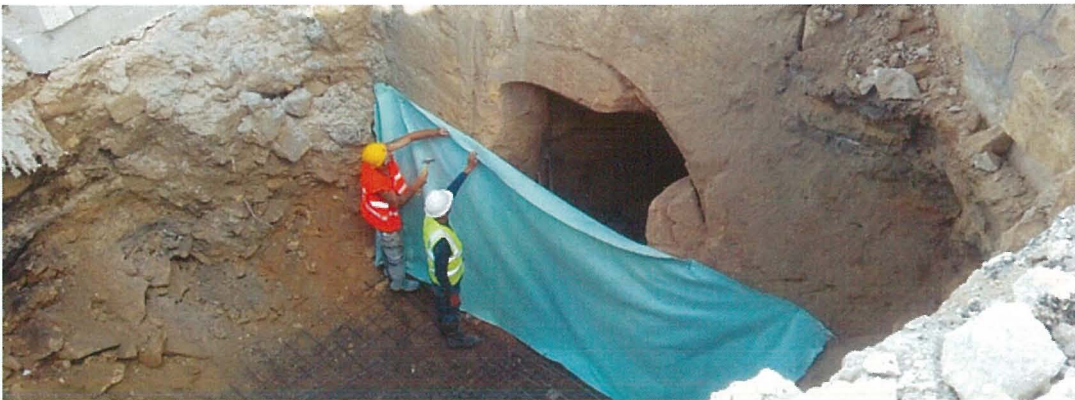


Fig. 6.

CONSULTATIONS

From the earliest stages of the project, The Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation (GHRC) held numerous meetings with stakeholders in order to discuss and establish the principal criteria, parameters and design for this project.

GHRC wishes to express its appreciation for the support and cooperation provided by the following Ministries and Entities:

Office of the Prime Minister
Ministry for Tourism
Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Projects
Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government
Ministry for Education and Employment
Ministry for Energy and Water Management
Malta Tourism Authority
Valletta 2018 Foundation
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Planning Authority
Environment and Resources Authority
Valletta Local Council
Floriana Local Council
Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
General Retailers and Traders Union
Central Bank of Malta
Flimkien għall-Ambjent Ahjar
MCP Car Park
Hotel Phoenicia
Malta Public Transport
EneMalta Plc
Water Services Corporation
Heritage Malta
Restoration Directorate
Cleansing & Maintenance Division
Works and Infrastructure Department
Transport Operators through Transport Malta
The Malta Police Force
The Management of Salinos Sports Facilities

PROJECT TEAM

The GHRC led this project together with the Ministry for Tourism.

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CONTRACTORS

The GHRC acknowledges the work carried out by the Contractors and their employees during the implementation of this project

List of Main Contractors

Barbros Group
Brands International Ltd
CE Installations Ltd
Central Asphalt Ltd
En-Sure Ltd
Halmann Vella Ltd
JM Consultancy Ltd
JM Micallef Group
Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority
Matsury & Associates Ltd
Rockcut Limited
Shield Consultants Ltd
Sicilville Landscaping
Solidbase Laboratory Ltd
The Guard and Warden Services

BBSV-JV made up of;
Barbros Group
Bonnici Group
iManage Ltd
Schembri Infrastructre Ltd
V&C Contractors Ltd

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