

The Malta Railway

A Visitor's Experience of the Journey from Valletta to Mtarfa on il-Vapur tal-Art

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Abstract

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Description <p>The Malta Railway operated in Malta between 1883 and 1931 from Valletta to Mtarfa. The route was eleven kilometres long and the trains passed through a number of localities, making use of stations, bridges, tunnels, and embankments. The amount of work involved in such a large project radically changed the Maltese landscape of the time. The main aim of this study is to ascertain the conditions of the remains of the railway today, in preparation for a guided tour to explore this heritage.</p> <p>This was done by initially mapping the exact route from which the railway passed, using maps and documents of the time, literature, and freely available software. All the remains were assessed and documented through photography, and the findings were presented for the whole route. The study highlights the conditions of each and every location – some were found in a good state of conservation, others put us all to shame. Suggestions and recommendations are being made for a better use of this heritage.</p>		
Keywords Malta Railway, Railway Heritage, Vapur tal-Art, Tour Guiding, Cultural Heritage		

Declaration of Authenticity



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Research Title : The Malta Railway :
A Visitor's Experience of the Journey from
Valletta to Mtarfa on il-Vapur tal-Art

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification. The research study was conducted under the supervision of Mr. Vincent Zammit.

18th January 2023
Date


Student's Signature

Acknowledgements

Words are not enough to express my gratitude to all those who, in some way or another, helped me in accomplishing this study.

This study is dedicated to my wife Rose-Anne, who has been a constant rock for me in these last 25 years, walking beside me through thick and thin, and always there with her continuous support, encouragement and help. And to my son Steve too, for making me proud with his achievements.

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I cannot not mention the help and support I received from Mr. Paul Galea. He personally, and through the Malta Railway Foundation, has been working tirelessly to ensure that the last few remains of the Malta Railway are properly conserved, and to create awareness and spread the knowledge of this important heritage. Thank you, Paul for all your work.

I would also like to thank all the staff at the National Library of Malta and the National Archives of Malta for the help and assistance they provided me during this study. In particular, Mr. Melvin Caruana at the National Archives for his patience and dedication.

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Finally, the last word of gratitude goes to God without whose help this study, and all the rest of my past achievements, could not have been reached and for His gift of my life.

Ian Joseph Abdilla

January 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1 Historical context

The idea of a railway for Malta was conceived in the 1870s. At the time, Malta was one of the few countries in Europe without a railway service. After three years of construction, the first journey of the Malta Railway took place on the 28th February 1883. It continued to operate for the next 48 years, between Valletta and Mdina, save for a brief period of around two years between 1890 and 1892, when the original private company went bankrupt and the government of Malta took over its operations.

The Malta Railway was a single-track line, and initially it operated between Valletta and Rabat. In 1900, the line was extended to Mtarfa to better serve the military barracks at this location. The voyage took about twenty-five minutes, with the train stopping at different stations and platforms. The railway had seven main stations in Valletta, Floriana, Hamrun, Birkirkara, Attard, Mdina (known also as Rabat or Notabile) and Mtarfa (known as Museum). It also operated from four official platforms in Msida, Balzan, St. Anton, and San Salvatore, with an added stop in Santa Venera. Throughout the line, which was about 11.1km long, various bridges, tunnels, and embankments were constructed, together with fourteen railway guard huts from which a railway employee would connect a chain at level crossings to stop road users from crossing the line when a train was approaching. In total, during the years of its operations, the Malta Railway had ten locomotives (or engines), 33 passenger coaches, a few workmen's carriages, and a number of wagons or trolleys.

The Malta Railway suffered financial losses and as a result of various factors, was no longer commercially viable. It had to close down on 31st March 1931. The Maltese referred to the train as *il-Vapur tal-Art*, the land streamer.

1.2 The aims and objectives of this study

The vast amount of construction and civil engineering works involved in such a large project as that of the Malta Railway, by its very own nature, necessitated a radical change in the Maltese landscape of the time. Today, more than 90 years after the cessation of operations of this mode of transport, what are the conditions of the physical remains of this heritage?

Based on this question, this study has three main objectives, namely:

1. to map the Malta Railway route in today's modern Maltese landscape;
2. to make an assessment of the heritage remains found along this route; and
3. to document the various stages of conservation of these remains, for an effective use in a tour guiding programme

While references to, and description of, the railway and its history will be made in this work for comparative and guidance purposes, this study will not be delving in detail on the history of the Malta Railway. Much of this aspect will be dealt with in the guided tour part of this study that is found in Appendix I.

Railway heritage has a great appeal to different categories of people, with various museums and private collections set up around the world. Malta's railway heritage is not as well known, unfortunately often neglected, yet there is great interest in the subject which offers great potential for niche tourism. This study intends to highlight some of this heritage's most important elements.



Picture 1: A train of the Malta Railway about to leave Valletta station
(source: Malta Railway Foundation)

2. Literature Review

The Victorian era in Malta was an appealing period, which brought about the construction of various large and ambitious projects such as the Victoria Lines, and the introduction of new innovations such as electricity. The war in Crimea (1853-1856) and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had an effect on Malta and its economic activity. The Malta Railway was a result of these changing times. In conformity with British colonial traditions, the railway was amply documented. Some of these documents, considered as primary sources, were used as part of this study, although secondary sources were equally important. Indeed, the point of departure for this work were two books that can be considered as reference guides of the Malta Railway.

2.1 Brigadier Bernard L. Rigby's book 'The Malta Railway'

Brigadier Bernard L. Rigby was never involved with the Malta Railway himself, and was not even in Malta when it was in operation. Yet as a young soldier stationed in Malta in the 1930s (soon after the railway stopped its operations), he was fascinated by its remains, short of falling in love with it. He writes:

Now, more than 30 years on, I recall that in the early 1930s as a young soldier serving in Malta with my regiment, I walked the line from Valletta to Museum (with the exception of tunnels and the odd embankment) when the infrastructure was still in reasonable condition and one could still 'feel' the line. I sometimes wonder if I am the only person alive to have had that experience.
(Rigby, 2004, p. 4)

In 1970, Rigby wrote a book entitled 'The Malta Railway', which he dedicates to all Citizens of Malta, followed by a second revised edition in 2004. In his publication, he writes about the early days of the railway, with details about the selection process for the railway, the setting up of the company, and the construction project.

He dedicates the bulk of his book to describe the line from Valletta station to Museum station in Mtarfa. He gives details on all the stations and platforms, the guard huts, the various embankments and bridges, and also describes the landscape of the route. Furthermore, this publication also deals with the running of the railway including costs, revenues and timetables, and gives details about

all the ten locomotives, the various carriages and rolling stock in use by the company.

An interesting feature found in the second edition of Rigby's publication is an appendix that reproduces a write-up that Roger Cleaver wrote when he explored the remains of the Malta Railway in December 1995. During the course of this study, the writer will find that not only have most of the structures described by Rigby in his two books disappeared, but also some of those described by Cleaver as late as 27 years ago are no longer visible or accessible today.

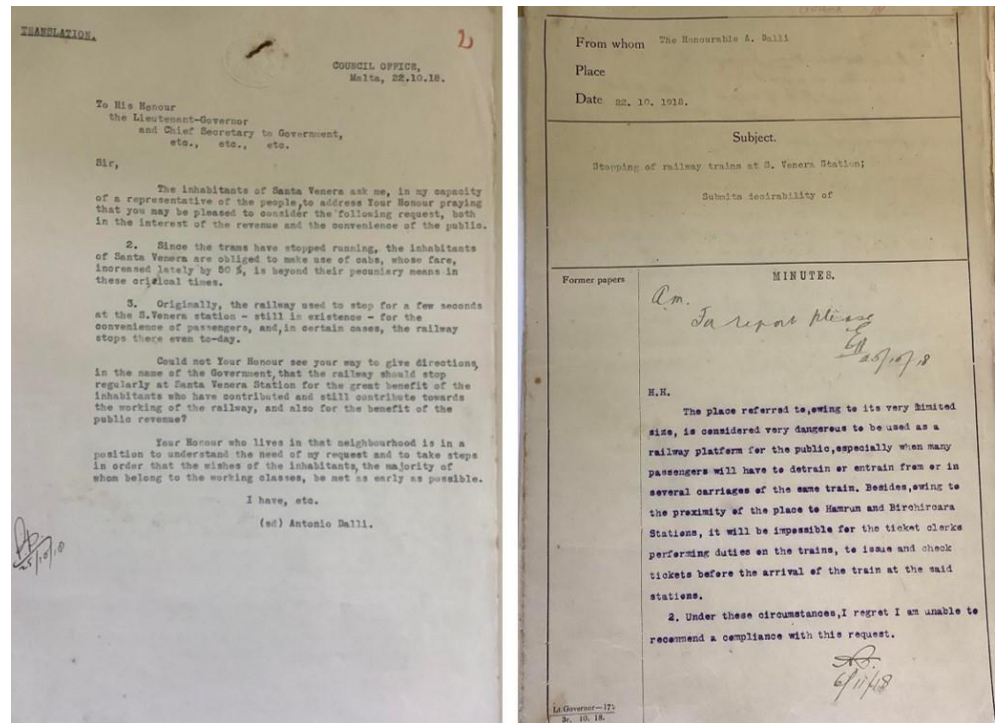
2.2 Joseph Bonnici and Michael Cassar's book 'The Malta Railway'

Bonnici and Cassar also look at the Malta Railway in a book entitled 'The Malta Railway', first published in 1987, with a second edition issued in 1992. While having a lot of similarities with Rigby's publication, this book gives more details about the administrative aspect of the railway, discussions held with government on various issues, stories and incidents that occurred on the railway, and life in Malta at the time.

Interestingly, this book attempts to document not just the structural remains of the railway but also the physical remains of railway-related items like carriages. Furthermore, this publication includes more pictures of the railway operations, which are in themselves a great source of information when mapping and comparing the railway route to today's modern environment.

2.3 Documents held at the National Archives of Malta

Adding to the information provided by these two books, the most important primary source for the Malta Railway is the collection of documents held at the National Archives of Malta (NAM). Some of these documents proved points which some secondary sources contradict. A case in point was the issue of Santa Venera platform, a small platform (possibly just a marked stop), that some sources even deny its actual existence. One of the documents found as part of this research was a file with correspondence between Antonio Dalli (a member of the Government Council) and the Lieutenant-Governor, whereby the former is requesting that the railway makes regular stops at the Santa Venera platform, which request was denied (NAM, CSG01 1918-1945 5291/1918).



Picture 2 - Copy of communication between councillor Antonio Dalli and the Governor regarding the Santa Venera stop (NAM CSG01 1918-1945 5291/1918)

2.4 Publications issued by Paul Galea

No study about the Malta Railway can be complete without referring to Paul Galea and his works along the years on this subject. Galea is an authority in this field, and is one of the founding members of the Malta Railway Foundation. He has dedicated these last two decades researching this topic, and trying to create awareness on the importance of conserving Malta's railway heritage. Galea has published countless articles on this subject. One of his most comprehensive works is a documentary issued in 2010 by the Department of Information entitled "Il-Vapur tal-Art", which not only includes the history of the railway but even interviews with people who lived and used the railway at the time.

Galea has met Brigadier Rigby himself who introduced him to this subject. In an interview published in the Times of Malta in January 2019, Galea states "*Brigadier Rigby had fallen in love with our island and he asked me to promise him to look after the remains of the Malta Railway. Having no other option, I accepted but little did I know what I was in for*" (Times of Malta, 18-01-2019).

3. Methodology

To achieve the aims of this study as specified in the Introduction (Section 1.1), a multi-disciplinary approach to research has been applied. This involved three different techniques, mainly document-based research, informal interviews, and personal observations.

3.1 Document-based research

The use of both primary and secondary sources was a vital component in the data gathering process, particularly for the mapping of the route. The starting point were the books by Bernard L. Rigby, and Joseph Bonnici and Michael Cassar. These books offer a thorough description of the route, and include maps, drawings, and photos that were of great help in identifying some of the localities.



Picture 3: Part of a map dating 1891 showing San Salvatore station held at the National Archives of Malta (NAM PDM62898)

This reading was further supplemented by research carried out at the National Archives of Malta. Various aspects of the railway can be found within the collection held at the National Archives, covering subjects such as the discussions held on the formation of the railway company, reports on the acquisition of engines and other items, yearly operational reports, court and expropriation settlement reports, police incident reports, and disposal reports following the dissolution of the company. The collection of Plans, Drawings and

Maps (PDM) was the most essential source for mapping the railway route to modern day Malta. Other collections examined as part of this study were:

- the Chief Secretary to the Government – Departmental Files (CSG);
- the Secretary of State Dispatches (GOV);
- the Police Reports (POL);
- the Crown Advocate General files (CA); and
- the Civil Defence Files (CDE).

Another documentary source that was consulted was the collection of newspapers held at the Malta National Library, from which details about the maiden voyage of the train and other interesting information were obtained. This material was used primarily for the guided tour part of this study (Appendix I).

3.2 Informal interviews

As stated in the Literature Review, no study on the Malta Railway would be complete without the involvement of Paul Galea. Galea was spoken to at length in various occasions, and was of great assistance during this study. Not only did Galea direct the writer to various publications related to this subject, but he also gave an insight into the railway, how it functioned and the route it followed. Same also accompanied the writer to key locations that are the subject of this study, including the underground complex that forms part of the Floriana station and the Birkirkara station.

3.3 Observations

Personal observations by the writer form the key element in carrying out two of the aims of this study – the assessment of the remains and the documentation of their various stages of conservation.

To carry out this task, the writer travelled along the route of the Malta Railway, observed all the visible remains, and where possible even gained access to areas not normally accessible to the public. The whole procedure and the actual remains were documented with photographs, which are being reproduced in this study. In this respect, unless otherwise stated, all photographs that are reproduced in this study have been taken by the writer. Remarks about security and safety concerns have also been included.

3.4 The mapping process

The mapping process was carried out after the railway route was analysed through maps, diagrams, and photos obtained through this research, and which were subsequently super imposed on Google Earth Pro.

For ease of reference and for any person wanting to explore the railway route using this study, directions via GPS coordinates, the use of street names as known today, and other indications have been included in this study. In fact, for this purpose, street names marked with an (*) represent the actual street names rather than that with which they were known during Malta Railway operations.

3.5 Limitations of this study

This study is intended for the general public and tourists who wish to appreciate Malta's railway heritage. In this respect, the study focuses on the remains that can be seen, visited or experienced without the need to either obtain special permissions from third parties or gain entry to places that are too abandoned and dangerous to explore. This was therefore the limiting factor, and this study did very limited attempts to gain access to such places. However, the study makes references to instances where such places may be visited during special occasions.

3.6 Ethical considerations

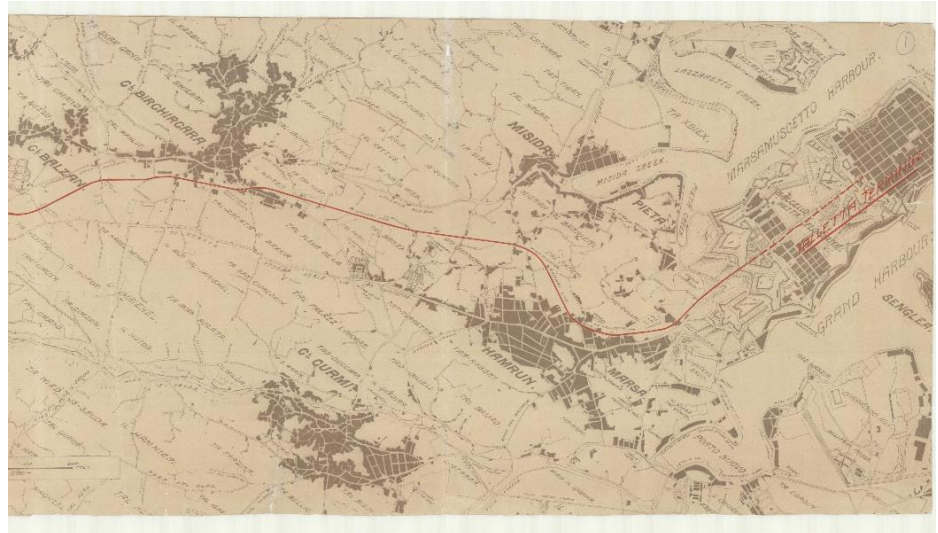
Throughout the course of this study, no personal information was gathered or processed. When photography was involved, care was taken not to capture any private individuals or vehicle registration plates, and whenever this was not possible these were blurred or eliminated completely, to eliminate any issues of privacy or data protection.

4. Analysis of findings

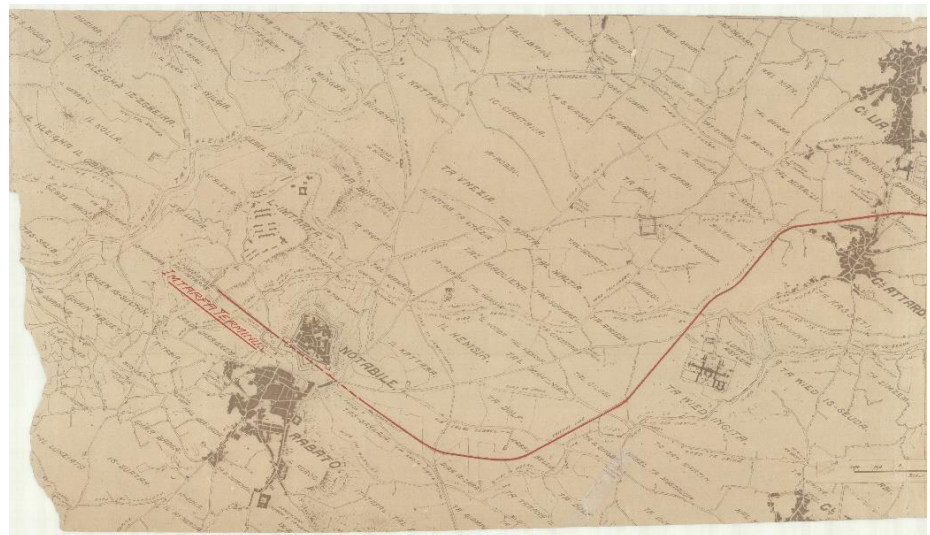
In this part of the study, the analysis and mapping of the Malta Railway route and the observations and documentations made of each of the remains will be presented.

4.1 Mapping the Malta Railway route

A number of maps that were obtained from the National Archives of Malta, diagrams, and descriptions in different sources of literature were used for this study. The most important one was a complete map of the railway route that is held at the National Archives bearing reference PDM63223 that is being reproduced hereunder in two parts (Pictures 4 and 5), due to its large size.

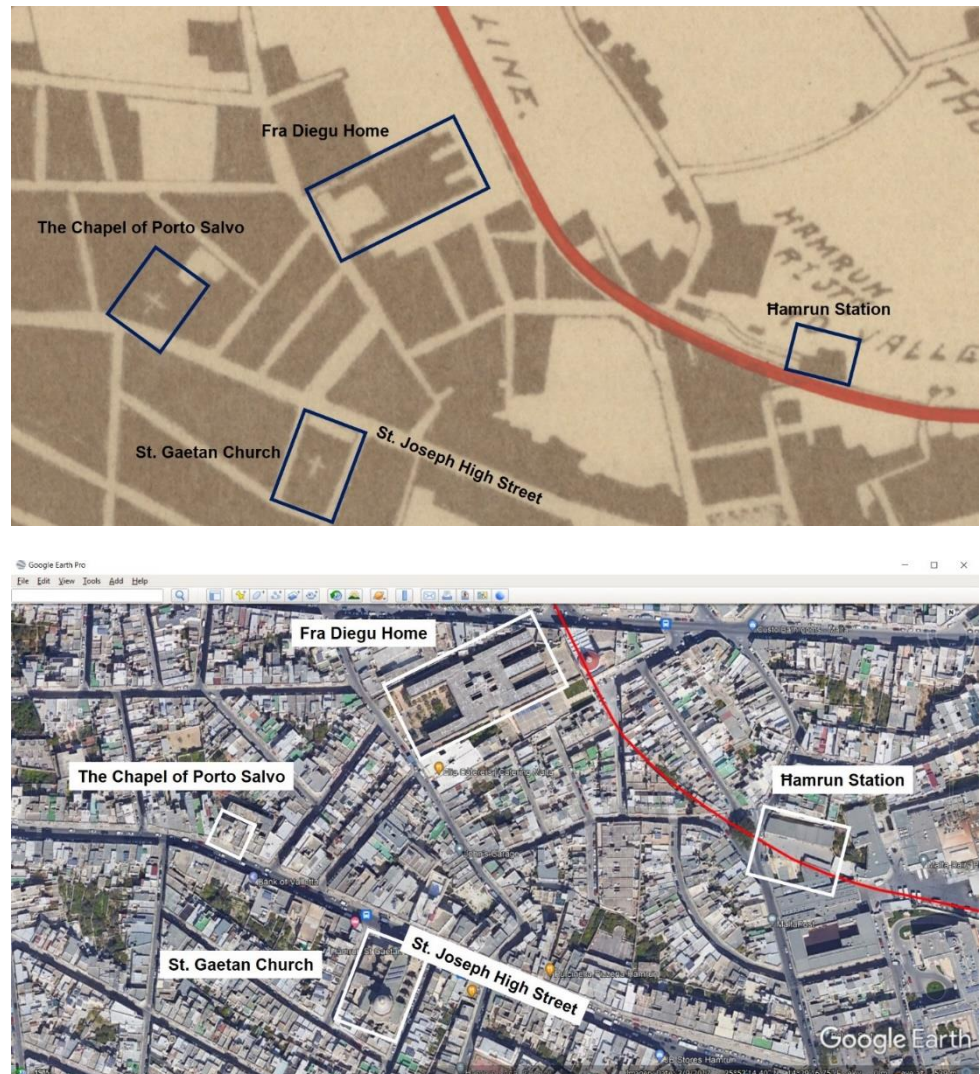


Picture 4 - Malta Railway Route: Part 1 of NAM PDM63223 from Valletta to Balzan



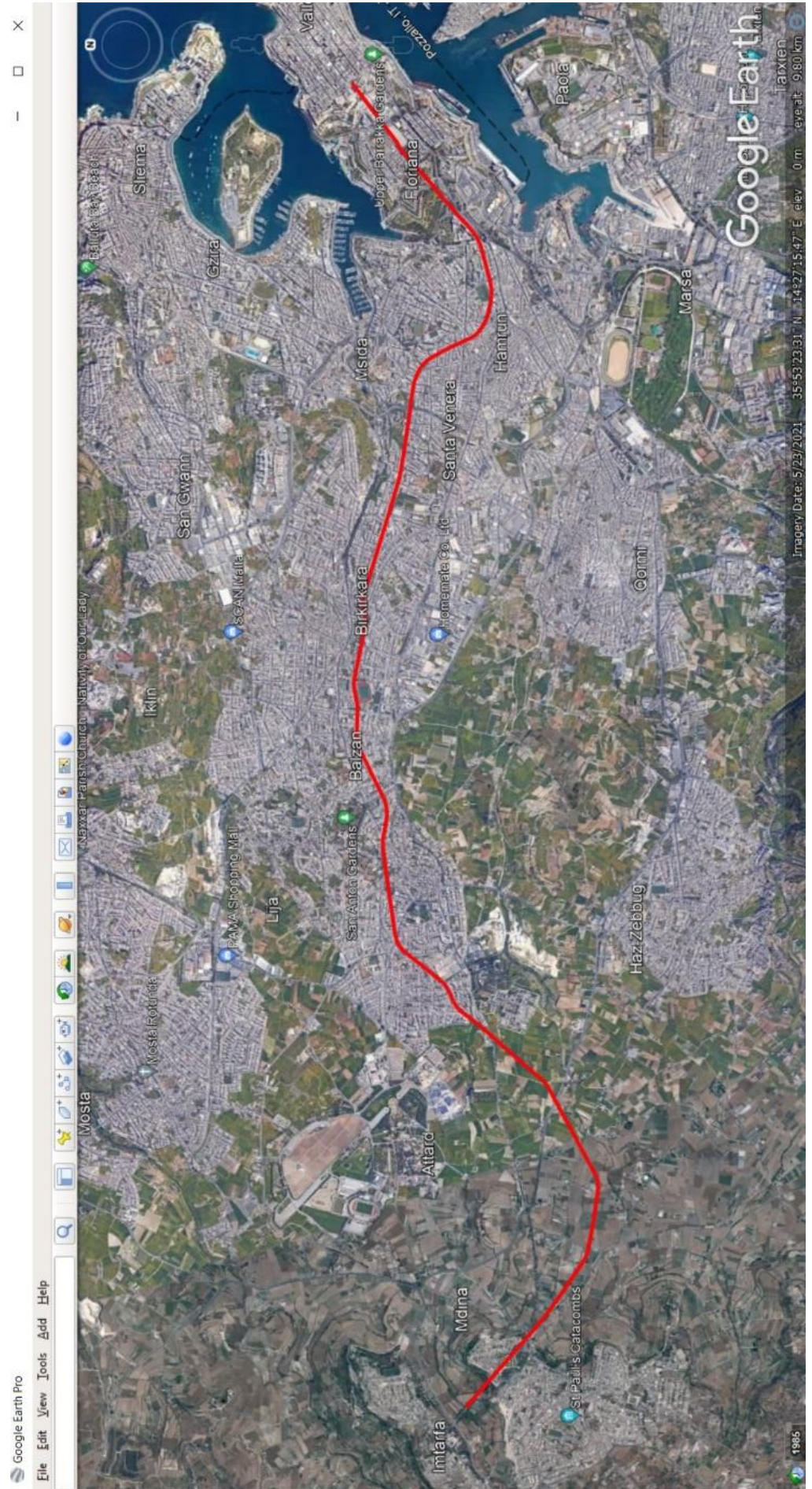
Picture 5 - Malta Railway Route: Part 2 of NAM PDM63223 from Attard to Mtarfa

The whole route was then drawn on Google Earth Pro step by step, using reference points, marks and locations, to provide the complete passage of the railway in Malta. Hereunder in Picture 6, is a sample of this exercise, with an enlarged section of the original map marked with key landmarks that are still present today, and the railway route as drawn on Google Earth Pro.



Picture 6 - The comparative work carried out between the original railway map (top picture) and Google Earth Pro (bottom picture), with the red line indicating the railway line.

The complete and final result of this exercise is being reproduced in the next page of this study (vide Picture 7).



Picture 7 - The mapping result of the full Malta Railway route on Google Earth Pro

4.2 Analysis of the remains of the Malta Railway

Following this exercise, the route of the Malta Railway was analysed and documented as specified in the Methodology (Section 3). In this part of the study, the conclusions of this analysis will be illustrated, by giving details, section by section, as to how the area looks today, starting from the Valletta Station and going all the way to Mtarfa.

4.2.1 Valletta Station

The Valletta station was situated on the side of the Royal Opera House, in the corner between Republic Street (*Strada Reale* or Kingsway) and Ordnance Street (*Strada Vittoria*), on the site which today is occupied by the House of Parliament. The station itself was a classic building, with a series of columns, respectful to the dignity and style of the city entrance (Rigby, 2004, p. 17). This building was used as a booking office, waiting area and offices, and led the passengers to the train platform some 35 feet (10.7 metres) below street level. The building was damaged in World War II, on the 7th April 1942 during the same aerial bombing raid that severely damaged the Royal Opera House. No remains of the station building exist today, as the area changed a lot in these last 80 years.



Picture 8 - Valletta station (source: Malta Railway Foundation)



Picture 9 - Valletta station building (on the left) damaged from the bombing during World War II (source: Stan Fraser Collection, NAM through Malta Railway Foundation)



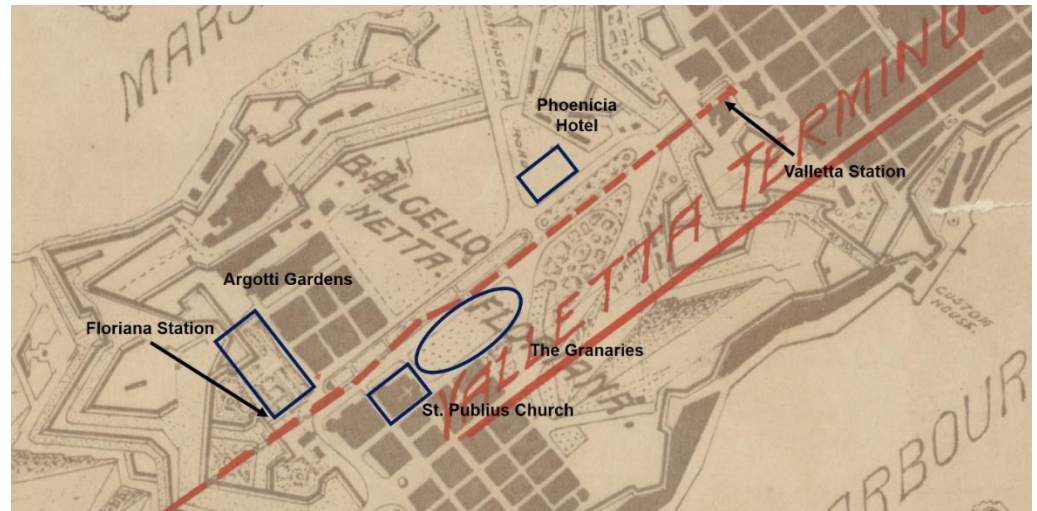
Picture 10 - The new entrance to City Gate with the Valletta station building on the left (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

As for the train platforms themselves, these were situated deep inside a tunnel at Porta Reale Curtain, and until a few years ago this was accessible via the Valletta Ditch through what used to be the Yellow Garage parking site. Unfortunately, following the regeneration of this area, this tunnel was taken over by the Parliament administration to be converted into archives and other ancillary services, and thus is no longer accessible. All the entrances leading to this tunnel through the stairs that are situated next to City Gate on the side of the House of Parliament have been blocked (Picture 11).



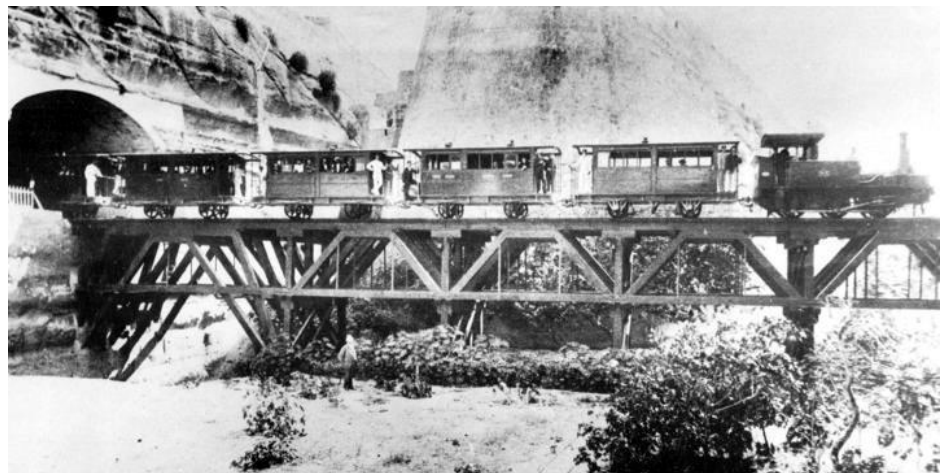
Picture 11 – One of the entrances leading to the Valletta station tunnel blocked by a steel door, as it now leads to the House of Parliament Archives

4.2.2 The tunnel between the Valletta and Floriana stations

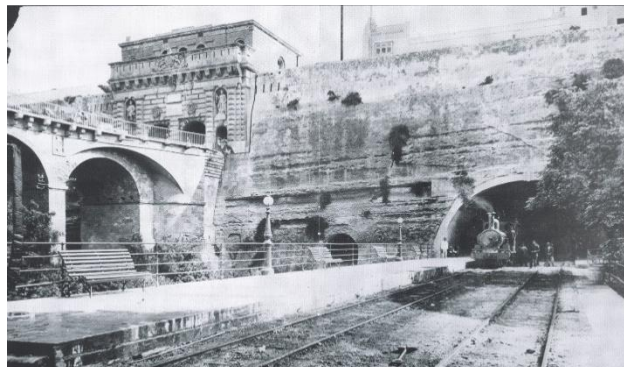


Route Section 1 - From Valletta to Floriana stations

Once the train left Valletta station it passed over a viaduct, originally made from wood then replaced with a stone one, to continue its journey underground towards Floriana station, through a tunnel almost 900 metres long. The tunnel passed under King Edward VII Road (close to the statue of Christ the King in front of Phoenixia Hotel) and the Mall Gardens, all the way to St. Philip's Gardens next to Argotti Gardens. It was commonly referred to by commuters as *il-Mina is-Sewda* (the Black Tunnel) due to its poor lighting conditions.



Picture 12 (top) – A Manning, Wardle 0-6-0T locomotive leaving Valletta through the wooden viaduct (source: Malta Railway Foundation)



Picture 13 (left) – A train on the stone bridge leading to the Valletta station with City Gate in the background (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

Today, only the bridge is visible, prominently crossing the Valletta Ditch in Francesco Laparelli Gardens (Pictures 14 and 15), just a few metres below the main bridge leading to City Gate (*GPS coordinates 35°53'45.0"N 14°30'33.0"E*). While the bridge is in a good state of conservation, access to its upper part is not possible. Both ends of the tunnel are blocked.



Picture 14 - The Valletta railway bridge as seen from Francesco Laparelli Garden



Picture 15 - The Valletta railway bridge as seen from City Gate

The part of the tunnel leading to Floriana is today under the control of one of the telephony service providers and used by various entities to pass cables and other services. Unfortunately, this tunnel, which has even provided shelter from aerial bombings during World War II, and which could be easily converted for much better applications, is nowadays neglected and cannot be visited.

The ventilation shafts that serviced this tunnel, which until a few years ago were still visible along the perimeters of the Mall Gardens and the Granaries, have also disappeared, covered by pavements that did not respect important Malta Railway landmarks.

4.2.3 Floriana station

The Floriana station was situated underground at the far end of the Valletta-Floriana tunnel, between Argotti Gardens and the Methodist church (now Robert Samut Hall). The only structure above ground of this station was a room, without much decoration, that served as a ticketing office (Picture 16). This building is still standing today, but is closed for visitors (*GPS coordinates 35°53'31.3"N 14°30'11.3"E*).



Picture 16 - The small room that served as a ticketing office for the Floriana station

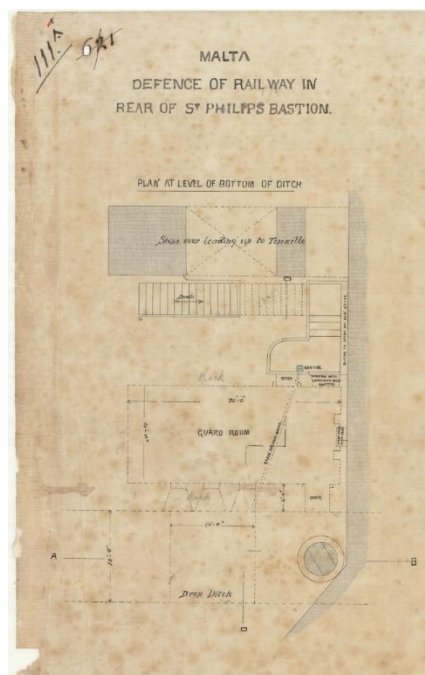


Picture 17 - The ramp leading to St. Philip's Bastions and Gardens, and to the Floriana station platform



Picture 18 - Part of the Floriana station tunnel complex

The station platform is situated at a depth of 90 feet (27.4 metres), accessible through a series of steps and tunnels. Due to this depth and the number of steps, it seems that this station was not very popular with commuters, who often preferred to use the Valletta station instead (Rigby, 2004, p. 23). Due to the breach in the fortifications caused by the tunnel, and given the importance that fortifications still had in the late 1800s, the British military made sure to defend this station with a number of bunkers and defensive positions to protect Valletta from any attacks through the tunnel (Picture 19).



Picture 19 - The plan of the defensive positions for the entrance of the railway tunnel (NAM PDM62910) and photos of the structures themselves with the gun firing position posts in the lower right picture)

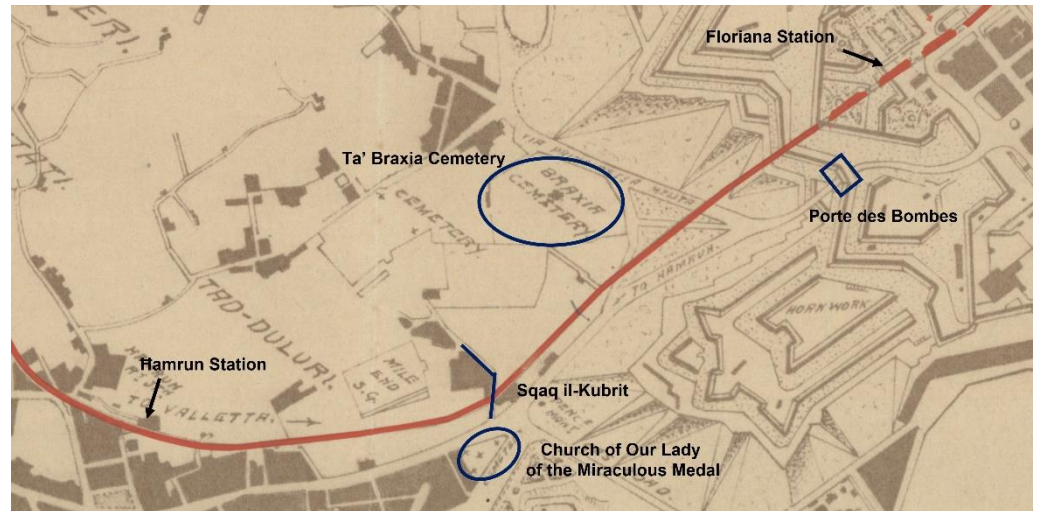
This station is a very interesting historical complex that include the Bastion of St. Philip, the gardens on top with the fountain that once stood in front of the Grandmaster's Palace in Valletta, structures from the British period to protect the *polverista* (powder magazine), and the Malta Railway platform and tunnels. Currently, access to these places is not possible due to renovation works that are being carried out in the gardens. Upon completion of works, the upper part leading to the gardens will be accessible daily, although the area pertaining to the Malta Railway will still be closed off to the public.



Picture 20 - A collection of pictures showing the state of neglect of the Floriana station

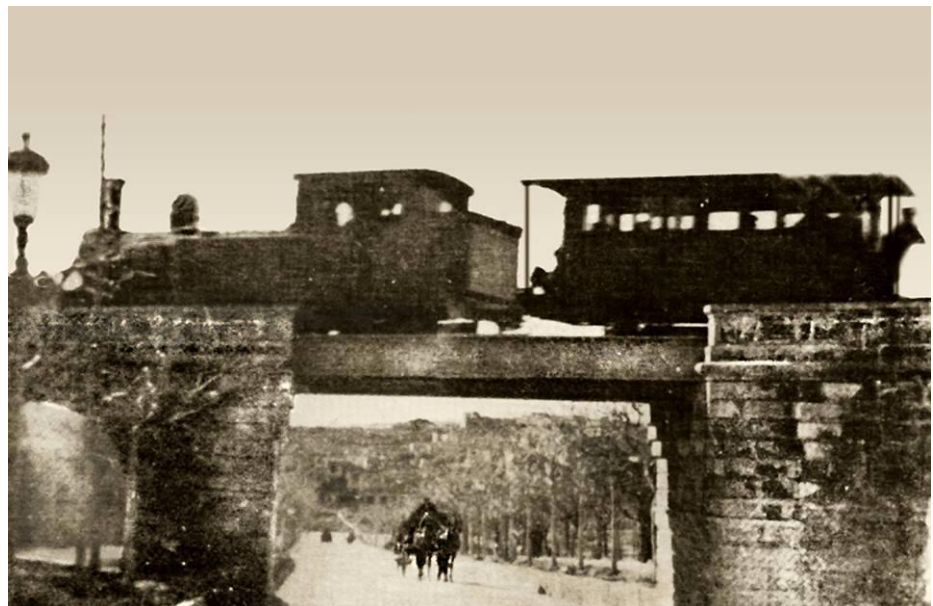
The part housing the train platform is in a sorry state, with barely any attempts being done to preserve and conserve it. The area is closed off and is only accessible one or two times a year during activities organized by the Floriana Local Council. Otherwise, the complex is very dark and unsafe. For this study, the writer could witness the status of this structure after obtaining permission to visit parts of the complex, under the guidance of Paul Galea together with representatives of the Floriana Local Council.

4.2.4 From Floriana station to Hamrun station



Route Section 2 - From Floriana to Hamrun stations

The train left Floriana station and it proceeded through the tunnel to emerge from St. Philip's Bastion for a few metres in Notre Dame Ditch, before re-entering a shorter tunnel inside the *Fausse Braye*. Once the outer fortifications of Floriana were reached, it passed over a six-arched stone bridge. From there, it crossed Princess Melita Street (today Independence Road) via a steel bridge, and continued next to Ta' Braxia Cemetery towards Spencer Hill, with its rails running almost parallel to Blata il-Bajda Road (today National Road). Then it proceeded to Mile End Road* in Hamrun to enter the station complex.



Picture 21 - A train passing over the viaduct in Princess Melita Street
(source: Malta Railway Foundation)

Today, in this stretch of railway measuring about 1.2 km, the only significant remains of the railway are found near Porte des Bombes. The most important and prominent of these is the six-arched stone bridge on the left just before passing Porte des Bombes on the way to Valletta (*GPS coordinates 35°53'26.3"N 14°30'04.2"E*). Visitors can safely and easily visit this structure which is found in the Floriana Garden, through a pathway next to the entrance to the subway under National Road (Pictures 22 A and 22 B).



Picture 22 A - The six-arched stone bridge near Porte des Bombes



Picture 22 B - The tunnel entrance, today blocked, on the upper part of the bridge

The tunnel portal in Notre Dame Ditch leading to St. Philip's Bastion is also still visible (Picture 23), situated in the area today used as a car park next to Porte des Bombes, although the tunnel itself is not accessible (*GPS coordinates 35°53'27.6"N 14°30'06.4"E*).



Picture 23 - The tunnel portal into St. Philip's Bastion at Notre Dame Ditch



Picture 24 – Blata il-Bajda as it was during the time of the Malta Railway, with Porte des Bombes and the Floriana fortifications in the background. A couple of people are walking freely along the railway lines, while a tram is on its way to Valletta
(source: Malta Railway Foundation)

The rest of the route to Hamrun is devoid of any further remains, as both the steel bridge across Princess Melita Street and the rest of the embankment were demolished, or replaced by the extensive buildings in the area, namely commercial outlets along National Road and residential homes along Mile End Street (Picture 24). Still a few loose stones that formed the embankment can be observed in the car park near Gattard House (Picture 25).



Picture 25 – Some remains of the embankment at the car park near Gattard House in Blata il-Bajda

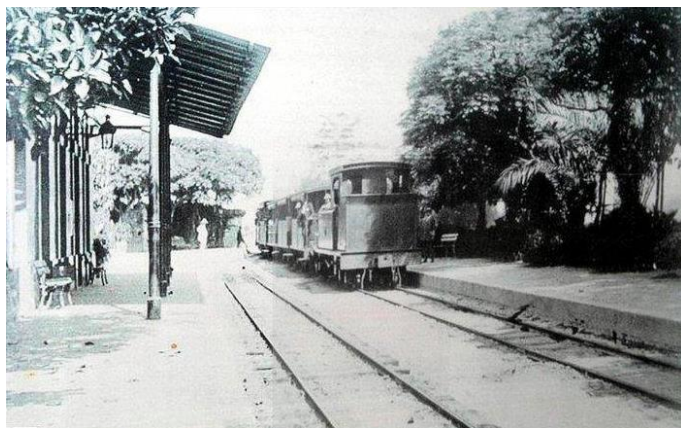
In this area, there are two streets whose names are synonymous with the railway. The first is Mile End Road, which is often associated with political party activities, yet the area was already well known in the late 1800s (well before today's political parties were born), particularly in connection with a sports ground that bore this name, and that was situated in the area today occupied by San Ġorġ Preca College. The present road itself kept much of the curvature of the railway lines.

The second is *Sqaq il-Kubrit* (Sulphur Lane), situated in front of the Church of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (better known as *Il-Knisja tal-Mużew*) in Blata l-Bajda. In the days of the railway, in this area there used to be a pit next to which the locomotives would stop to dispose of their used coal, hence the name of this road.

4.2.5 Hamrun station

The Hamrun station was a very large complex, as besides the station itself, it also housed the administration of the railway, and the maintenance and engineering sheds. Bonnici and Cassar describe it as:

As originally designed, Hamrun Station had two platforms with sidings leading to a carriage and engine shed. Passengers were provided with a shelter shed and there was a small booking office and a room for the Station Master. Hamrun Central Station, as it was known, was the place where the engines were coaled, washed, painted and repaired. Up and down trains were “made up” according to daily requirements. From the very start, Hamrun Central Station was considered as important a station as, if not more than, Valletta and Notabile. (Bonnici & Cassar, 1992, p. 41)



Picture 26 – The Hamrun station with a train waiting at the platform on its way to Valletta (source: Malta Railway Foundation)



Picture 27 – The maintenance and engineering huts of the Malta Railway in Hamrun (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

Today, the Hamrun station itself is in use by the 1st Hamrun Scouts Group, at Triq il-Ferrovija (*GPS coordinates 35°53'14.3"N 14°29'23.8"E*). The façade of the station is in good condition (Picture 28). The place can be visited on request, whenever members of this Scouts group are on premises.



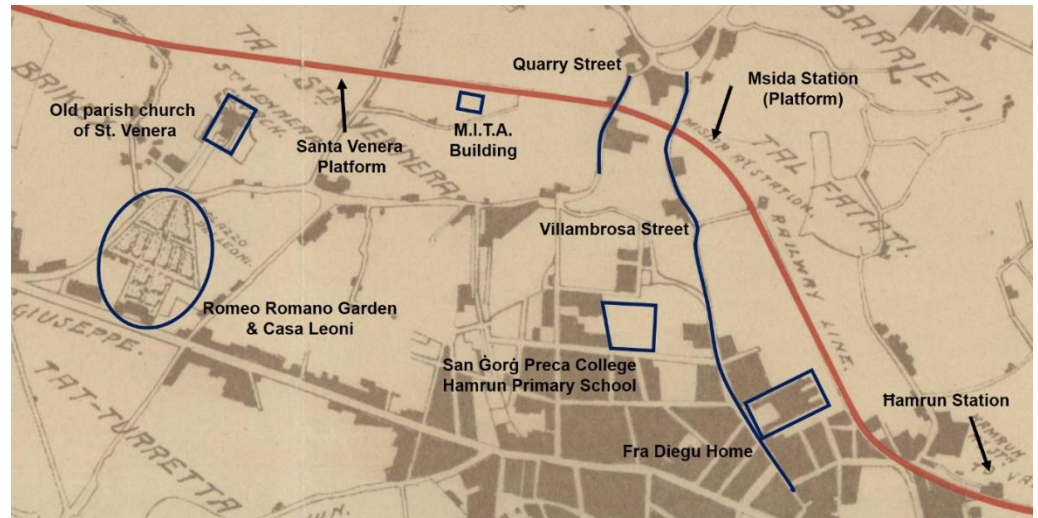
Picture 28 - The Hamrun station currently being used by the 1st Hamrun Scouts Group

The maintenance and engineering sheds form part of the Malta Dairy Products Limited complex situated in Mile End Road (*GPS coordinates 35°53'13.3"N 14°29'28.4"E*). Some of the equipment used by railway personnel, like winches and other material, is still on sight (Picture 29). However, being part of a commercial enterprise, with strict sanitary and hygienic controls, this place is not accessible to the public, and cannot be visited. In February 2022, the government announced plans for this factory to be relocated to an industrial zone, and this area is planned to be converted into a public garden (Lovin Malta, 21-02-2022). If the project materialises, the maintenance sheds will form part of this open space and will be accessible to visitors.



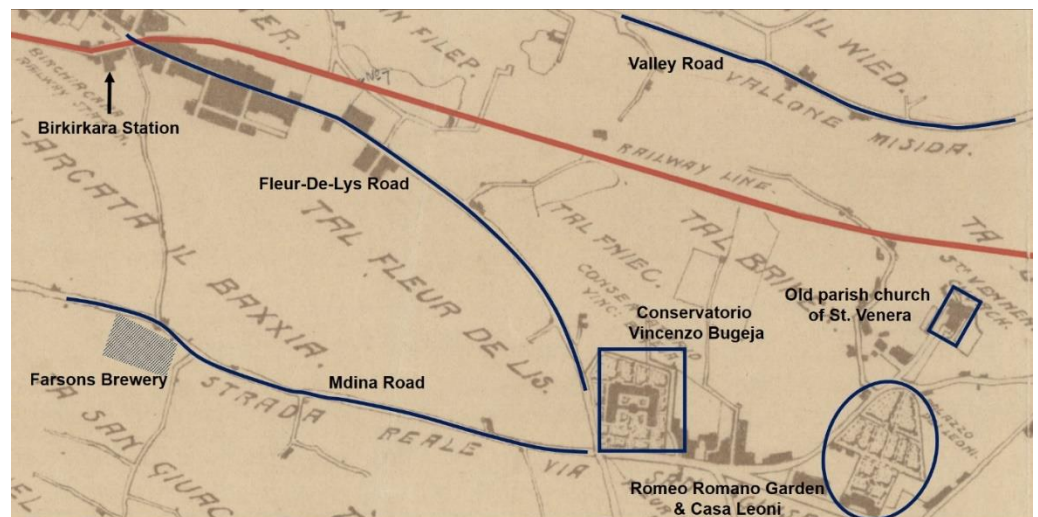
Picture 29 - Winches at the Maintenance and Engineering Shed of the Malta Railway, today occupied by the Malta Dairy Products Limited
(source: Ivan Bugeja through the Malta Railway Facebook page)

4.2.6 From Hamrun station to Birkirkara station



Route Section 3 - Part 1: From Hamrun station to Santa Venera

Once the train left Hamrun station, it banked to the right, crossed Sorrow Street, proceeded to Kappillan Mifsud Street* where it stopped at the Msida platform. Once it left Msida platform, the train took a westerly direction, through Old Railway Track*. Half way along this road, it stopped briefly at Santa Venera platform and then onwards to Salvu Psaila Street*, where it crossed Fleur-De-Lys Road* to enter the Birkirkara station.



Route Section 4 - Part 2: From Santa Venera to Birkirkara station

This stretch of the railway route barely contains any physical remains of its passage, other than about 30 metres of wall which formed part of the embankment at Kappillan Mifsud Street corner with Emvin Cremona Street, a few metres away from Santa Venera Lidl Supermarket (GPS coordinates $35^{\circ}53'32.1''N$ $14^{\circ}29'02.8''E$) (Picture 30).



Picture 30 - Part of the embankment at Kappillan Mifsud Street

There is also a small piece of the railway track which was inserted upright at Salvu Psaila Street corner with St. Anthony Street in Birkirkara, next to Andrew's Snack Bar (*GPS coordinates 35°53'41.1"N 14°28'09.2"E*) (Picture 31).



Picture 31 - A piece of rail inserted upright near Andrew's Snack Bar

The Msida platform was a very basic structure, which was situated close to Santa Venera Lidl Supermarket. Rigby writes *"the platform was never more than a baked-earth raised portion with boundary flagstones. It seems this little place from the very beginning fulfilled the functions of a halt as implied by that word in English railway practice"* (Rigby, 2004, p. 31).

As a result of the development that was carried out in this area, all traces of this platform were lost. Close to this platform, in 2021, a large mural was depicted to commemorate the railway and St. George Preca (1880-1962) who lived nearby during the time when the railway was in operation (Picture 32). This mural can be found in a small garden dedicated to Salvino Spiteri (*GPS coordinates 35°53'28.9"N 14°29'09.9"E*).



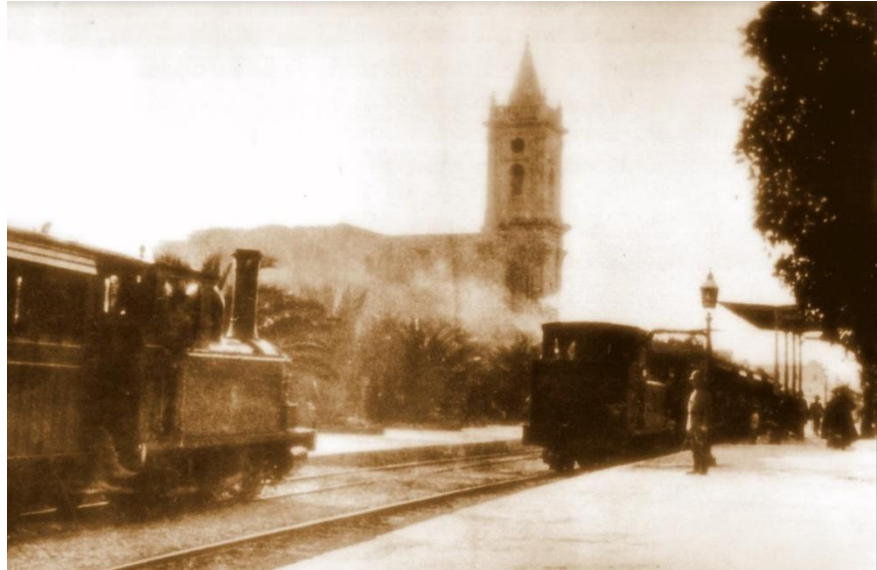
Picture 32 - The mural dedicated to the train and St. George Preca in Salvino Spiteri Garden

On a similar note, no evidence of the Santa Venera platform remains. Indeed, this was a very small rudimentary structure, possibly just a marked stop. It was situated close to the old Santa Venera church, with the area today being occupied by a number of showrooms in Old Railway Track, close to Falzon Bathrooms & Ceramics.

Interesting to note that from the Hamrun station all the way to where St. Salvatore platform was situated near Mount Carmel Hospital in Attard, one can easily trace much of the railway route since the vast majority of this part of the track was converted to main roads that still follow the curvature used by the railway.

4.2.7 Birkirkara station

Birkirkara station was situated close to the old parish church of this village which dominated the view. It had two large platforms across the whole length of the double tracks, beautifully decorated with flower pots, trees and various benches.



Picture 33 - The Birkirkara station with a train (on the left) going to Mdina and another one (on the right) returning to Valletta (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

The station building itself was constructed in the Victorian style, with a sun canopy on the platform. Its name Birkirkara was printed in black above the doorway. The station was a magnificent building. Rigby describes it as *“Birkirkara station was a place to go to, not invariably in order to catch a train, but also to sit, chat or snooze and watch the traffic go by, in much the same way as is done in some airports today”* (Rigby, 2004, p. 33).



Picture 34 - The Birkirkara station today, with the old parish church still partially dominating the view.

Following the closure of the Malta Railway, this station was abandoned. Later it was used by the Public Works, then as a kindergarten school, and in recent years as the Birkirkara Local Council building. With the collaboration of the local council, this building was passed on to the Malta Railway Foundation which obtained EU funding to restore this place and transform it into a museum. Today this station can be found at Ġnien l-Istazzjon (Station Garden) in Birkirkara, with entrances either from next to the bus station, or from near the old parish church of Birkirkara dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, or from the main gate at Triq il-Kulleġġjata (*GPS coordinates 35°53'43.2"N 14°27'50.8"E*) (Picture 35). It is a very well-kept place, and through its design, it offers a very unique experience. Keeping in mind Rigby's description, here a visitor can easily imagine how the station would have looked like during Malta Railway operations.



Picture 35 - The Birkirkara station with its sun canopy and railway carriage

Thanks to the work of the Malta Railway Foundation, the station itself is in a very good state of conservation, complete with its sun canopy and station markings showing the station name Birkirkara, and the first- and third-class areas (second class travel service was removed by the Malta Railway early during the days of its operations). For the time being, visits to the building itself are limited, and can only be done by appointment with the Foundation itself. At the moment, preparations for the first Transport Museum are underway in this building that will house the Railway Museum on the ground floor and a section dedicated to the tram service on the upper floor. This museum is expected to be inaugurated at the end of February 2023, for the 140th anniversary of the commencement of train travel in Malta.

In front of the bus terminus, the corner between Salvu Psaila Street and Fleur-De-Lys Road is very iconic to the railway, as this corner with the niche on top of it served as a background for one of the most known photographs of the Malta Railway, with the passing of the train on its way to Valletta and the chain blocking the crossing for a mule/donkey driven cart. This corner is still recognizable till this very day, a testament to times gone by (*GPS coordinates 35°53'43.1"N 14°27'56.7"E*) (Picture 36).



Picture 36 - A side-by-side comparison of the corner between Salvu Psaila Street and Fleur-De-Lys Road then and now (source: Picture on the left from the Malta Railway Foundation)

Furthermore, the Birkirkara station and gardens offer visitors two other experiences of the Malta Railway – the remains of the sole surviving carriage and railway guard hut used by the railway.

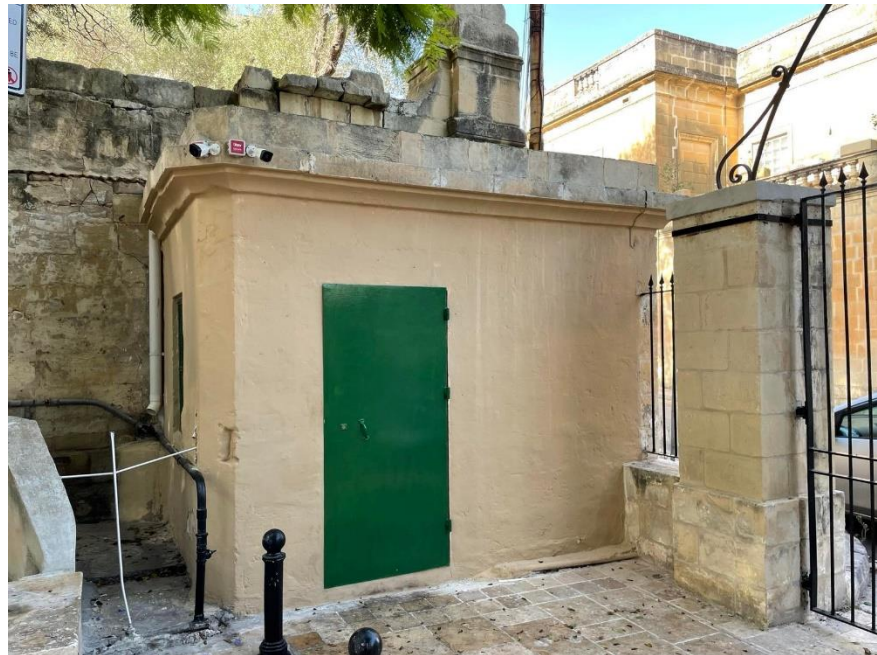
As mentioned in the Introduction (Section 1.1), the Malta Railway had 33 carriages specifically arranged for first-class and third-class services, and a very unique one reserved for the governor. Unfortunately, during the years all of these carriages were lost. Only one survived, a third-class carriage that was



Picture 37 - The 3rd Class Carriage used by the Malta Railway, now protected by a glass cover at Birkirkara station

saved by the Malta Railway Foundation when it was in a very bad state of conservation. It was skilfully restored and is now displayed on the platform in front of the station, protected by a glass cover (Picture 37).

At the far end of the garden, next to the entrance leading to the old parish church of Birkirkara lies a small room – one of 14 railway guard huts that were built along the railway route (Picture 38). This one in Birkirkara Station Garden is the only one to survive.



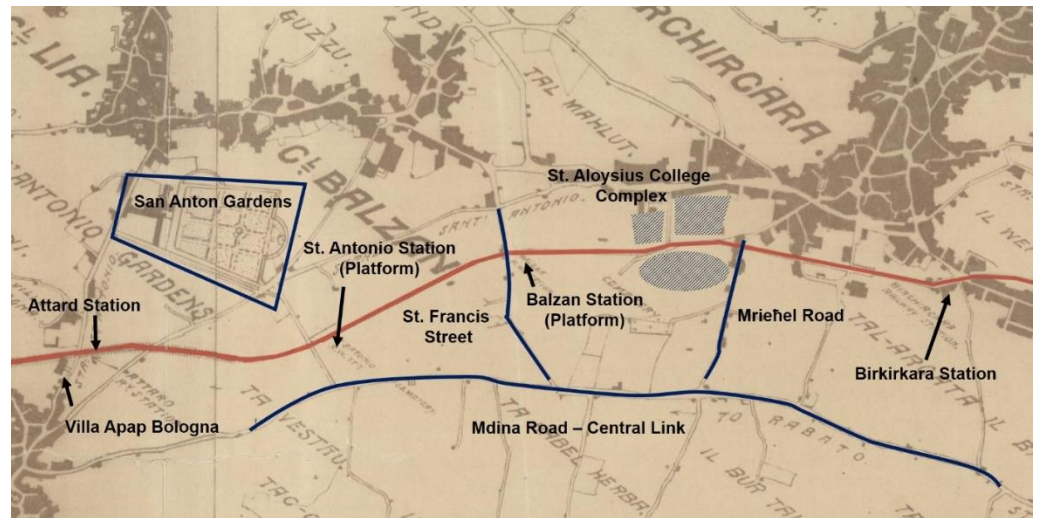
Picture 38 - The sole surviving railway guard hut at the Birkirkara station

As a side note, none of the ten engines acquired and used by the railway survived, indeed there are only a handful of the makes and models used at the time that still exist around the world. Similarly, none of the undercarriages (wheels) have survived, but a recent discovery in the Grand Harbour opened up the possibility that some still exist, and hopefully with some financial aid, the Foundation will be in a position to recover these artefacts and restore them for future display (Picture 39).



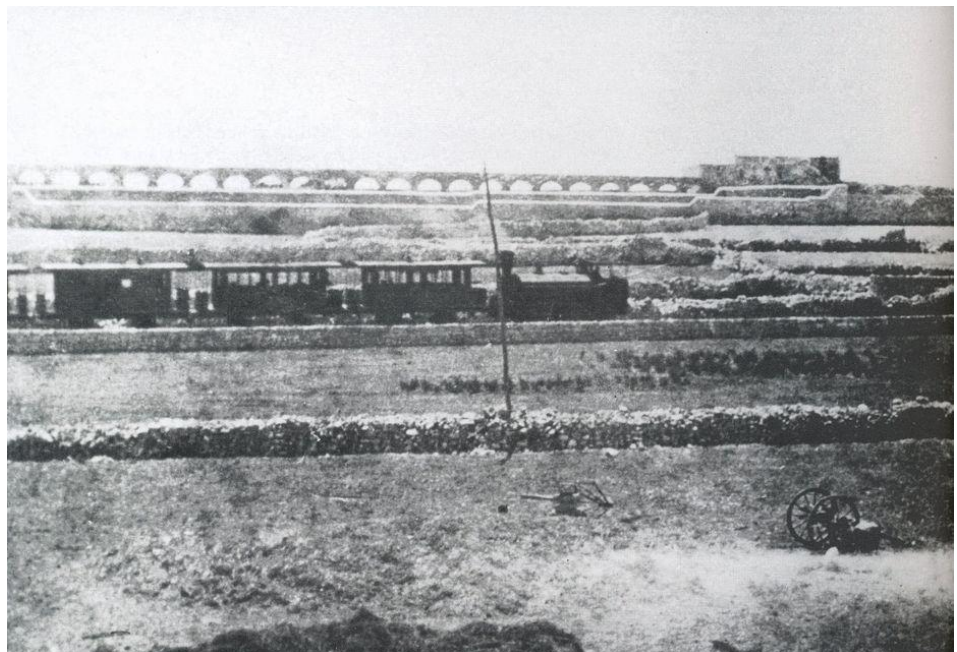
Picture 39 - One of the undercarriages used by the Malta Railway in the Grand Harbour (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

4.2.8 From Birkirkara station to Attard station



Route Section 5 - From Birkirkara to Attard stations

After leaving Birkirkara station, the train proceeded in a westerly direction, almost in a straight line through Triq il-Ferrovija I-Qadima*, passing through fields and countryside where today St. Aloysius College complex can be found, to stop at the Balzan platform. From there, it continued along Triq il-Ferrovija I-Qadima*, banking slightly to the south-west towards San Antonio platform. It crossed Vjal De Paule* to continue on a prominent embankment along Triq il-Linja in Attard, crossing Birkirkara Road on a purposely-built steel and stone bridge just before it entered Attard station.



Picture 40 - From times gone by, a train going to Valletta somewhere near Balzan, with the Wignacourt Aqueduct in the background (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

From Birkirkara station to San Antonio platform, development and construction have eliminated all traces of the railway, and other than the street names and the curvature of the main roads that take visitors along the railway route, nothing more can be observed (vide Picture 40 for comparison). Similar to the Msida and Santa Venera platforms, Balzan “station” was merely a halt consisting of a simple low-lying platform, near St. Francis Street, which area is today a residential zone.

The same can be said to San Antonio platform, which was a rudimentary halt mainly used by people wanting to go to San Anton Gardens. In fact, this platform was situated close to the main road Vjal de Paule that leads to the gardens, just opposite Corinthia Palace Hotel. Near this point, a very interesting feature exists – a small piece of rail, which years ago was inserted upright to support a small shrub that was planted in the area has served its purpose, with the plant now becoming a fully-grown tree enshrouding most of this rail support (*GPS coordinates 35°53'39.3"N 14°27'02.8"E*) (Picture 41).



Picture 41 - The large tree at Triq il-Ferrovija il-Qadima in Attard that has grown around a rail

Crossing Vjal de Paule, into Triq Il-Linja, next to Corinthia Palace Hotel one comes across the most visible remains of the Malta Railway – about 350 metres of embankment that in 2019 were restored by the Attard Local Council using the European Regional and Development Funds, in a project entitled “Restoration of the former railway embankment of F’Attard”, which is part of Il-Vapur tal-Art: the F’Attard Railway Heritage initiative. This embankment starts low, at street level, but as it approaches Attard station it becomes steeper, almost one storey high. A number of passages, today closed off or walled, allowed people, mainly farmers, to pass under the railroad with their produce and livestock (*GPS coordinates 35°53'36.8"N 14°26'53.7"E*). Various pictures of this embankment can be seen on the next page (Pictures 42-44).



Picture 42 - Parts of the Malta Railway embankment found in Triq il-Linja, Attard



Picture 43 - Openings in the embankment were constructed to allow people to safely cross the railway tracks



Picture 44 - The highest point in the Attard embankment, as it crosses Birkirkara Road

The gap in the embankment when it crosses Birkirkara Road is the site where, during the time the Malta Railway was in operation, a steel beam structure stood between two stone buttresses forming a bridge supported by central columns, on which the railroad proceeded to Attard station, a few meters away (Pictures 44 and 45). The two stone buttresses still stand at each side of the embankment, guarding the road which from San Anton Gardens leads to Attard centre (*GPS*

coordinates 35°53'37.8"N 14°26'47.2"E). Daily, hundreds of cars pass by where once the trains of the Malta Railways crossed overhead.



Picture 45 - Then and now, Birkirkara Road from St. Anton Gardens and Corinthia Palace Hotel, where in the times of the Malta Railway, a bridge would allow the train to pass overhead
(source: Picture on the left through the Malta Railway Foundation)

Visitors can walk along this embankment, and safely experience this part of the railway route. They can appreciate the workmanship and skill used at the time, and understand the role of embankments – being structures constructed by railway civil engineers to allow railway lines to pass over low-lying ground at an acceptable gradient.

4.2.9 Attard station

Like Birkirkara, Attard station was also constructed around a garden, today known as Ġnien l-Istazzjon (Station Garden) (*GPS coordinates 35°53'37.6"N 14°26'42.7"E*).



Picture 46 - Attard Station as a Malta Railway train makes its way to Valletta, with Villa Apap Bologna in the background (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

The station building itself consisted of a booking office and waiting areas. Unlike in the other main stations (with the exception of Floriana), this station did not have a double track, used by trains going in different directions to surpass each other. Rigby gives a somewhat romantic description of this station:

Attard, one felt, was the first of the uplands stations. The word uplands ... is used to emphasise that here was the dividing line between two types of terrain served by the railway. The economic functions, of the towns surrounding Valletta had expanded rapidly during the lifetime the railway... and from the point of view of the little railway, Attard station was a recognisable dividing point. One could stand on either platform and look back towards Valletta, below the fields to Hamrun and beyond to the capital; and appreciate how much the train had climbed since leaving Valletta.

(Rigby, 2004, p. 39)

The station was destroyed in World War II, on the 20th March 1942, during an aerial bombardment (Picture 47). At the time it was used as a Victory Kitchen and dispensary (NAM CSG01 129/1942 p194).

Air Raid No.1853. (1919-2332 hrs) 20-3-42.

Incendiary bombs fell and ignited in fields in the limits of Bingham, causing neither damages nor casualties.

Attard:- Two bombs fell and exploded in the garden of Rose Villa causing only slight damages, another two bombs fell and exploded in the garden of Villa Bologna causing only slight damages to same, no casualties. Another two bombs fell and exploded in St. Anthony street, damaging the Victory Kitchen and the dispensary, no casualties. Bombs fell and exploded on the Hospital for Mental Diseases (Criminal-Section) Four patients were extricated from under the debris dead, two others were injured.

Zebbug:- Four houses in alley No.1 Muxi Square and one in Annunciation Street demolished, one person was slightly injured and remitted to Hospital.

Malta:- Bombs fell and exploded at Notabile Road, demolishing two houses and severely damaging other buildings in the vicinity, two persons were killed and others severely injured and remitted to Hospital. Military stores in via Notabile damaged.

Mgabba:- A bomb fell and exploded in parish street, causing damage to woodwork and glass of building in the vicinity, another bomb fell and exploded at Ta Paul, damaging a farmhouse, no casualties.

St. Julians:- Six bombs fell and exploded harmlessly near St. Julians Ranges, no casualties.

Picture 47 - Extract from Police Air Raid Report dated 20th March 1942 found at the National Archives which mentions the attack on the Attard station
(source: NAM CSG01 129/1942 p.194)

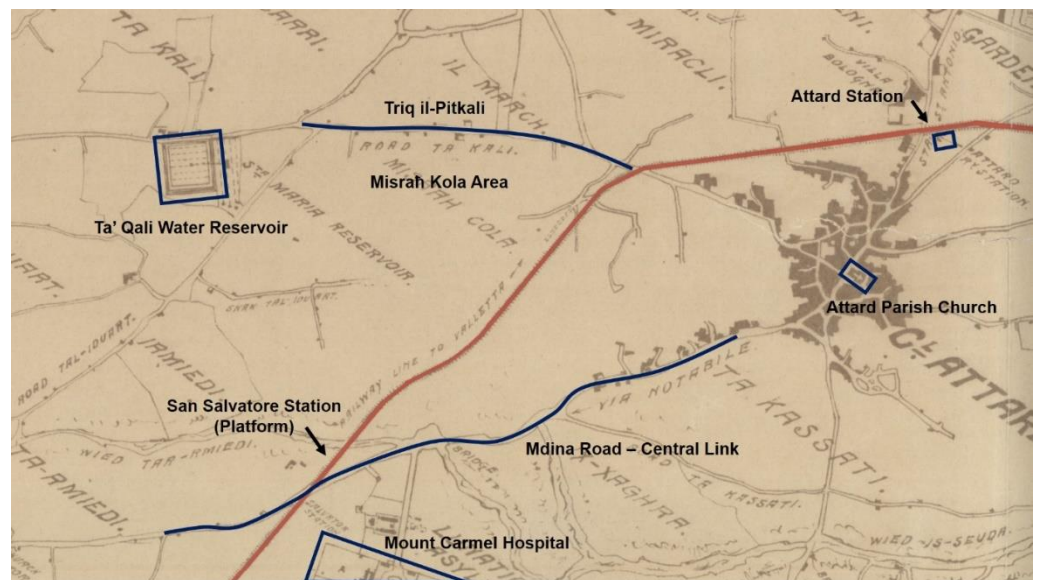
During the years, attempts to build a structure similar to the station on this site failed to produce the desired results. At the moment, the gardens cannot be visited, as they are closed for renovation, with a new building planned to be constructed to better represent the station during the time of the Malta Railway.

This forms part of the H'Attard Railway Heritage initiative already mentioned in Section 4.2.8 (Picture 48).



Picture 48 – Ġnien l-Istazzjon in Attard currently closed for renovation

4.2.10 From Attard station to San Salvatore station



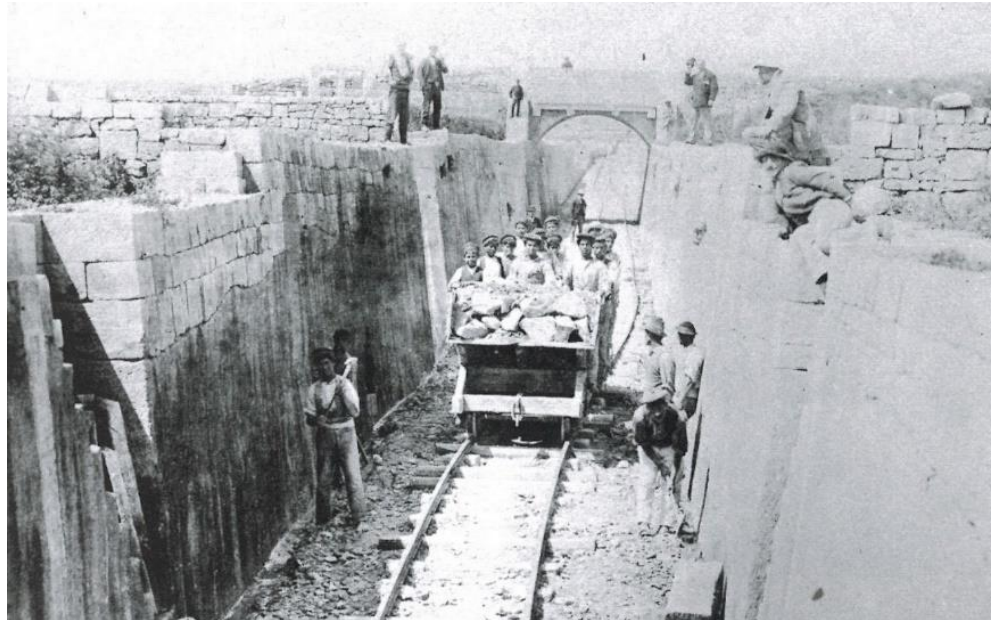
Route Section 6 - From Attard to San Salvatore stations

The train left Attard station travelling straight into Triq il-Linja, next to Villa Apap Bologna and proceeded to San Salvatore station, initially in a westerly direction and then banked to the south west through the Misraħ Kola zone. It travelled a distance of about 1.5 km in a few minutes.

Today the whole stretch of road which bears the name Triq il-Linja and follows the curvature of the rails (going all the way from Ġnien l-Istazzjon, in front of Santa Luċija Cafeteria, the M4 Supermarket, Misraħ Kola and ending next to the Ivory & Co. establishment) is a reminder of the railway passage, albeit with very little additional physical evidence, with the exception of two places, that

formed part of the supporting structure next to which the railway passed. There places are:

- parts of the boundary wall of Villa Apap Bologna (*GPS coordinates 35°53'36.6"N 14°26'34.7"E*) (Picture 50); and
- the supporting wall next to Pjazza Pubblika Gardens in Misraħ Kola (*GPS coordinates 35°53'33.5"N 14°26'14.7"E*) (Picture 51).



Picture 49 - Parts of Triq il-Linja being prepared for the Malta Railway line
(source: Malta Railway Foundation)

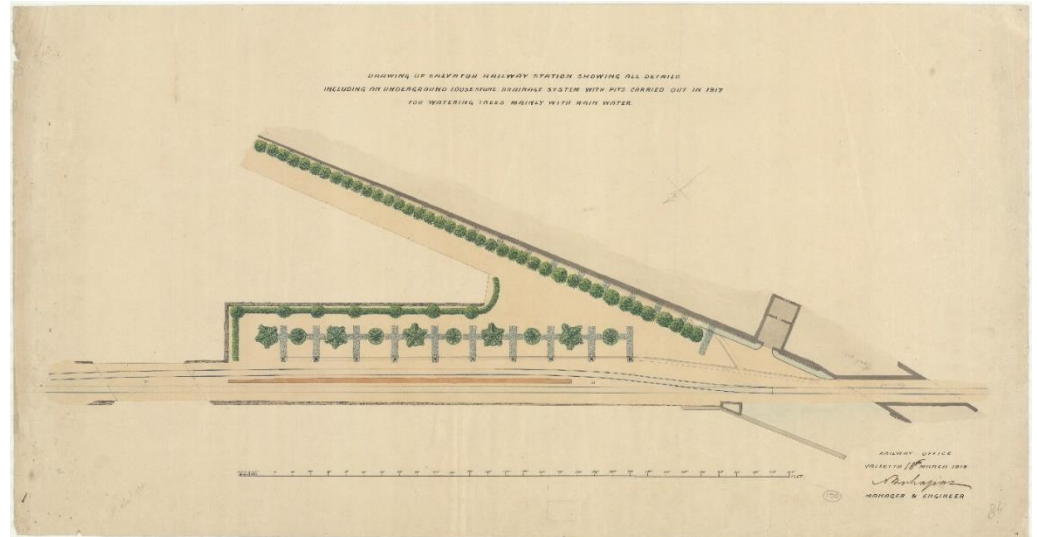


Picture 50 - The remains of the railway cuttings, now part of Villa Apap Bologna



Picture 51 - The remains of the railway cuttings, found next to Pjazza Pubblika Gardens

4.2.11 San Salvatore station



Picture 52 - Plan dated 18th March 1918 of San Salvatore station found at the National Archives of Malta (source: NAM PDM63348)

San Salvatore station consisted of a large platform, lined up with various palm and carob trees, and possibly had a small room that served as a station building. It was quite spacious, and very often the railway administration used to keep extra carriages at one of the slidings to cater for additional demand during feast days such as in the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul (*I-Imnarja*) when people flocked to Mdina. However, during the rest of the year, this station was mainly used by visitors or patients to Mount Carmel Hospital, known at the time as the Lunatic Asylum.



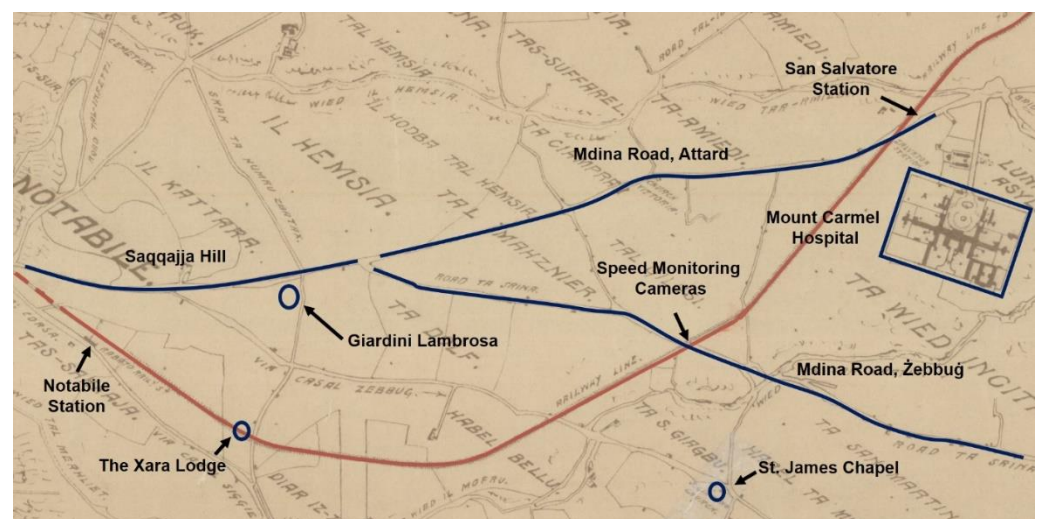
Picture 53 - The site where San Salvatore station used to be, today replaced by Ivory & Co establishment and residential houses

This station was situated at the corner between Mdina Road and Triq il-Linja in Attard, on the site where today one finds the Ivory & Co establishment and the residential houses next to it. Very little remains of this structure, with the exception of parts of the bridge that crossed over the small valley that is located at the corner between Triq il-Linja and Dun Mikiel Xerri Street (*GPS coordinates 35°53'15.4"N 14°25'52.6"E*) (Picture 54).



Picture 54 - The remains of the bridge and embankment over the valley near Dun Mikiel Xerri Street.

4.2.12 From San Salvatore station to Notabile station



Route Section 7 - From San Salvatore to Notabile stations

Once the train left San Salvatore station, it crossed Via Notabile (today Mdina Road). Following complaints by farmers that upon crossing the rails at this point, they were damaging the wheels of their horse-driven carts, an overpass bridge

was constructed under which the train passed. From here onwards to Notabile station, the route proceeded towards the open cultivated fields between Żebbuġ and Mdina. This part of the railway route between these two stations was the longest stretch of the line, measuring roughly 2.5 km.



Picture 55 - The overpass bridge crossing Mdina Road with insert showing the dismantling of it after the railway stopped operating (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

Today, this area remains largely agricultural, with very minor developments taking place other than the two main arterial roads leading to Mdina, namely Mdina Road (now part of Central Link) from Attard, and Mdina Road from Żebbuġ. Most of this route today can be easily identified, as it was turned into a country lane, which can be split into three sections.



Picture 56 - The embankment along the country road between Żebbuġ and Attard

From Mdina Road, Żebbuġ (south-bound towards Żebbuġ) just next to the speed monitoring camera, there is a lane that for about 500 metres leads to the fields beside Mount Carmel Hospital, a few metres behind Pit Stop Service Station (*GPS coordinates 35°52'54.9"N 14°25'28.7"E*). This lane eventually leads to a dead end, as it was replaced by a field. Along this path, a good part of the embankment is still in its place in the fields on the side of Mount Carmel Hospital and is clearly visible (Picture 56).



Picture 57 - Parts of the railway rock cutting along the path towards Mdina Road, Żebbuġ

From 12th May Road, Żebbuġ (being the country road which connects Saqqajja Hill to Żebbuġ) behind Giardini Lambrosa Hall, roughly half way between this hall and St. James Chapel, a crossroad divides the remaining two parts (*GPS coordinates 35°52'48.2"N 14°25'14.0"E*), as follows:

- the country lane towards Mdina Road, Żebbuġ stretches for about 300 metres ending at a dead end just a few metres off the main road. A small part of the embankment and some railway rock cuttings are still visible, and from the size and structure of the stones, it is evident that some of the stones that originally formed the embankment in this area were used for the building of rubble walls (Picture 57).

- the country lane towards Mdina is about 570 metres long, and ends at a gated field, a few metres in front of The Xara Lodge. Other than the curvature of the lane itself which gives the visitor the idea of the radius of the track used by the railway, no further evidence could be observed. In this area, it is evident that some of the stones forming the embankment were used for rubble wall (Picture 58).



Picture 58 - Stone remains that belonged to the Malta Railway along the path towards The Xara Lodge

From here onwards, no further physical evidence remains, accessible to the public. The railway passed through the structures of today's The Xara Lodge onwards to Notabile station situated a few metres away.

These three paths are only accessible from the indicated places, and can all be safely explored by visitors. These are country roads, in a relatively good condition with some parts covered in cement. The area is still pristine and a number of farmhouses, some abandoned, can also be observed, creating the perfect setting for visitors to imagine the scene of a coal-driven locomotive passing through these fields with farmers stopping from their work to have a quick look at *il-vapur tal-art*.

4.2.13 Notabile station

Until the extension of the line to Mtarfa in 1900, Notabile station was the last stop for the train. The station had two structures – a ticketing office at street level in Triq it-Tigrija (Racecourse Street) and the station itself with its platform at a lower level, for which passengers had either to use a ramp or a flight of steps. Bonnici and Cassar describe it:

The station was built at the bottom of a cutting in the areas known as Il-Qanpiena, Tas-Saqqajja and Habel Polin. A siding was provided to enable the engine to "turn" round for the down trip... Travellers complained of the small, damp and uncomfortable waiting rooms and the absence of public toilets. (Bonnici & Cassar, 1992, p. 43)



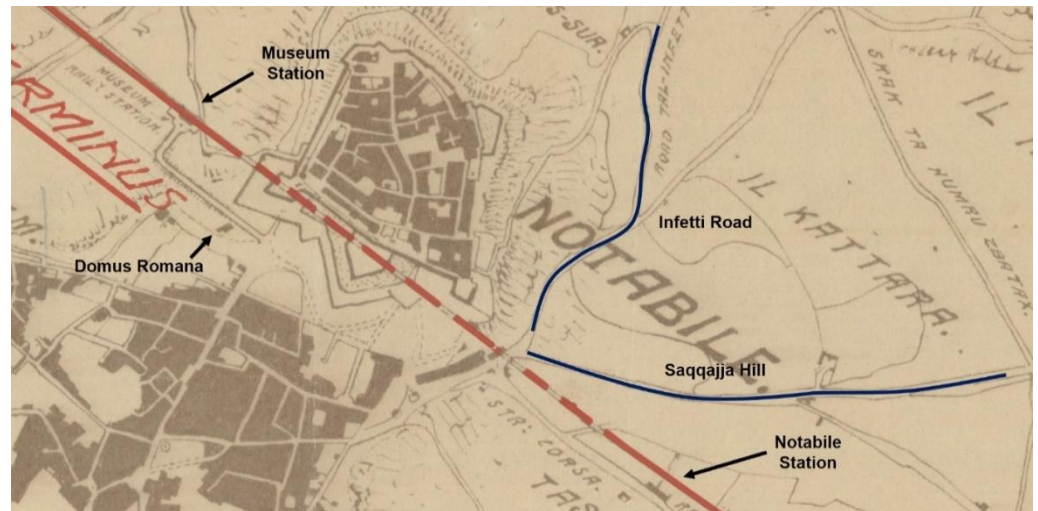
Picture 59 - Notabile station: the ticketing office at street level, the station and the platforms at a lower level, just a few metres away from the Mdina tunnel (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

Much of the area and the station itself have been levelled off for agricultural purposes in the second half of the 20th century, and it is believed that the station itself is still buried under the soil. Today, only the ticketing office remains – a small structure with faded paint in Triq it-Tigrija, just a few metres away from Saqqajja Hill (Picture 60). The property today is privately owned by farmers, and cannot be visited (*GPS coordinates* 35°52'54.7"N 14°24'25.0"E).



Picture 60 - The ticketing office at Racecourse Street

4.2.14 From Notabile station to Museum station



Route Section 8 - From Notabile to Museum stations

As soon as one arrives at Notabile station, one can easily understand the reason behind the extension of the route of the Malta Railway that was inaugurated in 1900, that provided for an added station at Museum, between Mdina and Mtarfa. The uphill road leading to Rabat and Mdina via Saqqajja Hill and the additional voyage either on foot or on horse-driven carriages onwards to Mtarfa were quite a challenge for every commuter of the railway.

Since the train could definitely not go uphill, a tunnel had to be constructed to connect the last station in the route, the Museum station. Much of the journey between these two stations ran inside this tunnel, measuring about 700 metres, and which ran from Triq it-Tigrija near Saqqajja Hill, underneath Mdina ditch, to the other side of Mdina close to Għajn Ħammieġ wash house. Rigby describes it as a major engineering and constructional achievement, and states

It pierced the hill on which stands the old capital of Mdina. Some 770 yards long, it ran through belts of blue clay and upper coralline limestone... Both the Notabile and Museum portals and supporting walls were imposing pieces of architecture, the latter (still intact) carrying the date of construction over the arch keystone. The tunnel emerged from the defence walls of the Mdina fortress almost immediately beneath the Roman Museum.
(Rigby, 2004, p. 49)

Along the whole tunnel a number of ventilation shafts were also constructed, to provide for the smoke that was generated by the engine. Both the tunnel and the ventilation shafts are still in place and preserved, and together with Museum Station and Gheriexem Bridge (which will be mentioned in the next section) are

protected by the Planning Authority with Grade 1 protection. The only exceptions are the ventilation shafts that are scheduled as Grade 3 (Picture 61). Unfortunately, however, the tunnel itself is currently not accessible to be visited by the public, and both entrances are not even safely visible from any location. Both entrances are located inside private properties and closed off.

Category	Heritage Item	Property Name/Address	Locality	Legislation	Feature	Degree
Architecture	Railway Station	il-Marg	L-Imdina	G.N. 0348 of 2001 - Development Planning Act, 1992 (Section 46) - Scheduling of Property (PDF)	Railway Station	Grade 1
Engineering	Gherixem Valley Bridge	Mdina Fortified City	L-Imdina	G.N. 0348 of 2001 - Development Planning Act, 1992 (Section 46) - Scheduling of Property (PDF)	Bridge	Grade 1
Engineering	Notabile Railway Tunnel	Located beneath Mdina Fortified City	L-Imdina	G.N. 0348 of 2001 - Development Planning Act, 1992 (Section 46) - Scheduling of Property (PDF)	Railway / Tunnel	Grade 1
Engineering	Notabile Tunnel Ventilation Shaft	Mdina Fortified City	L-Imdina	G.N. 0348 of 2001 - Development Planning Act, 1992 (Section 46) - Scheduling of Property (PDF)	Ventilation Shaft	Grade 3

Picture 61 - Extract from the Planning Authority website showing the protection levels of the Malta Railway remains in the Rabat - Mdina area

The entrance to the tunnel from the Notabile side is located a few metres away from the ticketing structure, behind a number of farm houses (Picture 62, left). It is not visible from anywhere unless access to the structures is allowed by the farmers.



Picture 62 - The Mdina railway tunnel entrances: the Notabile side on the left and the Museum Mtarfa side on the right (source: Malta Railway Foundation)

The entrance from the Museum side is located about half way between the station building and the side entrance of Mdina from Triq l-Imħażen. Until recently it was still visible, with some pictures circulating on social media and other sources (picture 62, right). Yet, now the area is cordoned off by fencing, with a number of small buildings possibly occupied by squatters. For the purpose of this study, the writer gained access to parts of this cordoned off area, but did not manage to arrive to the entrance of the tunnel as thick vegetation makes it extremely dangerous to approach. Thus the status of this tunnel could not be assessed, and it is a pity that such an engineering feat cannot be appreciated and enjoyed by the general public, and put to better use.



Picture 63 - Four ventilations shafts: Top left (A) near Ghar Ħammiem wash house, Top Right (B) adjacent to De Redin Bastion, Bottom Left (C) between Mdina Gate and D'Homedes Bastions, Bottom Right (D) Saqqajja Hill

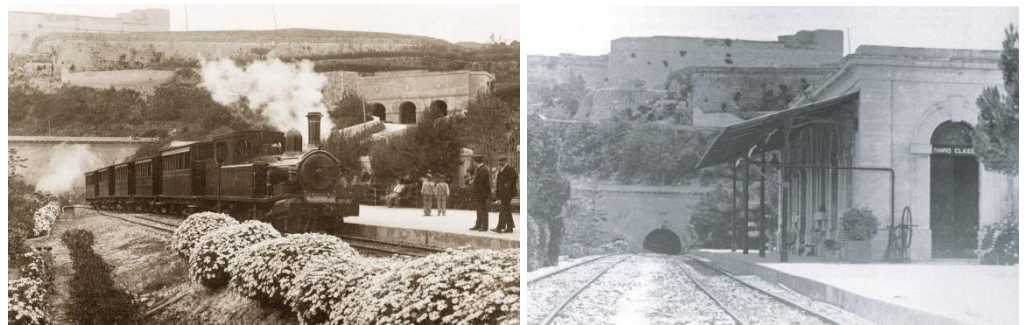
With regards to the ventilation shafts, four are still very clearly visible, and very easy to locate. These can be found as per Picture 63 at the following locations:

- one on the upper part of the road leading from Għajn Ħammiem wash house to the car park at the Mdina ditch (*GPS coordinates 35°53'10.3"N 14°24'03.2"E*);
- one in Mdina ditch near the Greeks' Gate adjacent to De Redin Bastion (*GPS coordinates 35°53'06.6"N 14°24'08.6"E*);
- one in Mdina ditch between Mdina Gate and D'Homedes Bastion (*GPS coordinates 35°53'03.4"N 14°24'13.3"E*);
- one on the boundaries of a field at the upper part of Triq it-Tigrija near Saqqajja Hill (*GPS coordinates 35°52'59.7"N 14°24'18.6"E*).

4.2.15 Museum station

The end of the line for the Malta Railway was at Museum station, situated between Mdina and Mtarfa. Rigby describes the station as

The station building was a solid affair with a substantial canopy. Windows and doors had curved portals and the words 'Museum Station' were painted around the arched portal of the central doorway whence also a very stylish lamp was suspended... A loop line enabled the engine to run-round its train and on the platform line just past the loop there was an inspection pit. (Rigby, 2004, pp. 49 & 55)



Picture 64 - The end of the line for the Malta Railway: Museum Station
(source: Malta Railway Foundation)

The Mtarfa station has survived the test of time, and after years of neglect, it has been restored and now serves as a restaurant bearing the name L-Istazzjon Bar & Kitchen (Picture 65). While the exterior of the building has been retained, the interior was heavily modified and not much of the original building remains, including the platform and the rails area that are now converted as an outdoor dining area (*GPS coordinates 35°53'12.9"N 14°23'58.1"E*). Visitors can have a look at the interior of the station during the opening hours of the restaurant.



Picture 65 - Museum station now L-Istazzjon Bar & Kitchen

The Mtarfa line extended for another few metres towards Mtarfa, passing on a bridge which was purposely built for this line. This bridge called Gheriexem Bridge is a landmark in this area (Pictures 66 and 67) and can be seen from various locations around it. On this part of the railway line, the locomotive was manoeuvred to prepare for the return voyage to Valletta (*GPS coordinates 35°53'15.9"N 14°23'54.4"E*).



Picture 66 - A train of the Malta Railway on Gheriexem Bridge being prepared for the voyage back to Valletta (source: National Archives of Malta through Malta Railway Foundation)



Picture 67 - The area around Gheriexem Bridge today

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study analyses in detail the remains of the Malta Railway that can be found along its route from Valletta to Mtarfa. The railway connected a lot of communities together, and helped in Malta's economic development before other motorized transport was introduced.

5.1 Final observations

As it can be observed, some of the places, features and remains identified in this study are very accessible and easy to visit. A few are being restored in one way or another. Others are more challenging, given that they are either under the control of third parties with little or no interest in their historical significance, or in a poor state of conservation after having been neglected and left to deteriorate. Throughout the course of this study, a vast number of landmarks that are mentioned in Malta Railway-related literature could not be identified, as these have either been destroyed or buried under construction works that did not respect this aspect of our heritage.

5.2 Recommendations

In the opinion of the writer, this is a shame, as our railway heritage is unique. In very few places around the world will a visitor ever have the opportunity to visit a complete railway line with a number of stations from the Victorian period in just a few kilometres, within easy reach from each other, even by public transport. With some goodwill and the necessary financing, these important landmarks can be restored to their former glory. Apart from serving as a monument of the Malta Railway, some of these places can be transformed into interpretation centres, and can host artistic and cultural activities such as art exhibitions and musical events for the benefit of the whole community.

Other locations have the potential to serve a unique public utility, and help in the management of congested areas. What an experience would a visitor gain if the tunnels in Floriana and Mdina are opened to the public, who would have the opportunity to park outside these busy areas and walk through these tunnels to reach the city centres, while being offered a museum experience along the way!

5.3 Concluding remarks

One cannot not mention the sterling work that is being carried out by the Malta Railway Foundation that has been working tirelessly for the past years to create awareness on this subject, and to preserve the remaining sites that are still available for the future generations.

I would like to close off this study by quoting Brigadier Bernard L. Rigby once again when in his Foreword he writes:

The endearing little Malta Railway established itself as one of the many links between Maltese culture and way of life, and that of their friends from other countries, including the British...The Malta Railway sits well in this august company. It also has a proud place in the pantheon of steam locomotive railways. (Rigby, 2004, p. 4)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Tour – A journey in time with the Vapur tal-Art

Preliminaries

This tour is intended for visitors to experience the 50-year long history of the Malta Railway, and explore some of the remains that are still visible today. Furthermore, the tour will also give the visitors an insight into the social aspects that this mode of transport brought about through stories, events and incidents that happened during the railway's years of operation.

The start of the tour will be from St. James Bastions in Valletta and will end in front of *I-Istazzjon* Bar & Kitchen at Għeriexem between Mdina and Mtarfa. It is a half-day tour, with a duration of about four hours, and will be carried out partially on foot and partially on a bus driving along the route of the railway lines. The tour has a mild level of difficulty, and therefore people of all ages can participate.

For the purpose of the exam and assessment, only a part of this tour will be conducted to give the group a better experience, without rushing through the programme.

Part 1: Valletta & Floriana

On foot

This part of the tour will be conducted on foot, taking the group from Valletta up to Porte des Bombes, with the following stops:

1. Introduction at St. James Bastion near Central Bank of Malta
2. The Valletta Station in front of Parliament corner with Ordinance Street
3. Valletta Platform & Viaduct on the bridge leading to City Gate
4. Along the Floriana Tunnel (1st Stop) on the steps leading to the Triton Fountain
5. Along the Floriana Tunnel (2nd Stop) next to Independence Monument
6. Along the Floriana Tunnel (3rd Stop) at the Mall Gardens next to the Floriana Parish Church
7. The Floriana Station next to Robert Samut Hall
8. Inside the Floriana Station (*this part will only be conducted if it is deemed safe to visit*)
9. The Route towards Mdina at St. Philip's Garden in Floriana
10. The tunnel portal at Notre Dame Ditch
11. The railway bridge next to Porte des Bombes

Part 2: From Floriana to Birkirkara




By bus

This part of the tour will be conducted by bus, and will take the group from Porte des Bombes to Birkirkara station. The highlights of the bus commentary will be the following:

12. From Porte des Bombes all the way along Triq Sant' Anna and National Road
13. Along National Road to Hamrun station, with highlights on Sulphur Lane and Mile End Road
14. A brief stop in front of the 1st Hamrun Scouts Group
15. Hamrun to Birkirkara station with various stops to pinpoint the location of platforms, embankments and accident sites

Part 3: Ġnien I-Istazzjon, Birkirkara

 *On foot*

In this part of the tour, we will enter Ġnien I-Istazzjon from the entrance in front of the bus terminus, walk to the station building and the carriage, and exit from the gate near the old parish church of Birkirkara. The stops and the highlights will be the following:

16. Ġnien I-Istazzjon

17. Birkirkara station

18. The 3rd Class Carriage

19. Visit inside the Birkirkara station and museum

20. The Railway Guard Hut

Part 4: From Birkirkara to Mdina




By bus

This part of the tour will take the group from Birkirkara station (pick up from near the old Parish Church of Birkirkara) all the way up to Mdina. Time permitting, the stretch of road in Triq il-Linja (Attard) will be done on foot, although it is also possible to do it by bus. The following route will be taken:

21. From Birkirkara station all the way through Old Railway Track, during which the location of Balzan and San Antonio platforms will be pointed out
22. Triq il-Linja, Attard (*This section can be done on foot or by bus*)
23. Attard Station
24. From Attard to San Salvatore station
25. A brief stop near the location of San Salvatore Station
26. From San Salvatore to Notabile station
27. Notabile station
28. From Notabile station to Mdina Ditch

Part 5: Mdina & Mtarfa

 *On foot*

This is the last part of the tour, to be carried out on foot, from Mdina Ditch near the new gate at the west wall of Mdina to Museum station.

29. Mdina Ditch

30. Museum station