

Opening Address

The Hon. Dr Mario de Marco

I am pleased to have been invited to address this industrial heritage conference hosted by The Farsons Foundation. The theme is intrinsically related to Malta's economic development, our own built heritage, and also our national identity.

Conserving our heritage underpins our responsibility to pay homage and respect to generations passed, but also relates to our present and future social, cultural identity as we take into consideration Malta's economic, cultural, demographic, and political developments along with the appreciation of craftsmanship, tradition and customs that surround our heritage.

Malta has indeed had its fair share of industrial innovation, such as the 1907 Blackley's bakery in Pieta', once described as a model bakery (Macmillan, 1915, p. 333) and the 100-ton Armstrong cannon at Fort Rinella. The Grand Harbour area, which we are obviously familiar with, became the focus of the main developments of the Industrial Revolution in Malta, especially those which suited the needs of the British Empire. Indeed in the course of the 19th century, the multifaceted harbour communities evolved into one of the most extensive and avant-garde industrial communities throughout the Mediterranean.

Whilst promoting an appreciation of industrial heritage, we must recognise that preserving our industrial heritage has its own challenges. Storage space and routine maintenances are just two major challenges. Yet sustainability must be the way forward for the preservation and strengthening of this sector. Our heritage, together with our natural environment and our culture, is what indeed makes our tourism product distinct and unique.

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority also has a significant role to play in safeguarding and strengthening our industrial heritage. A number of iconic 20th century buildings, such as the former drydocks and over 50 other sites in Malta and Gozo, are presently the subject of research with a view to schedule them in the future, but first, strategic objectives need to be identified so as to ensure that the limited resources are maximised.

Heritage Malta has also long been active in this particular field. The preservation of the Malta Maritime Museum – housed in the former Royal Naval Bakery, which is Malta's first ever purposely-built Industrial Revolution era building - is possibly the best known endeavour so far. More recently Heritage Malta ensured the preservation of machinery and equipment from the Malta Shipbuilding plant and the Malta

Drydocks, apart from a fleet of over 90 buses. A considerable number of machines has been collected from other locations, such as printing presses.

Heritage Malta has appointed, for the first time ever, a curator specifically for industrial heritage - a clear sign of the importance that this sector is being given. Non-governmental organisations such as Din l-Art Helwa, Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, and others continue to do a sterling job in restoring and keeping our heritage alive, sometimes even preceding Government's efforts.

The private sector also has a particularly important role to play. This conference is one such initiative by the private sector – for which I thank The Farsons Foundation. This positive event highlights the historical relationship between Simonds Farsons Cisk plc, with its brewing history dating back to the 1920s, and the development of industrial heritage in Malta, whilst encouraging discussion on the approaches that will further enhance Malta's industrial heritage.

This 1940s Brewery, which was built on a reinforced concrete frame, was an innovation in itself at that time, while exhibiting refined architectural detail as one can see in its proportions, rhythm, scale and stark whiteness, contrasting with the shades and shadows that emphasise the articulation of the architectural elements.

Even more innovative was the boldness of the designer, Architect Lewis V Farrugia, to make the industrial interior of this building visible from the exterior by literally putting on exhibition throughout the day, and even more spectacularly when lit at night, the functional huge upper brewing vats as if to demonstrate that the heritage of industry is indeed truly remarkable... and it is. In appreciation of all these architectural and historical qualities, this building was scheduled last year. Even today Simonds Farsons Cisk plc continues to be a pioneer in the industrial sector and in entrepreneurship, having just invested over 12.5 million euros in a brewhouse project that has given us another iconic building with state-of-the-art equipment.

I conclude by thanking Simonds Farsons Cisk plc for its ongoing investment and strengthening of the brewery sector in Malta, and for sponsoring the organisation of this conference. I augur that this will lead to a fruitful discussion, and to more initiatives that continue to enhance Malta's industrial heritage.

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References

Macmillan, A., 1915. Commercial Malta. In A. Macmillan (ed.) *Malta & Gibraltar Illustrated. Historical and Descriptive, Commercial and Industrial, Facts Figures and Resources*. London: W.H. & L. Collingridge.