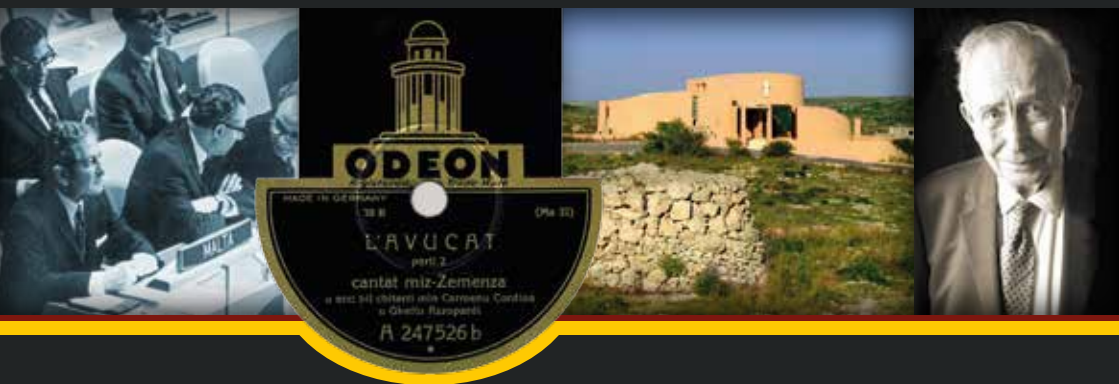


# MELITA HISTORICA



Editor: David Mallia



VOL. XVI No. 3 (2014)  
MALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# MELITA HISTORICA



VOL. XVI No. 3 (2014)  
MALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Libraries and Archives: Surviving, striving and thriving

Charles J. Farrugia<sup>1</sup>

The brief for this lecture was to discuss the twentieth-century history of archives and libraries, focusing on changes that occurred in Malta with Independence in 1964. I will try to avoid too much narrative of events and focus instead on highlights which in some way reflect the political, professional or lay thinking about the two sectors and whether the post-Independence mentality left a mark on the domains in focus.

I will start this presentation with a long quotation. The four paragraphs of this quotation present an excellent assessment of record-keeping practices in post-Independence countries:

*In many countries, public sector record-keeping systems are weak or have actually collapsed to the point where they barely function. This situation is particularly evident in countries that were once part of European-dominated colonial regimes. In these countries, structured record-keeping systems were common, supporting the information needs of a small, centralized civil service, often with a well-trained and experienced records staff. In many of these countries the European model of registries, a central point for the registration and control of documents, was introduced, and it was not unusual for civil servants to begin their careers working in registries and then move upwards. They tended in this way to develop a good understanding of the importance of information management.*

*In the years following independence, this situation deteriorated progressively as part of a general decline in public administration. Informal practices supplanted formal rules, and efficient public*

---

<sup>1</sup> **Charles Farrugia** is Malta's national archivist and Chairman of the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers. A graduate in history from the University of Malta, and in archives and records management from the University of Northumbria and UCL, he is currently concluding his PhD studies at the University of Aberystwyth. He has published several works including 'L-Arkivji ta' Malta' (2006), and edited 'Guardians of Memory' (2008). He is the Maltese representative on the European Archives Group, the European Board of National Archivists, and the Experts' Group on the Digitisation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage.

administration was of secondary importance to providing employment. While the civil service expanded steadily, bringing with it a corresponding increase in the flow of paper, more formal ways of working gradually collapsed, often replaced by ad hoc work methods. In many cases, the institution grew used to making decisions without referring to records. There was little incentive to maintain effective record-keeping systems or to allocate adequate resources for records storage and staff. In some cases, the failure to create and maintain records systems was motivated by the desire to conceal financial and other irregularities.

No. of letter	Date	To whose address	Subject
			6 <sup>th</sup> August 1946.
1177/46	6.	Bog. / c Administration.	Removal of letters from "B. Villanova" Bog.
1184/46.	6.	Mrs. L. Riggs.	Passage of letters & Mr. J. Gifford from B.S.D.
2087/46	5.	J.P.P.	Remission of sentence passed on B. Camilleri.
1575/46	6.	Mrs. H. Hooper	Passage of letters & Mrs. D. Parris.
1892/46	6.	H. Phillips, General, Rome.	Passage of letters & John C. Aguirre.
2037/46	6.	H. Phillips, Administration.	Mr. S. Lattina's release from Army & letters
2704/45	6.	Commodore Eps., N.H.S.Gt	Pardon of prisoner from service on 24 March I.
357/46.	6.	Principal, St. Dominick's Bog.	(Relief) of the church of St. Annunziata, Vittoriosa.
600/46.	6.	R.F.W.	Sanction to the consular accommodation at Malta of 5 wives.
1264/45.	4.	Mr R. Ogilvie.	Remission of sentence if wife passed a her husband.
872/46.	6.	At Sea Sgt. Rowe.	Passage of letters & J. Long.
2022/46.	6.		Transmission of medical certificate.
6419/46.	6.	Lieut. J.B. Abbott.	Passage of letters & Mrs A.R. Mitchell from Gairs.
1034/46	6.	King East London Inquiry, Gt.	Passage of letters & S.S. Walter sentenced - his letter.
		Joseph's Cemetery, Marseilles	
2015/46.	6.	Dr. Farnham, American Consulate	Transmission of 2 dead children for exar. 1939, 1940 & 1941.
4205/46.	6.	Mrs. G. McKinnon.	Consentation under Social Service Scheme.
1833/46.	6.	Mr. A. Smith.	Refusal of entry to America.
6476/46.	6.	Mr. A.E. Salvadori.	Information re himself.
3847/46	6.	Prof. Louis Jurek, Univ.	Passage of letters & Mr. J. Lomont from Lima.

*Paradoxically, in many countries, despite the low usage of records, there was an extreme reluctance to destroy records, even after they ceased to have any value for the institution. In the absence of rules*

*and guidelines for what should be kept and for how long, staff was reluctant to authorize destruction. Over time, registries became severely congested with older records. Ultimately, many records systems collapsed under their own weight.”<sup>2</sup>*

This quotation was not written with Malta in mind but it is taken from a records management manual issued by the World Bank for its staff in the first year new millennium. Yet it explains what happened in public records in Malta and in most Commonwealth countries – records systems collapsing under their own weight and replaced by the fallacy that IT applications can do what the professional records manager, archivist or librarian is professionally trained to do.



**Fig. 2 – One of the several congested record rooms**

But before we try to analyze the impact of Malta’s Independence on the two sectors, let us have a snapshot view at the historical background of the two sectors, starting with archival services under British rule.

---

2 The World Bank and International Records Management Trust, *Managing Records as the Basis for Effective Service Delivery and Public Accountability in Development: An Introduction to Core Principles for Staff of the World Bank and Its Partners*, 2000, 7-8. Online. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTARCHIVES/Resources/Core%20Principles.pdf>. Accessed on 10 July 2014.

## Archival services under British rule

One of the first moves aimed at centralizing government archives under British rule was the setting up of a 'Record Room' in the office of the Chief Secretary to Government in 1851. In that year a government notice was published instructing that the books and documents of the Order of Saint John and of the suppressed Università of Malta were to be moved to the new record room.<sup>3</sup> In 1890, it was decided that the records held at the Palace of the Governor were to be transferred to the Public Registry in Merchants Street. For a number of years, the duties of archival custody were shared between the librarian of the Royal Malta Library, and the Public Registry Director.

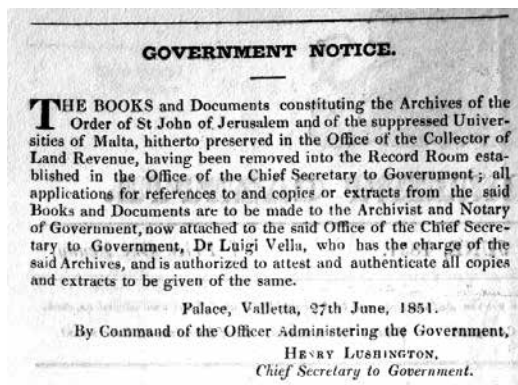


Fig. 3 – Setting up of a Record Room at the Palace

In 1931, the Institute of Historical Research was established in Malta.<sup>4</sup> The aims of this institute were 'to promote and encourage historical studies... advise the Government as to the best way of exploring the Maltese archives with a view to methodical publication; and to advise... and assist foreign students and Commissions undertaking studies bearing on the history of the Maltese Islands.'<sup>5</sup>

It was a time when the government viewed public records as intrinsically linked with duties of civil registration and public administration. The Keeper of the Government Archives listed the duties

3 *Malta Government Gazette* (MGG), 27 June 1851, no. 1715.

4 MGG, 28 August 1931, no. 315. The members of the Committee of the Institute were: H. Luke, H. Balbi, A. Bartolo, R. J. Dunbar Cousin, S. Cremona, A. V. Laferla, F. Ryan, T. Zammit, D. Callus, V. Laurenza, G. Darmanin Demajo, A. Hamilton Stilon, H. P. Scicluna, V. Gatt. Professor Carlo Mallia was appointed later on in September 1931 and replaced Rev. D. M. Callus. Another appointee was S. F. Newcombe in December 1931.

5 F. Ryan, A. Coville, & E. Rossi, *Les Archives de Malte*, Paris: Comité International des Sciences Historiques 1932, 199.

connected with the four different sections for which he was responsible, i.e. the Hypothecation Branch, the *Insinuazione* Branch, the Civil Status Branch and the Government Archives.<sup>6</sup> The Government Archives consisted of the Archives of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, documents of the Università and certain duplicate dispatches.

After the Second World War the Maltese archives sector benefitted from the visit to Malta of Sir Hilary Jenkinson, one of the most renowned and leading British theorists in archival science. He was sent to Malta in 1944 and commissioned to compile a report on the state of Maltese archives. He presented a report which was later discussed but unfortunately its recommendations were never implemented.<sup>7</sup>

The eleven recommendations made by Jenkinson<sup>8</sup> were the following:

- a. Contacts need to be established with the education sector, in particular, the University, but above all there is the most important need to preserve the archives;
- b. A national survey is to be conducted collating data such as type of document, extent, dates, place of deposit, under which authority they exist, and physical condition;
- c. To produce general lists of the material;
- d. The setting up of a national authority to regulate the sector;
- e. Build a national archives establishment;
- f. Discussions to be held with departments to convince them to deposit their records
- g. The setting up of the office to coordinate this process;
- h. That the Archives of the Order be moved to the National Archives and that private individuals will have the possibility to deposit private records;
- i. That future structure plans shall cater for restoration, research and reprographics facilities;

---

6 National Archives of Malta (NAM), CSG01/45/1935. The *Insinuazione* functions date back to 1681 when Grand Master Caraffa promulgated the code of laws which founded the *Ufficio delle Insinuazioni* for the registration of acts regarding transfers of immovable property. In 1859 it became part of the Public Registry. In 1863 the Public Registry became also responsible for the registration of all acts of birth, marriage and death.

7 NAM/CSG1/1400/1944.

8 The full recommendations are reproduced in Maltese in C. Farrugia, *L-Arkojji ta' Malta*, Malta 2006, 33. The recommendations in English are listed in State of Archives Report 2008, which also includes comments on the current state of progress on each recommendation.



**Fig. 4: Damaged *Consolato del Mare* records**

j. The organization is to be run by an archivist with knowledge in administrative systems, a deputy and a group of clerical staff. A strong consultative committee is also necessary;

k. The consultative committee is to be involved in appraisal decision, while the archivist is to oversee departments and provide services.

Considering the post-Second World War devastation, the solutions Jenkinson proposed might have been too early in Malta's socio-political and economic development. However, one doubts whether one can find reasonable justification for the inaction of local governments. The first State of Archives report published by the National Archives Council in 2008 showed that most of the recommendations Jenkinson made in 1944 were still not taken on board.<sup>9</sup>

As if having the best international expert on archives reporting on the sector was not enough, another full review of the recommendations

---

<sup>9</sup> An analysis of the recommendations in terms of what has been accomplished was published in the State of Archives Report, 2008, 36-37. Available online at: [http://www.education.gov.mt/ministry/doc/archives\\_report\\_2008.htm](http://www.education.gov.mt/ministry/doc/archives_report_2008.htm). Accessed on 2 March 2010.



made by Jenkinson was carried out by Ivor Evans, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales in 1947. Evans endorsed Jenkinson's recommendations. He recommended the setting up of an Archives committee, which would bring together the University, the Notary to Government, the Public Registry, Courts, the Legislative unit and the church authorities. Even with the current archives council we have not yet arrived at such a diversity of stakeholders around the same table.

a. An Archives Committee should be established, consisting of:-

The Vice-Chancellor of the University, as Chairman;

The Librarian-Archivist, as member and Secretary;

The Notary to Government;

The Director of the Public Registry;

The Registrar of the Superior Courts;

One or more members (not exceeding three) appointed by the Governor;

A member appointed by the Archbishop

A member appointed by the Legislature of Malta

A member appointed by the Council of the University.

b. The Librarian-Archivist should be appointed Reader in Palaeography and Diplomatic at the University;

c. A room should be set aside in the Royal Library equipped with technical books of reference, as a seminar room for the use of members of the University and other approved students.<sup>10</sup>

Nothing seems to have developed out of the recommendations made by Evans up to the date of Independence. Not completely different was the situation of libraries.

## Libraries Historical Background

In his publication *Promoters of Information* Paul Xuereb argued that the growth of the library profession in Malta proved very slow and the very concept of a library profession did not exist in the Malta of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or even in the first decades of the twentieth. The librarian was a scholar, a bookman, not a library manager, and he was assisted by a few clerical library attendants. This attitude was, and to a

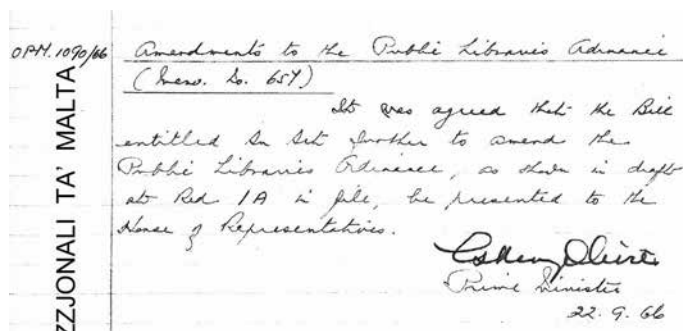
---

10 I. Evans, 'Report on a visit to the Royal University of Malta', June 1947, 17.

certain extent remains, typical of official and popular attitudes in all the Mediterranean countries.

The state of affairs started to improve in the late 1940s, mainly due to a number of persons who found themselves drawn towards employment in newly-established libraries within tertiary education. The Royal University Library started its transformation into a modern academic library at that time. British Colonial and Welfare Funds also helped a lot. The Valletta Public Library poured hundreds of books into schools in the first half of the twentieth century. After the Second World War some 30,000 books were received from Great Britain. The Hamrun Lyceum developed what can be called the first organized school library.<sup>11</sup>

Nearer to Independence, Borg Olivier's Cabinet started convening on 27 August 1962 and in the first few years one finds two instances when the issue of libraries was discussed during a Cabinet meeting. This information came to light last year when on 3 February 2014 the National Archives released Cabinet papers for public viewing.



**Fig. 5: Cabinet Minutes signed by Prime Minister Borg Olivier on 22 September 1966 approving the Draft Libraries Bill**

During Cabinet on 15 September 1966 Ministers approved the Bill to amend the Public Libraries Ordinance. The main changes were explained in Memo 657 prepared by the Minister of Education and Tourism. The document explained that till then the management and control of public libraries was vested in the Library Committee. The Minister of Education

11 J. Boffa, 'Half a century of school libraries', L. Zerafa, V. Vella & C. Vella, eds. in *A Mosaic of Library and Archive Practice in Malta*, Malta: MaLIA 2009, 110.

was the chairman of the said committee. The memo proposed changes so that the responsibility for the direction of the sector be moved to the Librarian while the Committee was to assume an advisory role.

The Draft Bill also added a new section concerning the issue of Legal Deposit. The provisions conditioning deposit on publication in Malta till then imposed the duty on authors to deliver three copies free of charge – two targeted at the local libraries and a third copy to be deposited in order that the Librarian may then transmit to the British Museum. This process was already considered a burden at the time. In his Memo the Minister stated:

It appears that this requirement was imposed by the British Government in 1937 for no reason other than that of providing the British Museum with free copies of works printed and published in Malta.

The political argument expressed by the Minister in the memorandum was that this procedure was a burden which cannot be justified and should be repealed. It does make us reflect on the current situation of legal deposit, which should be the cornerstone of any national library. Can we say that after 50 years of Independence we have managed to build a legal deposit system which is effective and captures the real national imprint of the country?

Allow me to recount a personal anecdote. In 2001 I was on an orientation visit at the Sound Directorate of the British Library. We were a group of six UCL international students – five from Commonwealth African countries and me. The Director of the unit who was a PhD ethnomusicologist from South Africa, who prepared for us a small sample of items the British Library holds originating from each country we represented. We heard traditional African music, sounds of a number of extinct species recorded in African jungles. But we also heard *ghana* recorded in the early 1970s by British Library sound technicians in a *piazza* in Żejtun. Another surprise for me was to find the book in Maltese that I had written about a local band club and also a full set of band marches recorded on cassettes at Boffa Studios in their collection. This was all material acquired by the British Library after the legal deposit provision was removed. That means that the staff of the British Library got to know of these items through their research and procured these items, even if they were on sale solely from local band clubs.

My reflection is this: It is perfectly understandable that at the time of the legal amendments to the Library Ordinance in 1966 there was an

eagerness to cut any colonial links. But considering Malta is a country with its own language, rich history and long standing traditions, and an over-active publishing activity, were 50 years not enough to put our act together and develop a legal deposit system which captures the whole of the nation's output?

The second instance Borg Olivier's Cabinet discussed the Library sector was in 1969 when it was agreed that the Minister of Education, Culture and Tourism take possession of premises at 2, Castile Place in Valletta to set up a Public Lending Library Service. This was probably aimed to pave the way for accepting the proposal of the British Council to furnish the Maltese sector with books. Soon after Independence the British Council approached the Malta government with a proposal to start a public / school library service. In 1967 British library advisor John Smith inspected school libraries and wrote:

*"The libraries in the schools and teacher training colleges in the Maltese Islands are in a badly neglected condition... The general shortage of library books in the schools is appalling."*<sup>12</sup>

However, there were also positive developments happening in the library profession at the time. Ġuzé Cassar Pullicino who was the first Maltese to obtain a British professional qualification in library science was appointed University Librarian in 1953. He did help with setting up professional standards for librarians. In the meantime, the Malta Library Association was set up in 1969.<sup>13</sup>

During its first years the association registered as a trade union, a decision which in the words of Paul Xuereb was 'not entirely a wise one'.<sup>14</sup> Initially the association made important achievements through the work of sub-committees on issues such as censorship, the Malta National Bibliography and Libraries of religious institutions. The same can be said of the educational aspect. It embarked on several short training courses which definitely left an impact on the work force. Equally positive were links established with IFLA,<sup>15</sup> COMLA<sup>16</sup> and the project in the early 1970s

---

12 J. Smith, 'Brief report and recommendations on the subject of school libraries', unpublished report presented to the Director of Education, 1967, 1.

13 The organization changed its name to *Għaqda Bibljotekarja* when it became illegal to use the word 'Malta' in the title.

14 P. Xuereb, *Promoters of Information*, Malta: Għaqda Bibljotekarji, 1990, 6.

15 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

16 Commonwealth Library Association.

to have library internships from the UK. However, the life of the Library Association was periodically hindered by lack of cooperation by certain stakeholders. From day one the Royal Malta Library did not join in the efforts made.

One of the most active sub-committees set up in 1969 was that on school libraries. They conducted an extensive survey on the state of libraries in schools.<sup>17</sup> This was followed in the early seventies by a series of visits by foreign experts such as Penelope Biggs,<sup>18</sup> and all this seems to have inspired the setting up of the School Library Service in 1976. In the meantime the appeals for the opening of the Central lending library were not taken heed of. Years passed with nothing more than correspondence and discussions. Then in 1971 the government accepted the offer of a British library adviser. Agreement was reached that Britain would give £60,000 worth of books (all chosen by advisor John Bristow) plus two scholarships in library studies. The central public library opened in February 1974 and issued over half a million book loans in its first year.

Relations between the Royal Malta Library and the Association improved when John Sultana was placed in charge of the National Library. He embarked straight away on reactivating the idea of a Maltese National Bibliography. Its publishing was a milestone in the history of Maltese librarianship. This momentum was further sustained when in February 1986 the first Diploma course in Library and Information Studies started at the University of Malta. Lillian Sciberras had a direct and central input in both projects.

Another impetus to the sector was given in 1971 when the University of Malta organized, what in my opinion, is still the most comprehensive conference ever held in Malta on the topic of libraries and archives. This was held in March 1971 with the theme 'Maltese History: What Future?' I am labelling this event as comprehensive as it did not discuss the sectors in isolation as often happens to the present day. Instead it provided a fertile environment for the academic, public, ecclesiastical and paedagogological worlds to meet up for three days and discuss the topic. The aim of the conference was to examine the related problems of

---

17 Boffa, 'Half a century of school libraries', 111.

18 *Ibid.* 112.



## **MALTESE HISTORY: WHAT FUTURE?**

Fig. 6: The published proceedings of the 1971 conference

the teaching and writing of history in Malta, and the preservation of the source materials for Maltese history.<sup>19</sup>

The recommendations of the conference with regards to archives were the following:<sup>20</sup>

1. That a Public Record Office be set up as a separate department with suitable premises and trained staff provided;
2. That an appeal be made to all associations and individuals interested in the preservation of records to co-operate to this end;
3. That full descriptions of the documents with a summary of their content, as opposed to mere catalogues of material in archives be prepared and published;
4. That an appeal be made to the general public to deposit any records for which they have no further need in public archives;
5. That private records be exempted from Succession and Donation Duty provided that these become accessibility for the purposes of study by the public;
6. That the resolutions concerning public and private records be communicated to all political parties with the request that they be incorporated in their electoral manifestos.

In an interview with Roger Vella Bonavita, who together with Ann Williams were central to the organization of that conference, recounts how in 1971 as Malta was geared up for general elections he wrote to the political parties urging them to include the establishment of a Public Records Office based on the British model in their electoral manifesto. In reality, no records had been systematically added to the public domain as historical documents ever since the achievement of self-government in 1921 and, in reality, not since the early nineteenth century. Soon after the Malta Labour Party took office in 1971, Vella Bonavita was appointed on a committee under the chairmanship of Ġużé Cassar Pullicino to develop the national archives. However, the political class was still not ready to implement the decisions of experts and preferred playing for time. In Vella Bonavita's words:

---

19 A. Williams, & R. Vella Bonavita, *Maltese History: what future*, Royal University of Malta, Malta 1974, 1. The conference was held on 19 and 20 March 1971 at the Royal University of Malta.

20 *Ibid.* 172.

*"All went well until we decided to run a test of the willingness of the government to adopt the procedures we had developed and recommended. A very large mass of file covers of ration card records (if I remember correctly) was identified as having no administrative or historical value whatsoever and the head of department concerned was approached with the suggestion that they should be destroyed. Unfortunately, he refused to take responsibility for this initiative and referred the matter to his minister who refused to sanction the destruction on political grounds. Once he learned of the decision Ġużé Cassar Pullicino adjourned the committee sine die."*

Another strong proponent favouring a national archive for Malta was historian Dr Albert Ganado. At the same 1971 conference, he had remarked that by UK standards, Malta was one-and-a-half centuries behind the times. In his view, even after Malta attained Self-Government in 1921, the Maltese had their chances which they 'did not care to make use of', even following the granting of Independence in 1964'.<sup>21</sup>

An impetus was given a few years later when Casa Leone and later part of the ground floor of the Palace were assigned to centralize archives under Architect Michael Ellul and my predecessor Joe Caruana. The project achieved new momentum in the late eighties with larger premises in Rabat, Mdina and Gozo assigned for the national archives project. This was followed by the legal enactment, which set up the National Archives in 1990. As important was the 2005 reform, which revamped the whole structure of the national archives. The libraries sector was also reformed later in 2011. These reforms were also taking place at a time when Malta took another challenging step, that of EU membership. It is worth assessing the thriving and striving characteristics of the libraries and archives sector in the last decade – which also coincide with Malta's EU membership.

---

21 *Ibid.* 116.



# Post-EU membership

## Legal Structures – unprecedented reforms

During the last decade we experienced legislative changes which I describe as breakthroughs for the sector. Surprisingly enough some of these reforms passed unnoticed. There were two important reforms in the legal structure of both the public libraries and archives sector. They were not amendments like those of the 1960s but brand new laws drafted by persons from the profession. The National Archives Act was replaced in 2005 and in 2011 Malta Libraries was set up by virtue of new legislation.

## Tertiary education opportunities for librarians and archivists

The period in question saw the shifting of first professional education to an indigenous Malta-based one. There was the subsequent coming together, and to some extent mutual enrichment, of the library and archival professions reflected in Maltese University qualifications. The introduction of Diploma Courses in Archives and Records Management at the University in 2005, of the Degree in Library, Information and Archive Studies in the same year and of the Masters in 2013 were all landmarks for the sector.

The courses in archives and records management we developed in 2005 were a breakthrough for the sector. In terms of content and organizational wise they are on par with the best archives training in the UK offered at UCL, Liverpool and Aberystwyth and the Records Management course offered at Northumbria in Newcastle. Having been myself a registered student in all of these four institutions I venture to say that our courses are even stronger when it comes to the practicum experience given to our students. The diversity of archival repositories we have in close proximity of each other allows us to give students a hands-on experience in a multitude of archives. We have also been successful in having regular flow of archival students from reputed archival schools such as Potsdam, Parma and the Institute of Public Administration in Paris carrying out their internships at our national archives.

## Volunteers

Another thriving aspect is the flood of volunteers coming to our repositories. Especially with regards to archives, the public out there is appreciating and offering sponsorship and valuable time. It is now a normal process that during a year at the National Archives alone we receive from 25 to 30 volunteers on placements. Another commendable process was that of volunteers at the Notarial Archives. They have managed to transform the repository at St Christopher Street from what Andrew Vella used to call 'a cemetery of old forgotten records' to a vibrant centre of preservation and study. Also encouraging is the shift towards greater participation of younger persons and women.

This is a healthy process and I can confidently say that we are thriving in all this. Volunteers give an input imbued with love which is often unmatched by permanent staff. They have made the archives sector visible. The downside of this is if these programmes are used by governments to abdicate from their duty to provide the vision, core funds, and authoritative representation which the sector needs.

There are also areas in which the sectors are striving – and at times striving hard without enough successes. The first is that of funding and resources.

Over the years budgets have dried to zero for the 'to do with' line votes. The post-EU membership frame of mind gave politicians a new answer whenever we ask for more funds – 'why don't you tap EU funding?' The reality is that we do not have the internal capacity to manage large EU projects and secondly the level of development of most partners in Europe is out of sync with our level of development in the sector. On the other hand, EU membership gave us an amazing network of expertise both on the political and the technical fronts which we are now benefitting from.

## Visibility and sustainability of the sector

Notwithstanding all the progress registered the system often functions thanks to the good will of individuals rather than through professional structures in place. Strained relations between stakeholders remain the order of the day. When collaboration exists it is more in joining forces for

a conference or event – rather than continuous collaboration on policy and strategy. And it is often that the situation where the right hand does not know what the left is doing.

## Striving towards Professional status

The Malta Library and Information Association will at long last be proposing a draft legal document that will, if eventually accepted, give official recognition to the library, information and archival profession in Malta. This is the right direction to take. What I augur is that the process leading up to this proposal is all inclusive as our profession has often failed to sell very good proposals to the political class who at the end of the day have the final say. It is also important that in executing the transition from the traditional library, archive and records management



**Fig. 7 – Digitization at the National Archives funded by foreign organizations. The photo shows the laboratory sponsored by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library of Minnesota.**

professions into the information, knowledge management professions as is the trend, we do not sacrifice the structures we painstakingly developed during the last few years.

Summing up I would say that fifty years after independence the libraries and archives sector in Malta is a mixture of the striving and thriving elements. When it comes to records management not simply in public administration but also in a lot of private organizations we have not yet managed to 'bring the records from the basement into the boardroom'. We might have managed to save a lot from the basements ... we might have managed to store them in some remote room on the same level with the boardroom ... but real progress will come when we really start discussing records issues *within* our boardrooms. A case in point is the legislation and application of both Data Protection and Freedom Of Information laws during the last decade. The sector was almost not consulted at all. To what extent have the libraries, archives, records management professionals and even associations like the Malta Historical Society been consulted in the debate about Data Protection and FOI which will very much affect the future of archives and records management?

By way of conclusion I would say that more in-depth studies have to be conducted to arrive at a better understanding of the dynamics of the libraries and archives sector in Malta. The level of development varies from one specialization to the other. However, one can firmly say that it is still struggling to reach levels of persistence in terms of quality of service. The various specializations have come to be associated with individuals who in most cases have dedicated their lives to the sector. It is unquestionable that if it had not been for these persons Malta would have fared even worse in its libraries and archives preservation and access. However, it is long overdue that we move from this personalized approach to an institutional approach. Building institutions that are well respected in our society should be the long term target for all of us in the profession.

## Acknowledgements:

Author is indebted to the following persons who accepted to provide their views on the theme: Joseph Boffa, Marie Benoit, Lillian Sciberras and Roger Vella Bonavita.

- Obit. Prof. Godfrey Wettinger  
*David Mallia*
- Change and Continuity in Malta from 1964 Onwards:  
a General Overview  
*Henry Frendo*
- Libraries and Archives: Surviving, striving and thriving  
*Charles J. Farrugia*
- Maltese modernity in the visual arts: a case of cultural ruptures  
*Michael Fenech*
- Music and identity in early recordings of Maltese music-1931–32  
*Andrew Alamango*
- Conservation and Preservation Renaissance in Malta since  
Independence  
*Joseph Schirò*
- Medicine in the Twentieth Century  
*George E. Camilleri*
- Towards A Maltese Culinary Identity: Some considerations  
*Noel Buttigieg*
- Developments in Technology and Independent Malta  
*Robert Ghirlando*
- Architecture in Post-Independence Malta Past, Present and Future  
*Conrad Thake*
- Archaeology, nationhood and identity in a small island state  
*Reuben Grima*
- K-129, the CIA and Early Manifestations of Maltese Sovereignty  
*David Attard*
- Maltese theatre, National Identity and Theatre in Maltese  
*Vicki Ann Cremona*
- Post-Independence Design in Malta  
*Stephen Vella and Melanie Mizzi*
- The Great Mediterranean Nation:  
Identity Constructs in Maltese  
Post-Independence Literature  
*Adrian Grima*

