

Wignacourt Tower Restoration

Stanley Farrugia Randon

Council Member of Din l-Art Helwa



It all started when the then Tourism, Environment and Culture Minister, Dr Mario de Marco visited Wignacourt Tower (also known as St Paul's Tower) on 9 February 2012 before inaugurating the new embellishments to St Paul's Bay. The then *Din l-Art Helwa* Executive President Simone Mizzi and I were invited to the inauguration and, in his speech, Dr de Marco expressed the hope that the tower could be restored. From then onwards, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), in collaboration with DLH, began the process to obtain the support of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funds for Sustainable Tourism.

The restoration project involved a number of preliminary studies and documentation before an application for funding could be made. We are grateful to architect Kevin Fsadni (Project Development Director) and Francelle Azzopardi (Project Executive for the MTA) for their encouragement. Preliminary studies and the tendering process itself took some time, after which AX Holdings were entrusted with the restoration project. We are grateful to them, in particular their conservator consultant Fabio Billi, for carrying out such a thorough and professional restoration for which Amanda De Giovanni was the Project Architect.

Restoration work started in October 2014 and the MTA appointed architect Simon Darmanin as Project Manager. The old pointing was removed and redone using hydraulic lime-based material. Due to an advanced state of deterioration, a number of stones had to be changed; the façade of the tower, which gets the most sunlight and pollution from the road, was most in need of attention.

The stones that supported the wooden bridge before the staircase was removed in the early 1960s had to be changed and a gallery-like platform created. While cleaning the stones above the main door of the upper floor, the original metal pulleys that were used to raise the wooden bridge were discovered.

The external doors and windows, which were in urgent need of restoration, were stripped off their numerous successive layers of paint and given a new undercoat and paint layer. It was interesting to be able to see the original 405-year-old door on the upper floor of the tower after the paint was removed to reveal that it was made of red deal.

Some of the flagstones on the roof needed changing as they had deteriorated badly and were causing pools of water to accumulate on the roof after it rained. The parapet wall also required extensive pointing and the changing of some stones.

Before the unveiling day, the tower had to be cleaned and a great deal of painting work was required. We are grateful to staff from the Eden Leisure Group for helping us with this.

The restoration work was unveiled on 6 April of this year by Tourism Minister Dr Edward Zammit Lewis but this did not mean that the tower was ready to receive visitors and Martin Vella and I began working on a number of ancillary jobs. These included the opening of the well shaft and installation of a laminated glass cover to make it safe for visitors who can now look down the bell-shaped well; the installation of an information board and four benches on the roof; the sandblasting of the cannon, which dates to the time of the Knights, and the construction of a new carriage for it in iroko wood; the provision of a protective metal grid for the and a parapet railing to comply with insurance policies. This work was financed by the MTA.

Martin Vella, who for the past few years has been an enthusiastic volunteer, together with his wife Josette, took over as warden of the Tower from this summer. I have served as warden for the past 16 years but I now need to concentrate my efforts on other properties that are being restored.

The external walls of the tower were restored by *Din l-Art Helwa* 40 years ago and so this restoration was urgently needed. It is very appropriate that it all happened during our 50th anniversary year and we are very grateful to the Malta Tourism Authority for making this possible.

