

***The breaching of the fortifications around  
Valletta and Floriana  
during the British occupation of Malta***



**by**

**Charles Gixti**

**Higher National Diploma in Tour Guiding**

**May 2019**

---

**DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY FOR HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA STUDENTS**

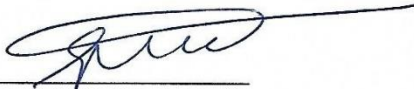
Student's I.D. /Code 17759(m)  
Student's Name & Surname CHARLES GRIXTI  
Course HND. TOUR GUIDING.

Title of Long Essay  
THE BREACHING OF THE FORTIFICATIONS  
AROUND VALLETTA AND FLORIANA DURING THE  
BRITISH OCCUPATION OF MALTA

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Long Essay and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another qualification of this or any other higher education institution.

I hold the Institute of Tourism Studies (Malta) harmless against any third party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third party right infringement.

  
Signature of Student

26-05-19  
Date (DD/MM/YY)

*Dedicated to*  
*Jeremy and Gabriella*

# Abstract

The fortifications around Valletta and Floriana were the brainchild of the Knights of St John, borne of a need to build a fortified city close to a harbour. This paper focuses on some of the breaches in the fortifications as well as remodelling of the major gates done during the British occupation after the Order of St John in 1800. It sheds light on the major historical events that would have led to their execution. Extensive research was conducted at the National Archives where several documents were discovered which enabled the author to piece together some of the events and circumstances that led the authorities at the time to affect such breaches in the fortifications or remodel already existing gates. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with eminent professionals in the field of Maltese historical architecture who continued to shed more light and appreciation for what is now considered to be one of the largest national treasures in Malta.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank first and foremost Mr. Vincent Zammit and the lecturers at the Institute of Tourism Studies who have shown patience in lecturing me in my mature years. Mr. Zammit has shown me how to be a professional guide by means of his good example and vast knowledge.

The staff at the National Archives in Rabat especially Melvin, Joseph and James who were instrumental in sourcing material related to the subject that I chose.

Dr. Stephen Spiteri who was instrumental in locating various places related to the subject matter and for giving me permission to use some of his various detailed illustrations.

Dr. Christian Mifsud who found time in his busy schedule, he encouraged and coached me in the writing of this long essay.

Ms Elisa Buttigieg who has been a true friend throughout my course by being my 'guardian angel' and regularly checking up on me to make sure that I am on the right track.

Ms Charlotte Schembri for having had the patience to proof read my work and the endless support that she has shown these last few months.

Ms. Glorianne Mizzi who was a source of encouragement all throughout the course.

My course mates, Chantelle, Michelle, Elisa, Andrew, Marco, Emily, Francesca, Alvaro and Gala who made these last two years interesting and colourful.

# Table of Contents

Authenticity form	1
Dedication	2
Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Table of contents	5
Introduction	6
Literature review	9
Methodology	11
Chapter1 : Portes des Bombes	12
Chapter 2: Porta San Giorgio	16
Chapter 3: Duke of York Ave.	23
Chapter 4: Calcara gate	27
Chapter 5: Porta del Monte	33
Chapter 6: Porta Sant' Anna	38
Chapter 7: Marsamuxetto Gate	42
Conclusion	46
List of images	47
References	51
Tour description	53

# Introduction

## A brief history

The lines of fortifications around Valletta and Floriana were built during different periods and under the design and the supervision of different military engineers.

The Knights of the Order of St. John spent eight years without a base and headquarters for their fleet after their expulsion from Rhodes in 1522 by the Ottoman Empire (Mallia-Milanes, 1993). In 1530 King Charles V of Spain finally offered the Maltese islands and Tripoli to the knights as their future home and base which would remain so for the following two hundred and sixty eight years (Mallia-Milanes, 1993).

The Maltese islands offered the knights the following advantages:

- a. A natural harbour deep enough to berth their galleys.
- b. Autonomy due to the distance from mainland Europe.
- c. Safety from the plague which was prevailing at that time in Europe.

Upon their arrival in 1530, the knights decided to occupy the maritime village of Borgo which had a *Castrum Maris* at the tip of the peninsula. They immediately embarked on the project of strengthening this castle which was in a bad state of repair. Therefore, with their arrival of, the small seaside town of Borgo was transformed into a bustling city. The knights also went on to build additional fortifications around Borgo and Isla as well as several important buildings in Borgo, such as the *Castellania*, the *Sacra Infermeria*, the *Darsenale* and the *Auberges* of the several *langues* that constituted the Order of St John (Mallia-Milanes, 1993).

Along the years, the nearby peninsula, Isla, later to be called Senglea, was built upon and fortified to meet the demands of the ever-growing population which was living in the harbour.

The knights were always in fear of another attack by the Ottomans and had therefore planned to build a fortified city on the peninsula of Mount Sceberras should they remain in Malta. This location was earmarked for this mega project because it was situated on much higher ground than Borgo, and because it was flanked by the two harbours: The Grand Harbour and

Marsamuxetto Harbour. However, this was not possible at that time because the knights did not have the necessary funds and they needed to strengthen what they already had.

The Ottomans staged a siege on Malta in the summer of 1565. Immediately after the departure of the Ottomans in September, the knights started to make concrete plans for the building of the fortified city which until then had only been a pipe dream.

Francesco Laparelli was the military engineer who drew the plans of the new city consisting of four kilometres of intricate fortifications around the peninsula of Sceberras. Using the measurements and specifications which had been made by his predecessors, Laparelli produced the final plans after just six days of his arrival in Malta (Vella, 2016).

Girolamo Cassar, a young Maltese architect, was appointed as his assistant and later went on to take over the supervision of the whole project. The Valletta fortifications were completed in eight years (ibid.).

In 1636, the Floriana lines started being built. For this task, the military engineer Pietro Paolo Floriani was sent by Pope Urbanus VIII upon the request of Grand Master Antoine de Paule (Spiteri, 2017).

There were several other military engineers who along the years gave an input to the improvement of the Floriana lines. At the beginning of the British occupancy, the authorities and architects took care of the preservation of the fortifications as built by the knights. However, during the last years of their occupancy they neglected the idea of preservation and instead ravaged the fortifications to satisfy their military needs. The demolishing of gates, bastions and glacis was rampant especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sites like the glacis along the Floriana lines, the bastions at Ghajn Dwieli, Porta Sant Anna, Notre Dame Gate and Calcara Gate have all vanished owing to the hasty decisions and lack of funding for these breaches. Other methods of accessibility like that used in the tunnels at Ghajn Dwieli, could have been used, however, these would have been costlier and more time consuming to complete.

Thankfully, nowadays, there is more awareness of restoring our local heritage rather than replacing or demolishing it completely.



The subject matter of this paper was inspired by the author's interest in architecture, construction and fortifications. However, rather than tackling the subject directly, the author chose to tackle a different path not known to many – that of the breaching of the walls by the British as very few people realise that these breaches once formed part of the original bastions or gates.

This long essay is going to focus on seven locations: Portes des Bombes, Porta San Giorgio, Gerolamo Cassar Avenue, Calcara Gate, Victoria Gate, Porta Sant' Anna and Marsamuxetto Gate. However, there are other places along the fortifications around Valletta and Floriana which were breached or had the gates widened or modified. These were at Horn works, the right sally port, Notre Dame Gate, the Jews' sally port.

## Literature review

Stephen Spiteri (2008) has tackled the subject of fortress building in a detailed way in his book called *Art of Fortress building in Hospitallier Malta*. His passion in the subject is very evident as his study in this field is very detailed and deals with the planning, executing and repairing of fortifications that had to be carried out at the time the latter were built. He gives also detailed descriptions on how these projects were debated by the Knights' Councils and how military engineers were in disagreement with one another on certain plans and strategies.

In another book called *The Fortifications of Malta*, Dr. Spiteri (2017) gives a visual guide of the fortifications of Malta to the reader who would be interested to visit any kind of fortified building especially from the Knights and British period. This book has a wealth of aerial shots and detailed illustrations drawn by the author himself, as well as brief but informative description about each military site.

The Knights' period is well mentioned in the book edited by Victor Mallia Milanes (1993) called *Hospitallier Malta 1530-1798*. Dr Mallia Milanes compiled a selection of sixteen papers from various other scholars which deal with the various aspects of the 268 years of the occupation of Malta by the Knights of St John.

An important publication which was instrumental during this project was *Valletta Porta Reale and Environs* by the well know architect, Michael Ellul (2013). The author gives a detailed account of the various gateways that existed as the main entrances to our Capital. In his book Ellul also mentions the immediate important buildings such as the Ferreria or Palazzo Buttigieg Francia and the Royal Opera House.

To commemorate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the foundation of Valletta, Heritage Malta and the Malta Libraries published *Valletta 1566 Melita Renascens* edited by Godwin Vella (2016). Vella captivates the different aspects of life within the capital which took place these last 450 years together with colourful illustrations and paintings, as well as photographs by the well-known photographer, Daniel Cilia.

Finally, in their book *Malta Tramway and the Barracca lift*, Michael Cassar and Joseph Bonnici (2011) recount every little detail of the 25 years of existence of this form of transport from inception up until it was phased out. It also mentions several incidents that occurred during the years as a result of bad planning due to space constraints in the Maltese roads of the time.

# Methodology

The author started his research at the National Archives in Rabat and with the help of the staff there, several old photographs of the locations which are the subject matter of this study were sourced. These images depict how these locations evolved through the years from when they were first built by the Knights of St. John. Furthermore, several correspondences between the Governors of Malta of the time and the Secretaries of the Colonies at the Office of the British Prime Minister in London were also identified. No detailed accounts were found on the amount of human resources used and other related information.

The research continued at the Project House of the Works Department in Floriana where several plans and elevations of the locations that were breached were found. These date back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and some of them were signed by the illustrious architect, Emanuele Luigi Galizia.

No relevant information was found at the National Library (Bibliotheca) in Valletta.

## Chapter 1

### Portes des Bombes (or Porta dei Cannoni)

This gate was designed by Charles Francois de Mondion and was built in 1720-1721 (De Lucca, 1982). At that time the cost for the building of this gate was 6000 scudi. The gate was first called Porta dei Cannoni since there were upright cannons sculptured all throughout the height of the gate. Later it earned the name 'des bombes' due to the large stone orbs which were placed in front of the baroque gate.



Figure 1  
Courtesy of Stephen Spiteri



Figure 2  
Porta dei Cannoni as built by Charles Francoise de Mondion  
Source: National Archives - Malta

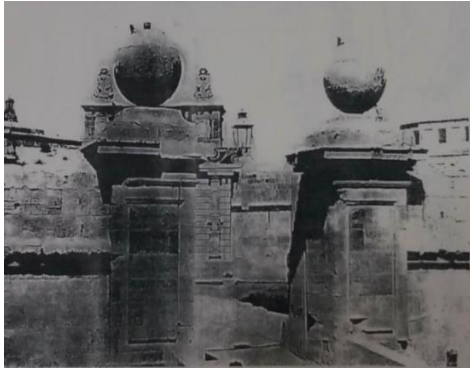


Figure 3

Portes des Bombes as built by Charles Francoise de Mondion

Source: National Archives - Malta



Figure 4

Portes des Bombes as modified by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century



Figure 5

Portes des Bombes – present day. Notice that the inner arches had been removed in 20<sup>th</sup> century to accommodate the Malta Tramways

Source: Works Department - Project House



Figure 6

The rear view of Portes des Bombes prior to the breaching of the walls. Notice the adjacent guard rooms which are no longer existent.

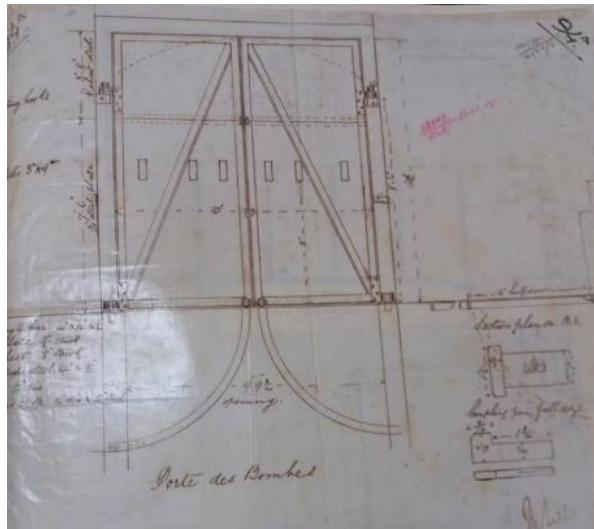


Figure 7

Source: Works Department – Project House  
The design of the metal gates at Portes des Bombes

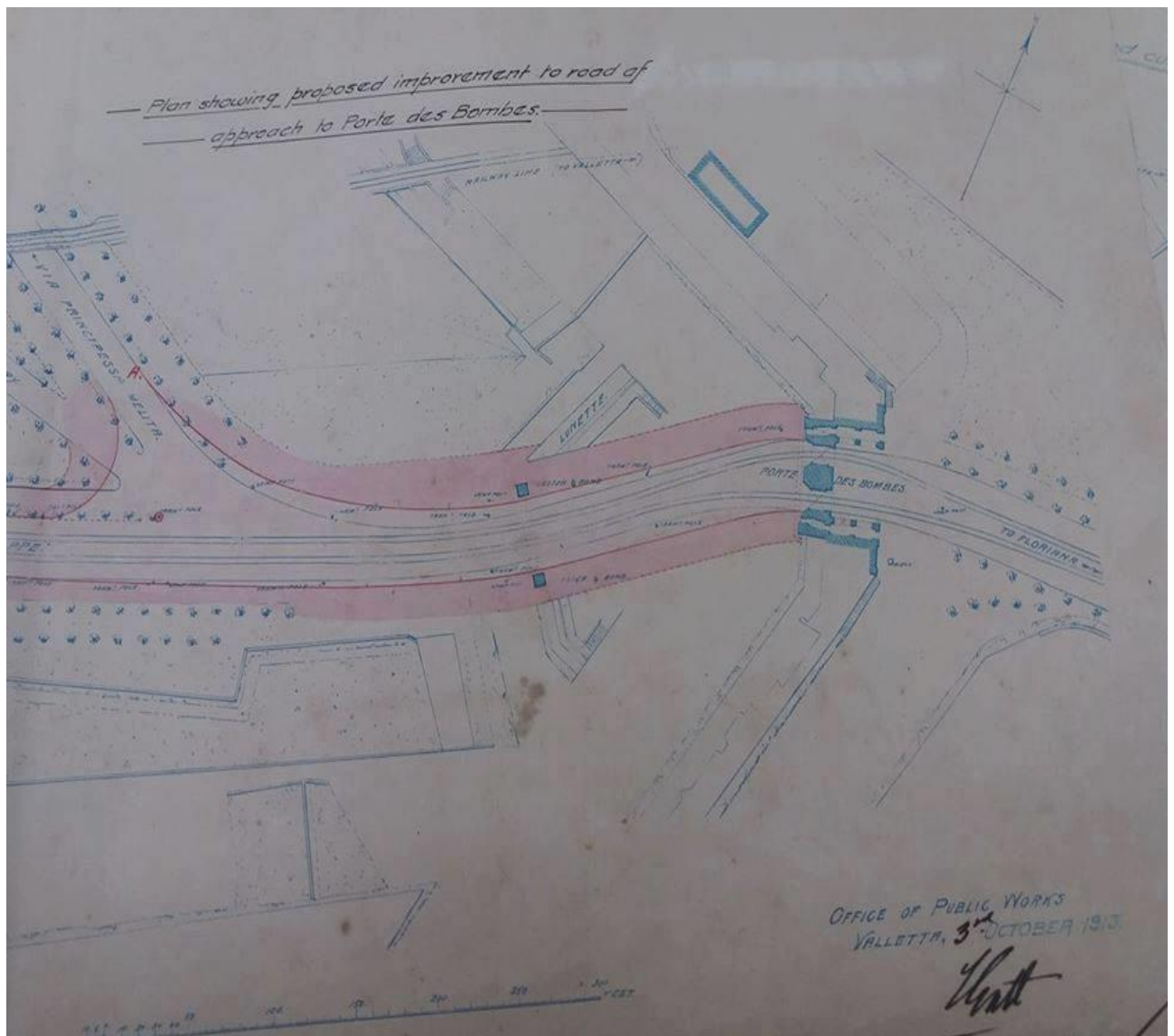


Figure 8

Public Works plan of Portes des Bombes by Luigi Gatt, Superintendent – 1913

The gate consisted of only one arch, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British authorities, under the Governorship of Sir Patrick Grant, decided to retain the same Baroque design and extend it with another arch to accommodate the increasing demand of traffic entering Floriana and later into the harbour area. The task was entrusted to the Royal Engineers' Regiment and the Officer in charge of the project was Col. E.W. Dunford (Rizzo, 2010). The same original design was kept and the emblems pertaining to Grandmaster Perellos were retained. Guardrooms for soldiers were added on at the back of the gate. The cost of the project was £900.

With the introduction of the Malta Tramway in 1905, some modifications were made on the archways of the gate (Bonnici and Cassar, 2011). These consisted of the removal of the decorative inner arch to provide more head space for the tram to pass through the gate. The fortification which stood in front of the gate (lunette) was removed to create an open space in front of it (Rizzo, 2010). In the 1930s the vehicular traffic increased so much that the gate was isolated from the rest of the fortifications to open a road on each side, creating the effect of a triumphant arch (ibid.)



## Chapter 2

### Porta San Giorgio/ Porta Reale/ Kingsway/ City Gate

In his book called 'Valletta Porta Reale and Environs', Architect Michael Ellul describes in detail the three gates that existed here. The original entrance to the city was designed by Francesco Laparelli to be 'a narrow passage dug in the rock-face of the main ditch which led through a flight of steps or ramp to the *strada maestra* [now Republic Street], which was originally designed to be 5 canes wide and 500 canes long' (2013, p. 9). One cane converts to approximately 2.095m, so this entrance made sense at the time since Laparelli made use of the excavated wall where, with limited funds, he found a way to create a gateway which did not cost much money and provided maximum security.

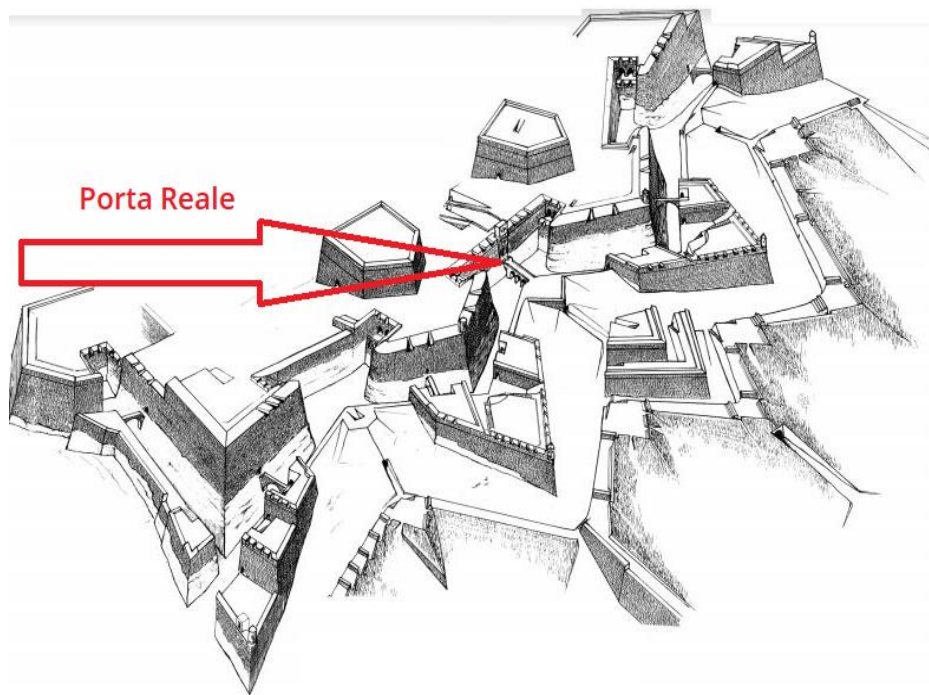


Figure 9  
Courtesy of Stephen Spiteri



Figure 10

Source: Valletta Porta Reale and Environs

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the ever-increasing traffic of carts and pedestrians going in and out of the city rendered this set-up impractical. Merchants and farmers flocked to the new city to sell their goods and produce and that was the only entrance on the land front of the new capital. So, in 1632, Grand Master Antoine DePaul commissioned architect Tumas Dingli to design and supervise a new entrance and gate to replace the original one.

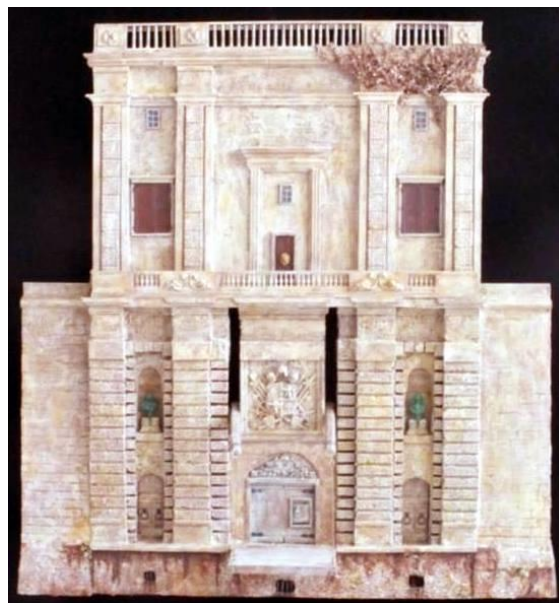


Figure 11

Source: Google images

The gate started being built in 1632 and took two years to complete. The design was baroque and it consisted of two floors.

During the British occupation of Malta, the gateway saw another remodelling with regards to size and design.

The works to demolish Dingli's gate commenced in early 1853 and by May of that year, the gate ceased to exist.

Works on the building of the new gateway started immediately in a bid to minimise any inconvenience to the day to day life in Valletta. This was because Porta Reale was the only entrance and exit to the city of Valletta in that area and people relied on it as a lifeline to the outside world. Indeed, using only Marsamuxetto and Marina Gate was a great inconvenience. Nonetheless, it was decided that no pedestrians, and neither carriages nor carts, were to be allowed to pass through it since works needed to be speeded up. However, there were people who expected to be dealt with in a more preferential manner and so it was decided that only certain dignitaries and medical doctors would be allowed passage through the gate. A log book was also kept recording those who had passed through the gateway with the necessary permits issued by the Colonial authorities.

The gate was officially opened on the 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1853. Ellul (2013) cites the comment of The Malta Times which declared the gate as 'the greatest benefit that has been conferred on the inhabitants since the possession of the town by Great Britain' (p. 34).



Figure 12  
NAM PHO 1799



Figure 13  
Source: Works Department – Project house





Figure 34  
Source: photo from the internet

With the passage of time, the gate built by the British in 1853 started to become rather shabby. Moreover, modern times dictated the need to have a larger entrance into the city of Valletta. One must bear in mind that this gate was over 200 years old in the 1960s and had withstood weathering and air raid bombardments during the Second World War.

At that time, restoration was unheard of and so replacement was the only option that was considered. One must note that in those times there was not much awareness about protecting our nation's heritage. Hence the proposal to demolish the old gate and replace it with a modern one was met with minimal opposition. The Maltese public were given the chance of commenting about the new gate during the Trade Fair of 1963, where a scale model of how the new gate would look like was exhibited, however, hardly anyone commented about it. It is also pertinent to mention that at the time, the public was distracted by the impending referendum for independence (Attard, 2008).

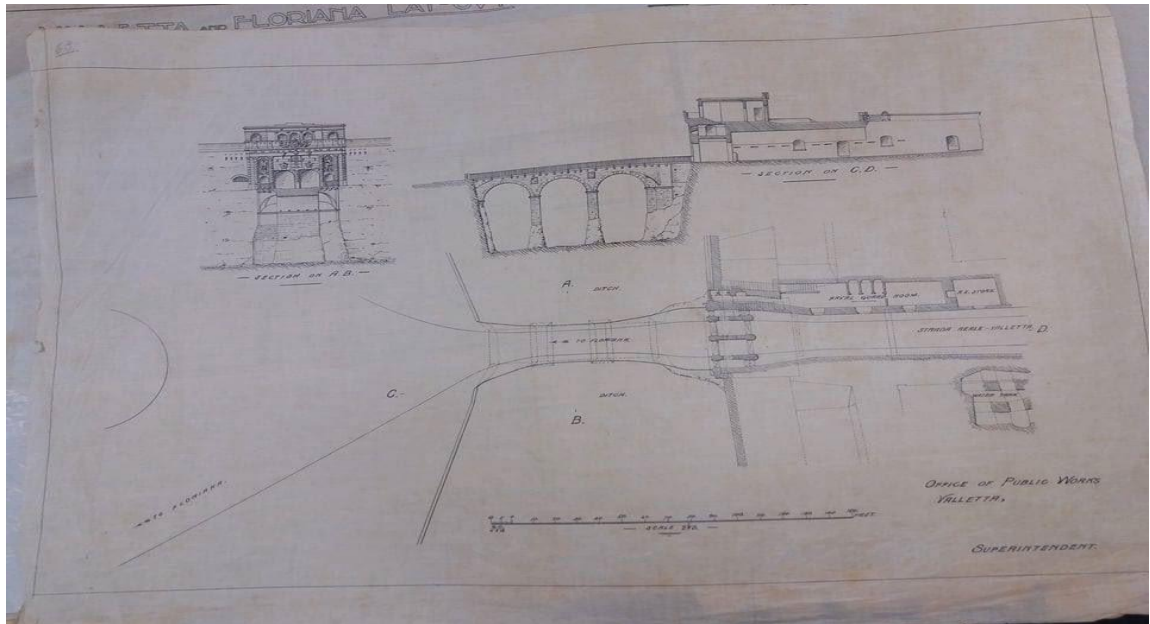


Figure 15

Source: Works Department – Project House

In 1964 The Public Works Department started demolishing the 1853 gate to make way for a more modern one as designed by the Italian architect Alviro Bergonzo. Bergonzo's design was influenced by the Italian Fascist style. The size of the opening was chosen to accommodate the Carnival floats so that they would be able to enter City Gate without any problems whatsoever. This project also consisted of the demolishing of the shabby houses that were on the right-hand side and replacing them with a shopping arcade around an open space called 'Misrah il-Helsien'.

This project was never completed and for many years it was an eyesore until 2011, when an ambitious project for the regeneration of City Gate and its environs was launched. The world-famous Italian architect, Renzo Piano, was approached by the Government to submit his suggestions vis-a-vis the Opera House, Misrah il-Helsien and City Gate. This involved the demolishing of the Bergonzo gate together with the shopping arcade, where the latter was replaced by the Parliament building and the former was replaced by an opening in the lines of fortifications. This project resulted in much controversy amongst the Maltese population -

a drastic change in attitude which reflected how the Maltese population has grown to be more aware of preserving its heritage rather than replacing it.



Figure 16



Figure 17

The replacement of the 1853 City Gate in 1964  
Source: Works Department – Project House

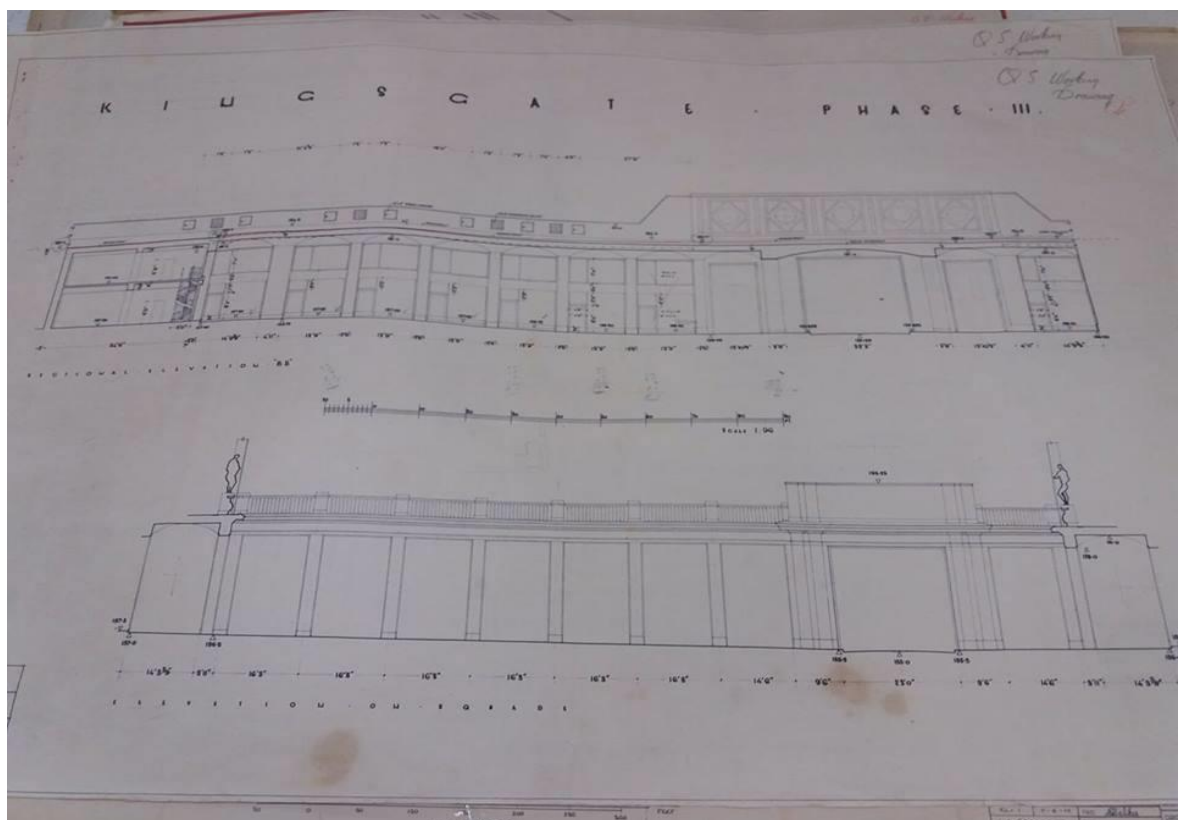


Figure 18  
The plans by Alviro Bergonzo for the 1964 City Gate  
Source: Works Department – Project House

## Chapter 3

### Duke of York / Girolamo Cassar Avenue.

Pedestrian and vehicular traffic entering and exiting Valletta was on the increase at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the authorities at that time were thinking of addressing the problem that arose once again regarding the accessibility into the city. In 1920, the War Office declared that the zone called 'Harper Area' was not needed anymore for defence purposes. This zone comprised all the land between the Valletta land front and Floriana. As a result, this land was passed on to the civil government which at the time was led by Prime Minister Sir Gerald Strickland. In 1924, the Malta Government Gazette issued a notice inviting Maltese and foreign architects to submit designs 'for the lay-out of the open spaces and fortifications situated between Valletta and Floriana and of those encircling the Floriana fortifications' (cited in National Archives of Malta, 2017, p. 49).

Two British assessors, Mr Edward Prioleau Warren, and Professor Patrick Abercrombie, were appointed to scrutinize the submissions which were submitted by architects from different countries and eventually submitted their report to the Minister of Public Works, Mr. Giovanni Adami, after having examined thirty five submissions. The winners of this competition were Messrs. James Burford & S. Rowland Pierce and were awarded the sum of £1000 (National Archives of Malta, 2017).

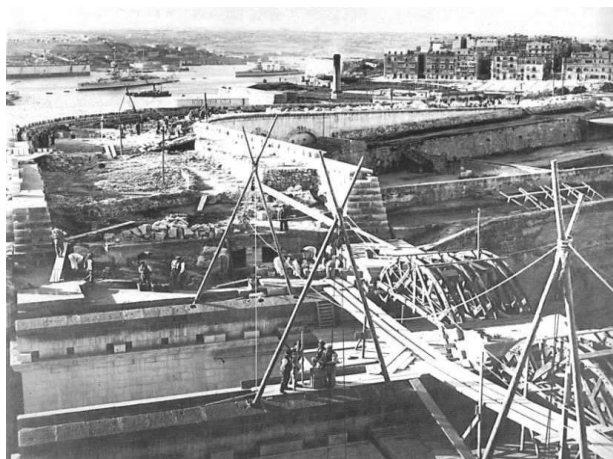


Figure 20  
NAM, PHO2032





Figure 21  
NAM, PHO2045



Figure 22  
NAM, PHO2031

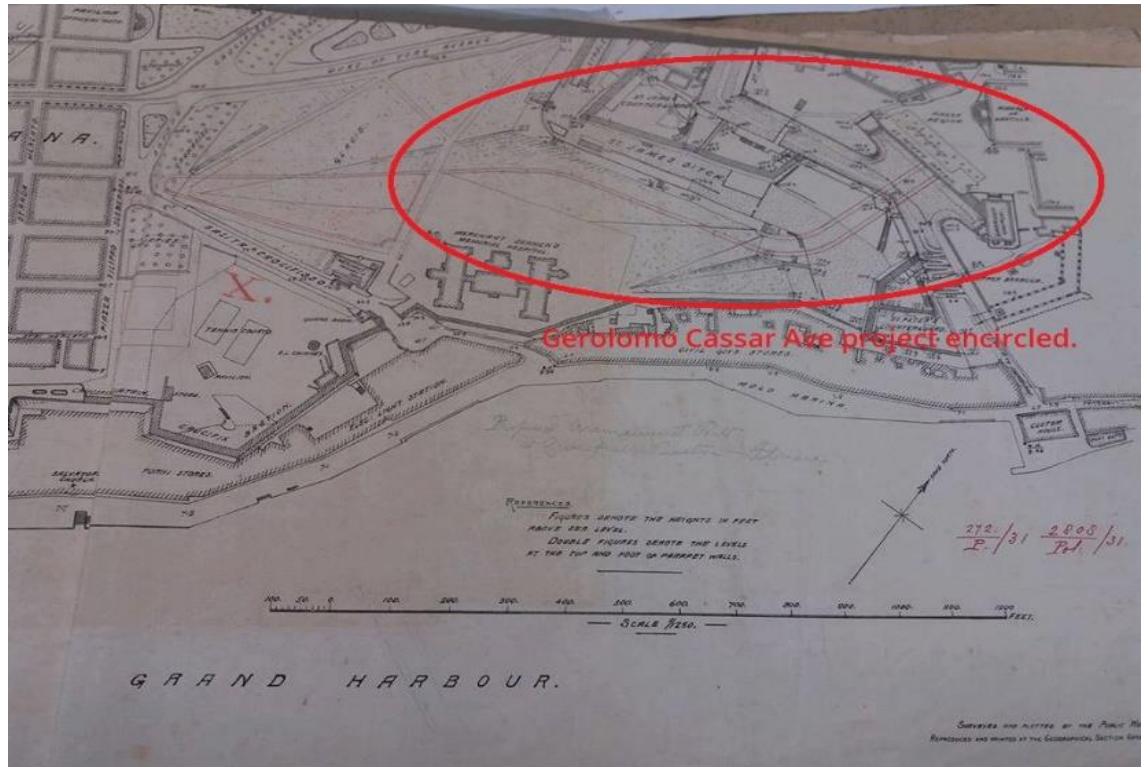


Figure 23

Source: Works Department – Project House

Besides other things, the specifications of the new layout also had to include the identification of a new entrance into the city of Valletta with minimum damages to the fortifications. This was because there was some opposition to the tampering of the fortifications and the filling of the ditches by the Antiquities Committee (The National Archives of Malta, 2017).

It was decided that a road leading towards Valletta was to be built consisting of an arched bridge over St. James Ditch and the glacis in front of the Auberge de Castille. This was suggested by the Maltese architect, Alfonso Drago, in one of the submissions for the new layout competition of the Harper Area international competition. The budget allotted for the project amounted to £75,000 (The National Archives of Malta, 2017).



Figure 24

Source: NAM, PHO1919

The works on this project started on the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1927, when the first stone was ceremoniously laid by the Duke of York. The project was completed after three years and was inaugurated by Prime Minister Sir Gerald Strickland in 1930 (Cini, 2006).

## Chapter 4

### Calcara Gate / Crucifix Hill, Floriana

The bastions where the Calcara Gate was located formed part of the fortifications designed by the military engineer Pietro Paolo Floriani in 1635. This gate derived its name from the lime kiln which was located in the vicinity.

The problem caused by heavy trade at the grain stores outside the gate brought about the need to make several improvements to the infrastructure in that area.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1849, the Governor of Malta, the Right Honourable R. More O'Farrell, by means of despatch no. 60, had asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies for approval to widen the mole (wharf) near the fortifications at Calcara Gate, as can be seen in the copy of the extract below. Furthermore, the despatch went on to say that the project was estimated to cost £1,126.00 (GOV01\_60\_24/05/1849).

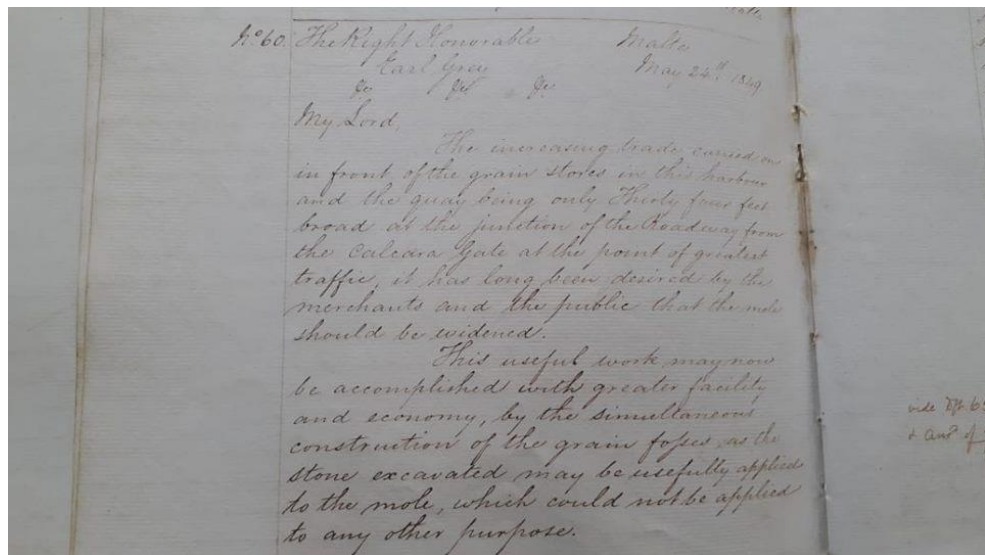


Figure 25  
Despatch no. 60 By Governor O' Farrell, part 1  
NAM \_ GOV 1/3/7- 24<sup>th</sup> May 1849



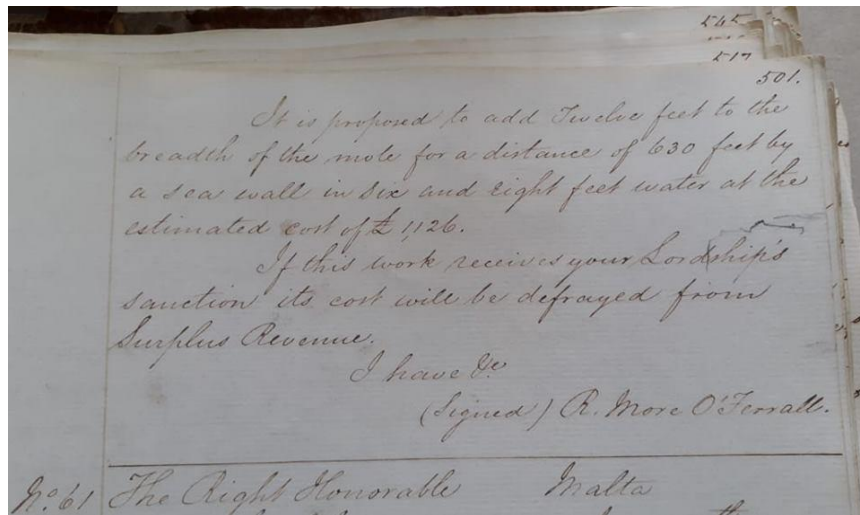


Figure 26  
Despatch no 60 by Governor O'Farrell, Part 2  
NAM\_GOV 1/3/7- 24<sup>th</sup> May 1849

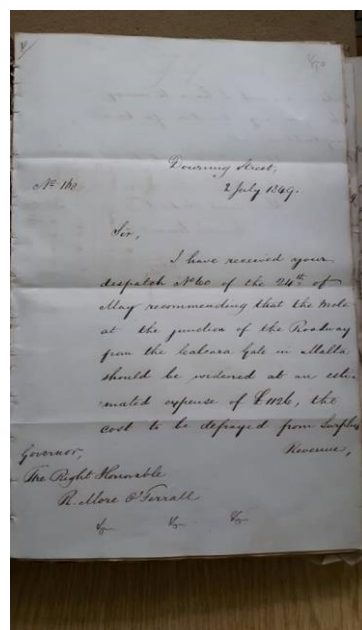


Figure 27

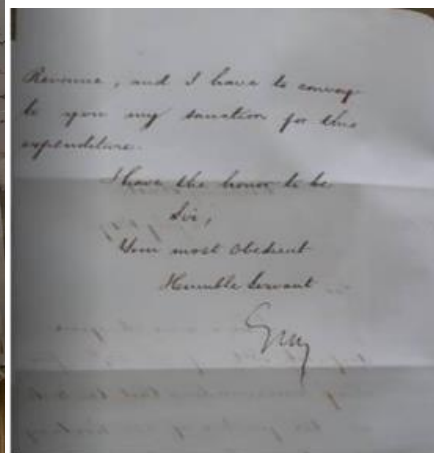


Figure 28

Despatch no. 118 from the Secretary of State of the Colonies at  
Downing Street approving the request of despatch no. 60  
NAM\_GOV 1/3/7/ - 24<sup>th</sup> May 1849

After almost 30 years the need to improve the infrastructure in the area arose again. As a result, the gate was dismantled in the late 1880s in order to accommodate the increasing traffic flow from the harbour into the suburb of Floriana (Cini, 2018).

Governor Simmonds requested that the roads from the wharfs from the Grand Harbour through Calcara Gate to Floriana be improved. This involved the alterations in the defences of Floriana (possibly the demolishing of the Calcara Gate) (GOV01\_33\_1/3/1819).

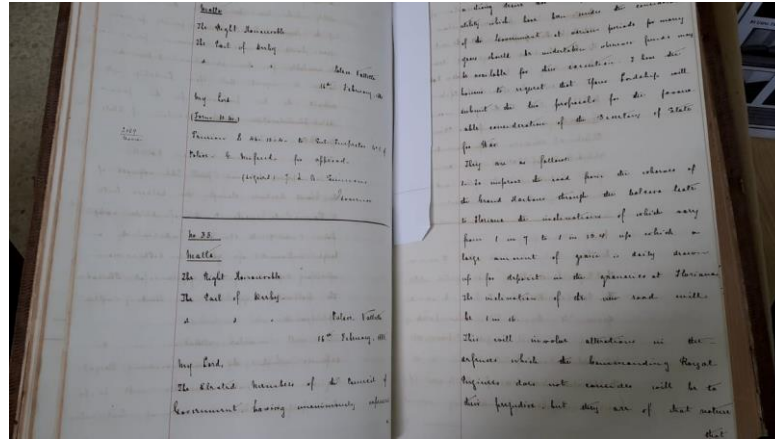


Figure 29

Despatch no. 33 part 1, from The J.S. G Simmonds dated 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1885, to The Right Honourable the Earl of Derby at Office of Prime Minister at Downing Street, London (NAM 1/3/19).

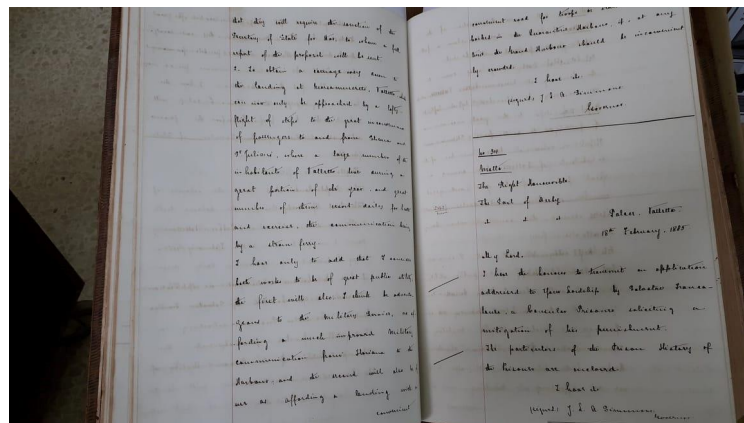


Figure 30

Despatch no. 33 part 2, from The Governor of Malta J.S. G Simmonds dated 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1885, to The Right Honourable the Earl of Derby at Office of Prime Minister at Downing Street, London (NAM 1/3/19).

Furthermore, in despatch numbered 134 dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1885, Governor Simmonds submits the cost of the Calcara Gate project for the amount of £6000 (GOV01\_134\_1/3/1819).

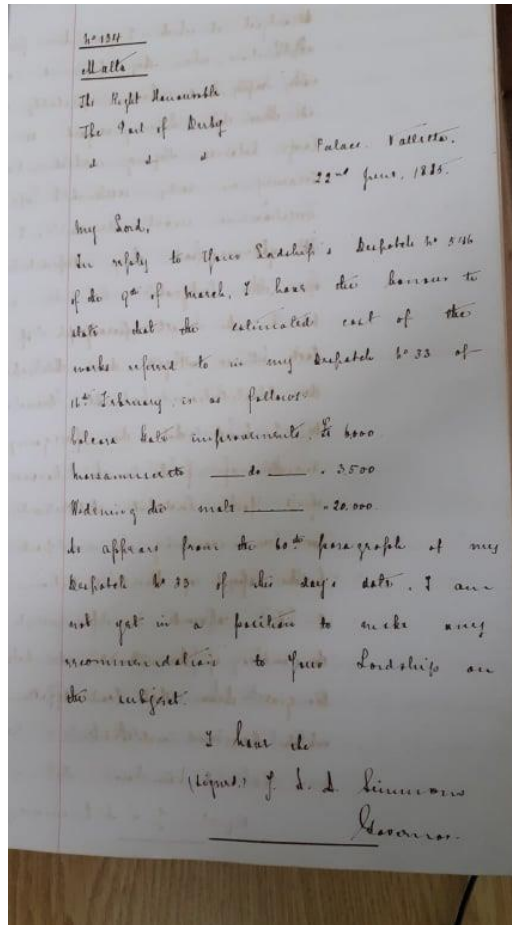


Figure 31  
NAM 1/3/19

In the early 1920s part of the road at Crucifix Hill was built (Cini, 2018).

The grain stores which were situated outside Calcara gate were later demolished and a straight road was built through the breach in the Floriana fortifications for better accessibility.

What is left from this gate nowadays is a small building which was presumably used as a guardroom and now has now been turned into a cafe.



Figure 32  
Façade of Calcara Gate

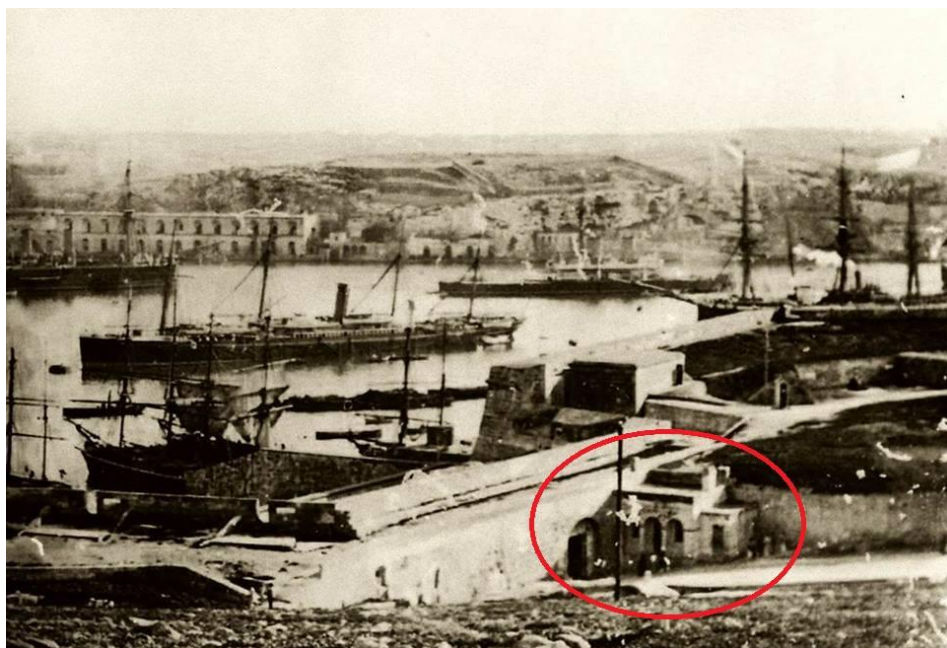


Figure 33  
Guard room at Calcara Gate, now D Coffee Club



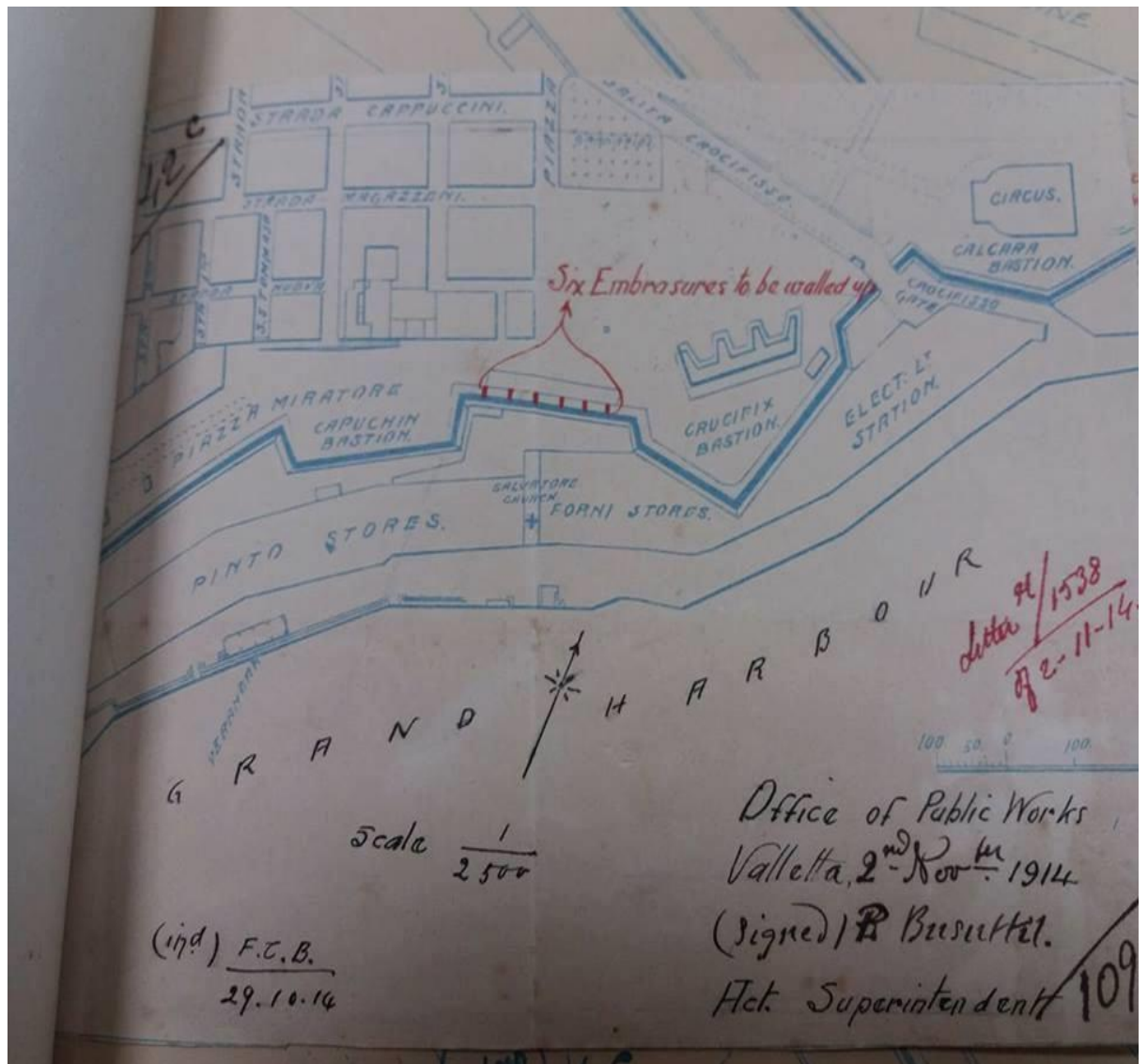


Figure 34  
Plan of 1914 showing Calcarea Gate already inexistent.  
Source: Works Department – Project House

## Chapter 5

### Porta Del Monte / Marina Gate/ Victoria Gate

This gate is situated on the side of the Grand Harbour and was one of the busiest gates around Valletta because through this gate everything and everyone arriving by sea in the Grand Harbour had to pass through it. It was originally designed and built by Francesco Laparelli in 1568 and later redesigned by Romano Carapecchia in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Spiteri, 2008).

This gate was of great importance to the city during the initial stages of the building of the Valletta fortifications, and Pietro del Monte, the person who succeeded Grand Master de Vallette, made it a point to regularly visit the works being carried out on the fortifications of the new city. This gate was built right in front of Fort St. Angelo so that he would be able to commute to and from it easily. The gate consisted of one opening which was not wide enough for carriages and people to pass through it both at the same time. There was also a draw bridge.

During the British period, Governor Arthur Borton made a request for the gate to be remodelled since it was impractical for the commercial needs of the day.

The works were to be carried out by the Royal Engineers and its cost was estimated to be £6500 (PWD 439, p. 14-17).

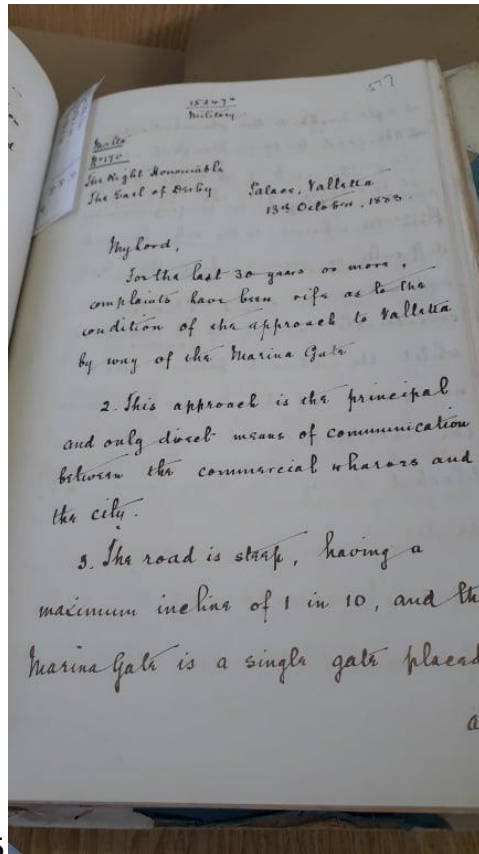


Figure 35

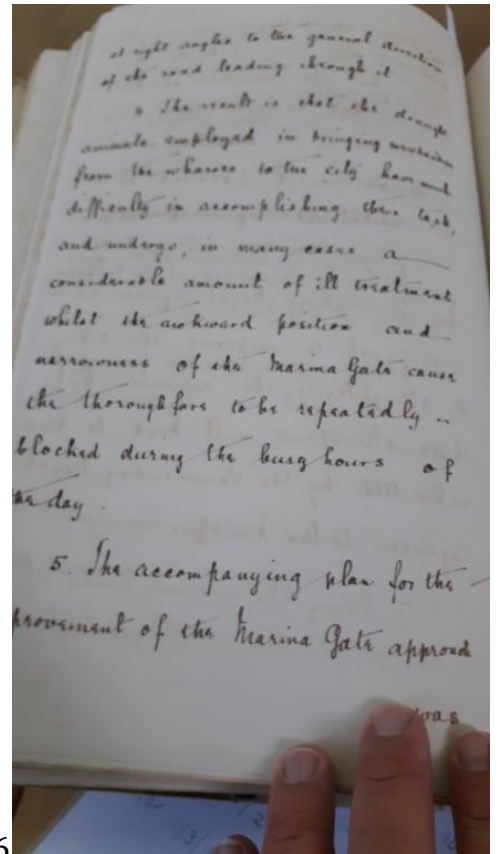


Figure 36

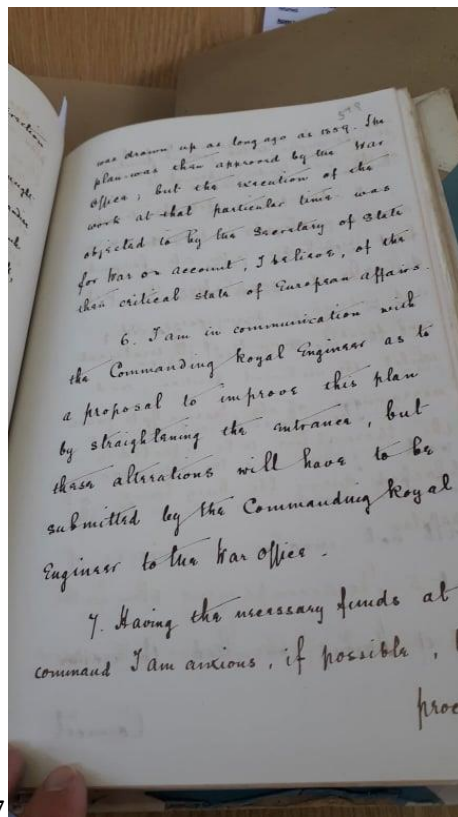


Figure 37

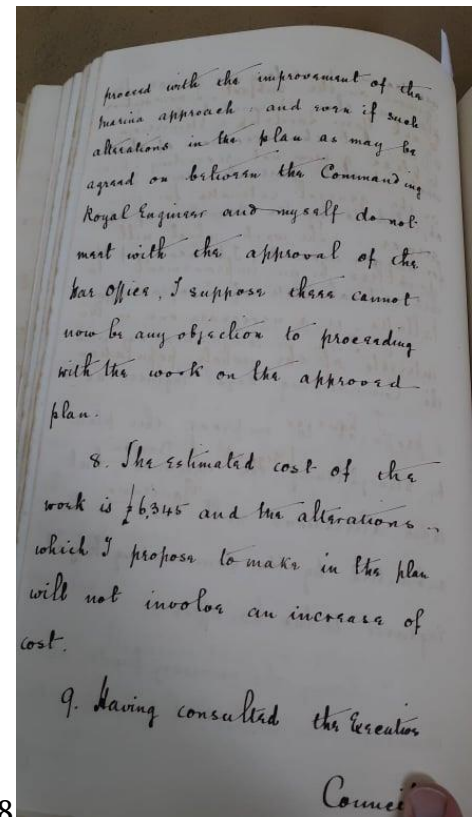


Figure 38

Council on the subject, I now venture  
to ask Your Lordship's permission  
to place a sum not exceeding £6500  
on the general estimate for this  
service. The work, which will  
doubtless be an improvement to  
Tallate, is a necessary one in the  
interests of the whole population.

I have &c.  
(Signed) A. Dorton  
Governor.

Figure 39  
NAM 1/3/17



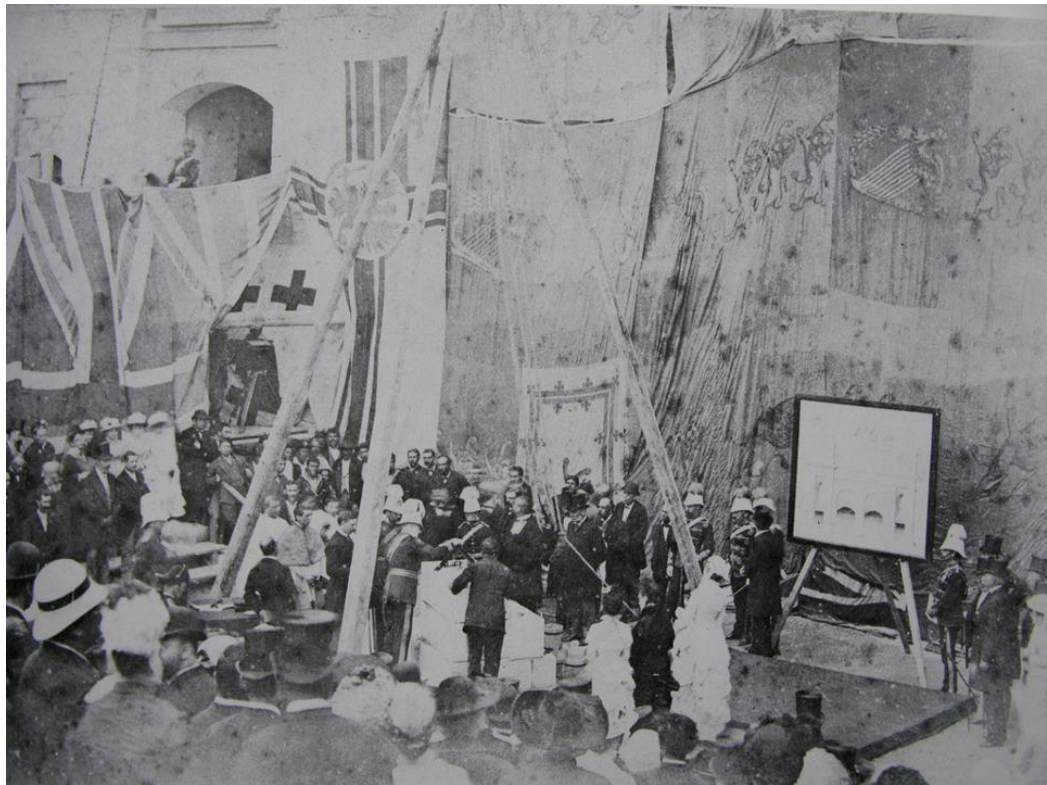


Figure 40  
The Inauguration of the project by the Governor Sir Arthur Borton in 1884



Figure 41  
Porta Marina being replaced by Victoria gate

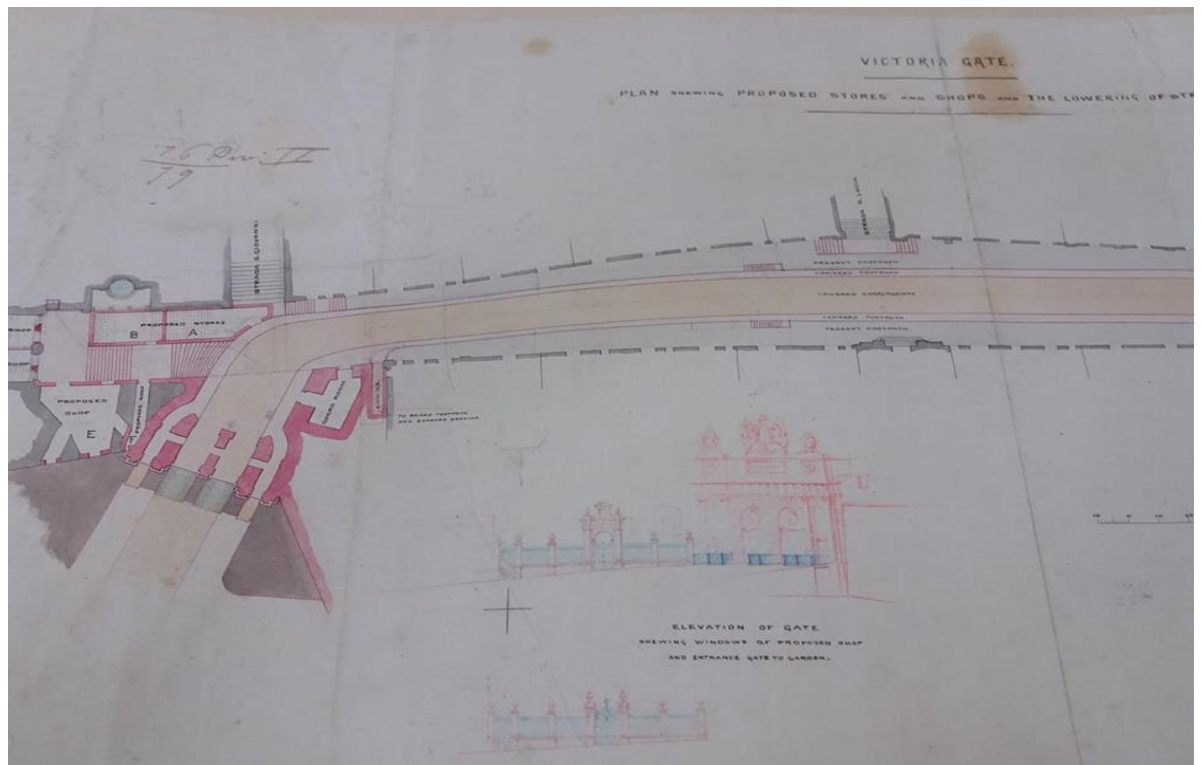


Figure 42

Source: Works Department – Emmanuelle Luigi Galizia, 1883

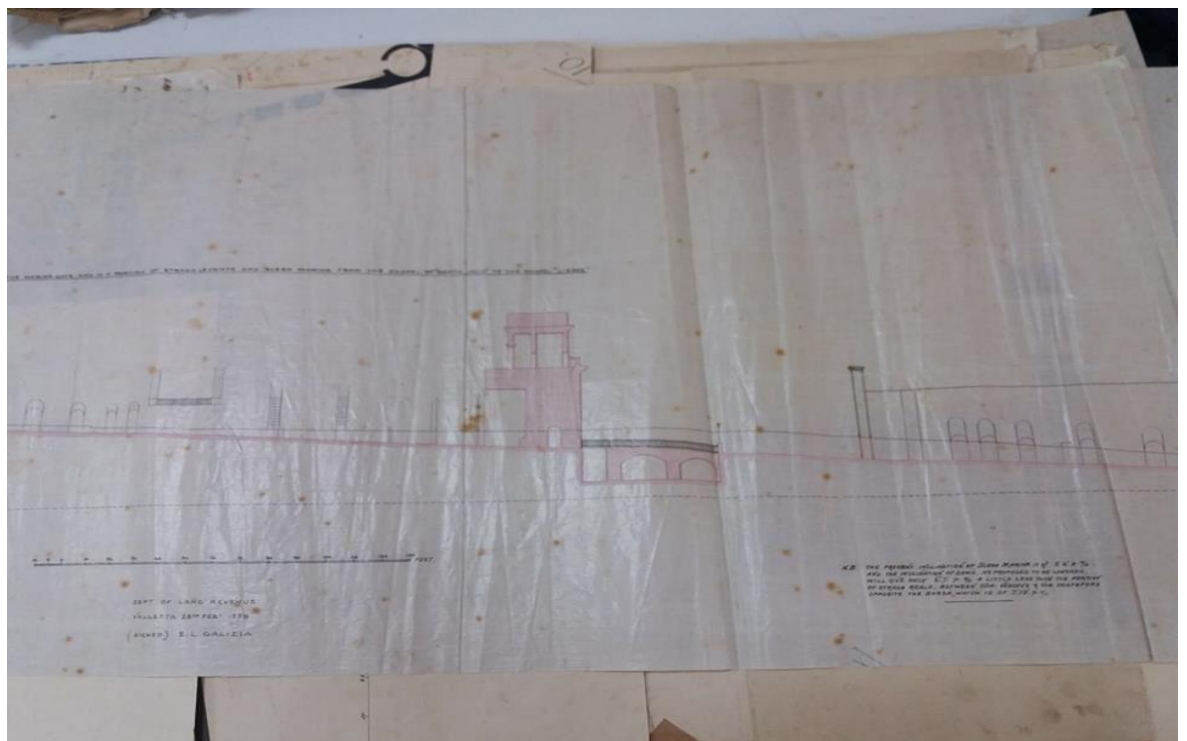


Figure 43

Source: Works Department – Emmanuelle Luigi Galizia, 1883

## Chapter 6

### Porta Sant' Anna (or Porta dei Cani)

In his article published in the Times of Malta dated May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Joe Bugeja states that Porta Sant' Anna was one of the entrances into Floriana as part of the Floriana lines which started being built in 1636 during the reign of Grand Master Antoine de Paul. However, it was the military engineer Brigadier Jacob de Tigne' who designed and built it to act as the main entrance to Floriana, to be named Porta Sant' Anna. This was to act as a triumphant entry into Floriana and as soon as one went through it, one would encounter the Vilhena fountain and the open space of St. Anne Street leading to Valletta with the loggias on either side.

In 1897, Porta Sant' Anna was demolished by the British authorities. Unfortunately, the British architects did not care about the damage they would cause when they decided to demolish the gate to create the opening that presently exists now. Floriana too has lost its main entrance and only the aging niche survives today perched up to one side above the fuming traffic (Bugeja, 2018).

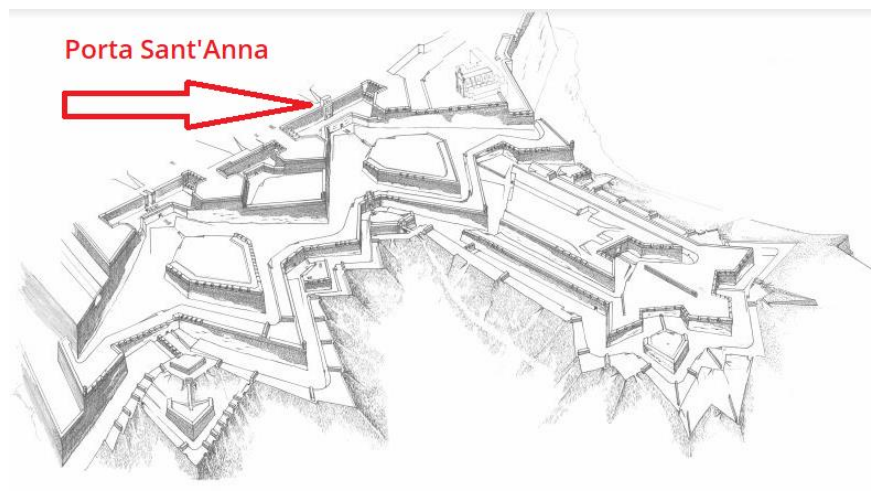


Figure 44  
Courtesy of Stephen Spiteri





Figure 45  
Front



Figure 46  
Back





Figure 47

NAM 1747

The breached fortification where Porta Sant' Anna was previously located at the beginning of Floriana

## Chapter 7

### Marsamuxetto Gate

This gate was built as part of the initial fortifications during the reign of Jean Parisot de Vallette. It was very similar to that of Porta Marina and it remained so until the year 1889 when it was demolished and replaced with a wider one and one which provided better access.

Despatch no. 33 from The Governor of Malta, J.S. G Simmonds, dated 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1885, to The Right Honourable the Earl of Derby at the Office of Prime Minister at Downing Street, London, requested authorisation to build a carriageway at the Marsamuxetto landing place to replace the 'the lofty flight of steps [originally built by the knights] to the great inconvenience of passengers to and from Sliema and St. Julians, where a large number of the inhabitants of Valletta live during a great portion of the year' (GOV01\_33\_1/3/1819).

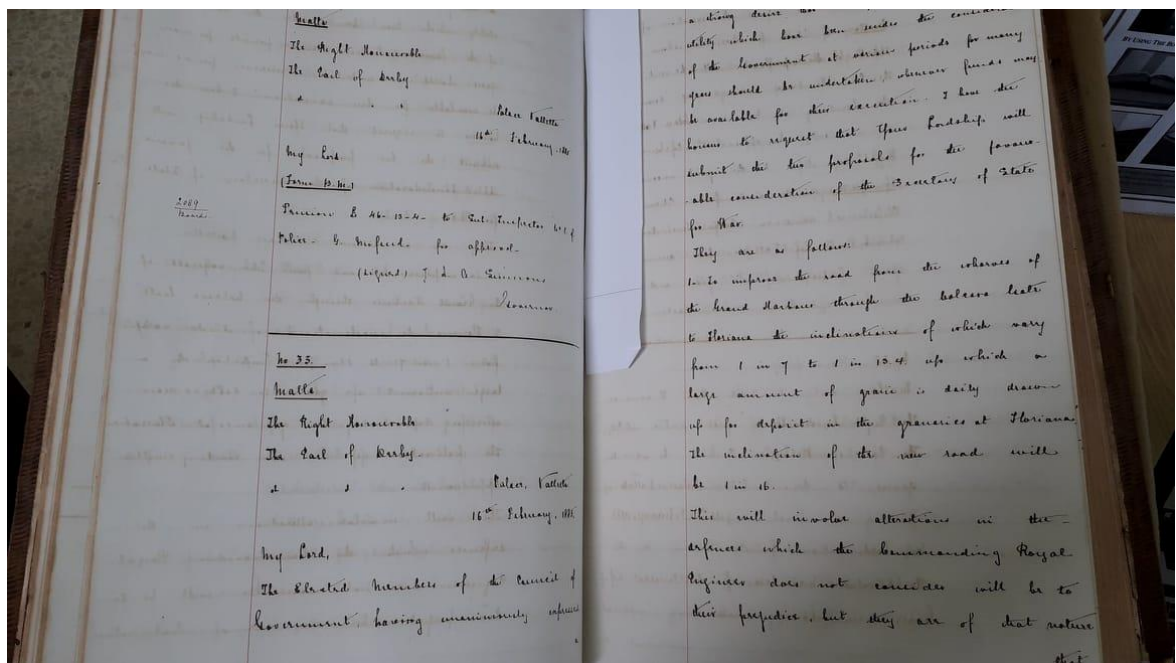


Figure 48  
NAM 1/3/19

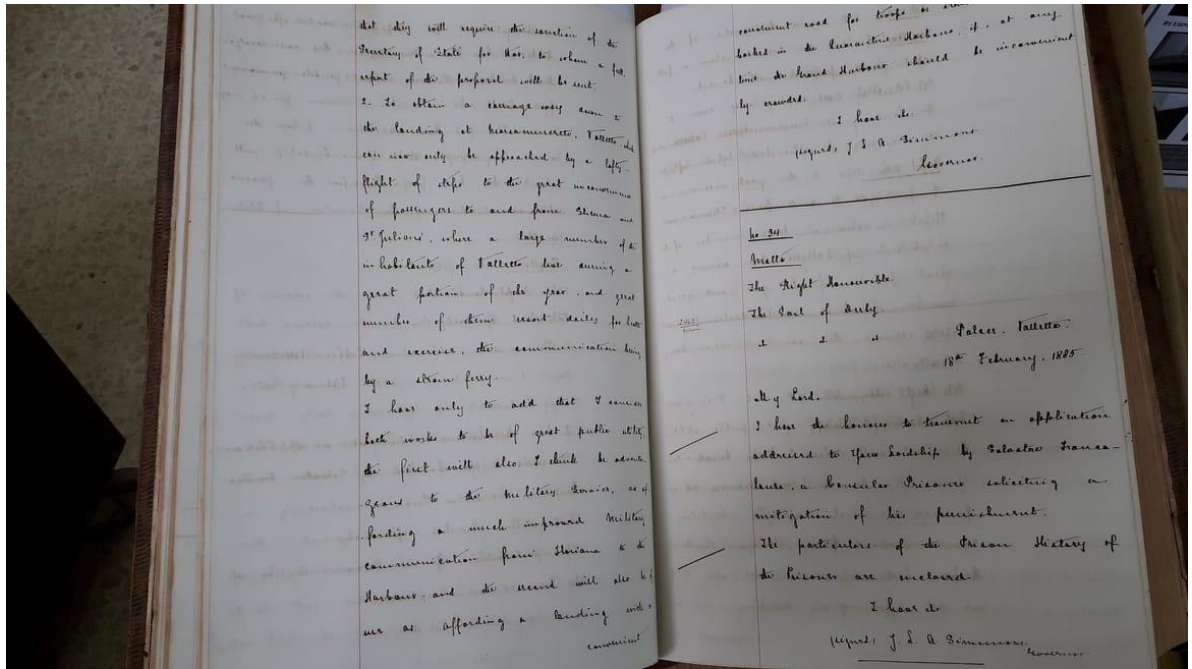


Figure 49

NAM 1/3/19

In his despatch numbered 134 dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1885, Governor Simmonds quotes the sum of £3500.

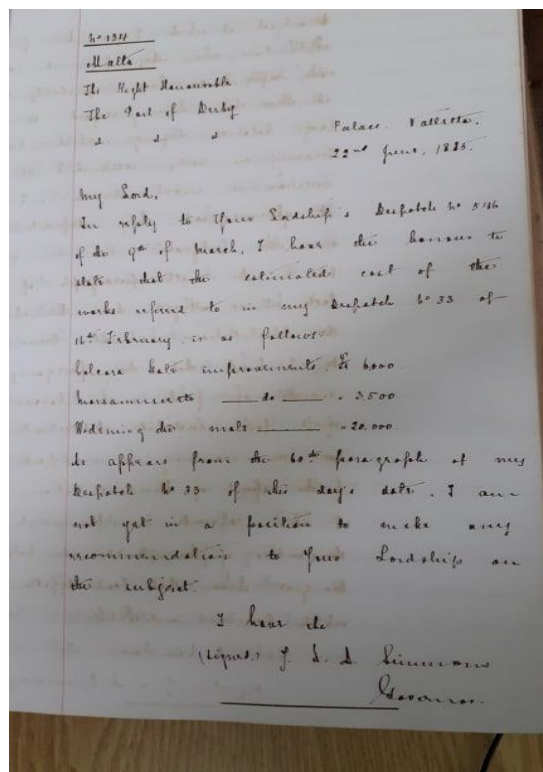


Figure 50

NAM 1/3/19





Figure 51

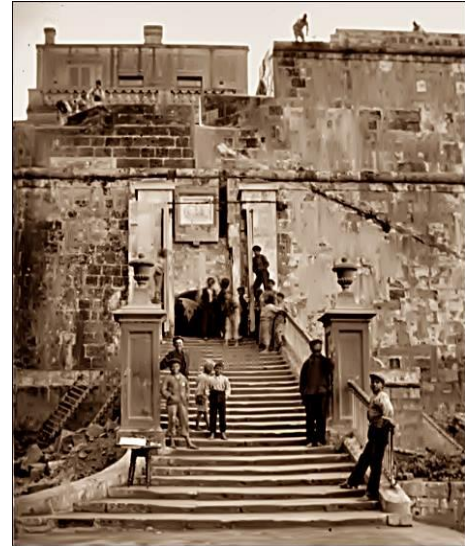


Figure 52

Works Department – Project House (NAM PHO1782)  
Marsamuxetto Gate as built by the knights until 1898



Figure 53

The original gate at Marsamuxetto NAM PHO 028



Figure 54

The carriageway built after 1885 with the old gate demolished to make way for a ramp.  
Photo from the internet



Figure 55

Great Siege road built around the Marsamuxetto.  
Photo by the author

# Conclusion

If walls could talk the fortifications around Valletta and Floriana have quite a story to tell. They were built by the knights to protect them and the people living within them, and they were so impregnable that no one has ever challenged them. Valletta was never attacked neither from land nor from sea, and it is ironic that the only time that these fortifications were utilised as a defence was against the Maltese themselves when the French occupied Valletta during the revolt of 1798. However, the Maltese never attempted to attack the walls because they knew that it was impossible to penetrate them. Instead they staged a blockade, and with the help of the British, kept the French “imprisoned” inside the walls for 18 months.

Nowadays, it is the fortifications themselves which need protection: they need to be protected from the elements that continuously deteriorate them by erosion and subsidence, and they need to be protected from the demands of modernisation.

One should stress the importance of the awareness of preservation of national heritage and not neglect it, for sadly, that would lead to the destruction of these grand structures.



# List of Images

Cover photo	Porta della Marina being replaced by Victoria Gate in 1885. Source: photo from the internet
Figure 1	The Floriana land front showing Portes des Bombes. Courtesy of Stephen Spiteri
Figure 2	Porta dei Cannoni as built by Charles Franchoise de Mondion. Source: NAM
Figure 3	Portes des Bombes as built by Charles Franchoise de Mondion. Source: NAM
Figure 4	Porta dei Cannoni as modified in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century by the British. Source : NAM IMG 0070
Figure 5	Portes des Bombes – Present day. Notice that the inner arches had been removed in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century to accommodate the Malta Tramways. Source: Works Department – Project House
Figure 6	A rear view of Portes des Bombes prior to the breaching of the walls. Source: NAM
Figure 7	The design of metal gates at Portes des Bombes Source: Works Department. – Project House
Figure 8	Plan of Portes des Bombes project by Luigi Gatt, Superintendent -1913. Source: Works Department. – Project House
Figure 9	Valletta land front showing Porta San Giorgio/ Porta Reale/ Kingsway/ City Gate. Courtesy of Stephen Spiteri
Figure 10	The first entrance to the Capital. Antonio Francesco Lucini after Matteo Perez d'Aleccio -1631 Source: Porta Reale and its Environs - M. Ellul

Figure 11	Image of a model of the second city gate by Tumas Dingli Source: Image from the internet
Figure 12	Porta Reale as remodelled by Royal Engineers', Lieut. Col. Francis Ringler Thomson in 1853. Source: NAM PHO 1799
Figure 13	Design of Porta Reale to scale. Source: Works Department – Project House
Figure 14	Rear view of Porta Reale in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century. Source: photo from the internet
Figure 15	Side elevation plans of Porta Reale – undated Source: Works Department. – Project House
Figure 16	The demolishing of the 1853 gate. Source: Works Department – Project House
Figure 17	The building of the new City Gate in 1964 Source: Works Department – Project House
Figure 18	The plans by Alviro Bergonzo for the 1964 gate. Source: Works Department: Project house
Figure 19	Photo of present-day City Gate by Renzo Piano. Source: photo by the author
Figure 20	Works in progress at Gerolomo Casar Avenue 1928 Source: NAM_ PHO 2032
Figure 21	Works almost complete on Duke of York Avenue 1928. Source: NAM_ PHO 2045
Figure 22	Works in progress on Duke of York Avenue 1927. Source: NAM_ PHO 2031
Figure 23	Plan of Harper area with proposed Duke of York Avenue. Source: Works Department – Project House

Figure 24	Laying of the first stone by the Duke of York, 17 <sup>th</sup> June 1927 Source: NAM_ PHO1919
Figure 25	Despatch no. 60 by Governor O'Farrell for improvement of the Calcara gate environs, 24 <sup>th</sup> May 1849, part 1 Source: NAM_GOV1/3/7
Figure 26	Despatch no. 60 by Governor O'Farrell for the improvement of the Calcara gate environs 24 <sup>th</sup> May 1849, part 2 Source: NAM_GOV 1/3/7
Figure 27	Despatch no. 118 by the secretary of State of the Colonies at Downing Street approving O'Farrell's request. Part 1. Source: NAM_GOV 1/3/7
Figure 28	Despatch no. 118 by the secretary of State of the Colonies at Downing Street approving O'Farrell's request. Part 2. Source: NAM_GOV 1/3/7
Figure 29	Despatch no. 33 part 1, from The Governor of Malta J.S. G Simmonds dated 16 <sup>th</sup> February 1885 to The Right Honourable the Earl of Derby at Office of Prime Minister at Downing Street, London. This was for the second improvement within 30 years of the Calcara Gate. Source: NAM_ 1/3/19
Figure 30	Despatch no. 33 (part 2) Source: NAM_1/3/19
Figure 31	Despatch no. 134 dated 22 <sup>nd</sup> June by Governor Simmonds giving further detail about the costs on the improvement of Calcara Gate to Downing Street. Source: NAM_ 1/3/19
Figure 32	Front view of Calcara Gate, 19 <sup>th</sup> Century. Now Crucifix Hill, Floriana. Source: photo from the internet
Figure 33	Rear view at Calcara Gate, Now crucifix Hill, Floriana. Source: photo from the internet

Figure 34	Plan of 1914 showing Calcara Gate already open. Source: Works Department. – Project House
Figure 35-39	Despatch no. 170 (55-59) dated the 13 <sup>th</sup> October 1883 sent to the Earl of Derby at Downing Street. Source: NAM 1/3/17
Figure 40	Photo showing the inauguration of works at the new Victoria Gate by Sir Arthur Borton in 1884. Source: photo from the internet
Figure 41	Works in progress at Victoria Gate. Source: photo from the internet
Figure 42	Plans by Architect Emm. Luigi Galizia showing the proposed remodelling of Del Monte/Marina Gate, 1883. Source: Works Department – Project House
Figure 43	Elevations by Architect Emm. Luigi Galizia showing the proposed remodelling of del Monte/Marina Gate, 1883. Source: Works Department – Project House
Figure 44	Location of Porta Sant'Anna on the Floriana land front. Courtesy of Stephen Spiteri
Figure 45	Porta San't Anna, front view. Source: Photo from the internet
Figure 46	Porta Sant' Anna, rear view. Source: Photo from the internet
Figure 47	The breached fortification where previously Porta Sant' Anna stood. Source: NAM 1747
Figure 48	Despatch no. 33 dated the 16 <sup>th</sup> February 1885 Source: NAM 1/3/19
Figure 49 & 50	Despatch no. 134 dated the 22 <sup>nd</sup> June, 1885 Source: NAM 1/3/19

- Figure 51 & 52      Marsamuxetto Gate as built by the knights  
Source: Works Department – Project House
- Figure 53            The original gate at Marsamuxetto  
Source: Photo from the internet
- Figure 54            The carriageway built after 1885  
Source: Photo from the internet
- Figure 55            Great Siege road built around the Marsamuxetto  
Source: Photo by the author

## References

- Attard, C., 2008. The Gate Triumphant. *The Times of Malta*, [online] 24 August. Available at: <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20080824/opinion/the-gate-triumphant.222115> [Accessed 21 May 2019]
- Bonnici, J. and Cassar, M., 2011. *Malta Tramway and the Barracca Lift*. Published by Authors.
- Bugeja, J., 2018. The Birth of Floriana, [online] 19 May. Available at: <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180519/opinion/The-birth-of-Floriana-Joe-Bugeja.679415> [Accessed 3 February 2019]
- Cini, G., 2006. Glormu Cassar Avenue is 76 years old. *The Times of Malta*, [online] 24 August. Available at: <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20060824/local/glormu-cassar-avenue-is-76-years-old.43620> [Accessed 15 February 2019]
- Cini, G., 2018. Crucifix Hill Bastion Given a Revamp. *The Times of Malta*, [online] 8 August. Available at: <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180108/local/crucifix-hill-bastion-given-a-revamp.667467> [Accessed 15 February 2019]
- De Lucca, D., 1982. The contribution of Francois de Mondion in the architectural development of 18<sup>th</sup> century Malta. [pdf] Available at: [http://melitensiawth.nl/index/Proceedings%20of%20History%20Week%20\(PHW\)/PHW%201981/04s.pdf](http://melitensiawth.nl/index/Proceedings%20of%20History%20Week%20(PHW)/PHW%201981/04s.pdf) [Accessed 23 March 2019]
- Ellul, M., 2013. *Valletta Porta Reale and Environs*. Malta: The National Archives
- GOV01\_33\_1/3/1819, National Archives of Malta.
- GOV01\_33/2\_1/3/1819, National Archives of Malta.
- GOV01\_134\_1/3/1819, National Archives of Malta.
- GOV01\_60\_24/05/1849, National Archives of Malta.
- Mallia – Milanese, V. ed., 1993. *Hospitallier Malta 1530 – 1798*. Malta: Mireva Publications.
- PWD 439 p. 14-17, National Archives of Malta.
- Rizzo, V., 2010. *Discover Floriana, Historic Walks in a Green City*. Din L-Art Helwa and Floriana Local Council. Best Print Co. Ltd.



Spiteri, S., 2008. *The Art of Fortress Building in Hospitallier Malta*. Malta: BDL Publications.

Spiteri, S., 2017. *The fortifications of Malta*. Malta: BDL Publications.

The National Archives of Malta. *Annual report 2017*, Malta: National Archives of Malta.

Vella, G. ed., 2016. *Valletta 1566 Melita Renascens*. Malta: Heritage Malta and Malta Libraries.

## Tour Description

The tour will take us around the city of Valletta and its suburb of Floriana where fortifications that were breached by the British authorities will be indicated. The tour will consist partly on foot and by mini coach.

Rendezvous      Beside **Horn works, Floriana**, near TM driving licence testing section.

### Route

- 1                      From beside **Horn works** walk to the entrance to Park and ride and turn right (**St. Francis Bastion**).
- 2                      Passing by near the entrance to Planning Authority (**St. Francis Raveline**), turn left (**Porta Sant 'Anna**). Board the minivan and drive towards **Portes des Bombes**.
- 3                      At **Portes des Bombes**, turn left and proceed under small flyover.
- 4                      Continue downhill. (Talk about the Glacis on the right and **Ta' Braxia Cemetery** on the left and further down the past about Pieta' as a suburb of the new city of Valletta.)
- 5                      Arriving in **Pieta'** continue driving to beginning of the creek (Mention the **P&O Customs House** now restored and transformed into a catering establishment).
- 6                      Turn right into **Sa Maison** driving past the old P&O Customs House.
- 7                      Turn right and drive uphill with the bastions on either side of the road. Passing under a large arch at **Basso Forte della Conception (1670)**, formerly known as **Right Sally Port**.
- 8                      Enter through opening of bastion (**Notre Dame Gate**) and go past general **Police HQ** on the left and turn left and left again. Pass through small gateway (**Polverista Gate**) going past the **Ospizio** on the left.
- 9                      At the **Excelsior Hotel (Salvatore wall)**, turn uphill to the right.
- 10                     Park in front of the **Phoenicia Hotel** and start walking towards **City Gate**. Talk about the various gates along the years and interventions made in that location. Walk towards **St James Ditch** and position yourselves beside **Gerolomo Cassar Avenue**.
- 11                     At **Gerolomo Cassar Avenue** (Mention the local plan of 1924 of Harper Area). Cross the road and walk towards Boffa Hospital.
- 12                     On arrival walk down Capuchins Hill through **Kalkara Gate** (Explain the previous function of **D Coffee Club** and the Kalkara Gate. Board the coach and continue downhill to drive past Customs House and go through the breach under the Siege Bell leading to the **Mediterranean Conference Centre**).

- 13 At the **Mediterranean Conference Centre** continue to **Baviera**.
- 14 At **Baviera** alight from the mini coach and walk into Valletta (Old Bakery Street) and immediately turn right and proceed downhill to exit Valletta via the **Jews' sally port** (explain what interventions happened there). On exiting the Sally Port, board the mini coach and proceed along the sea level road under the bastions towards Marsamxetto Gate.
- 15 At **Marsamxetto ferry landing** enter Valletta again through the tunnel, turn left and left again and proceed via **Great Siege Road** to our starting point at Horn works in Floriana.