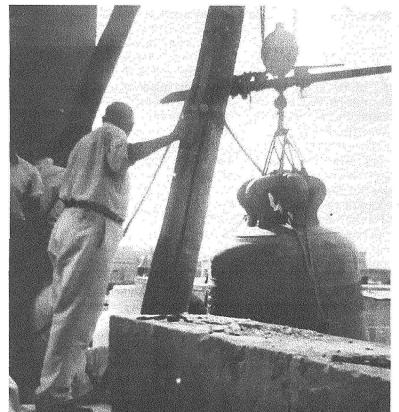
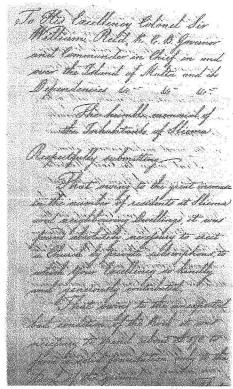


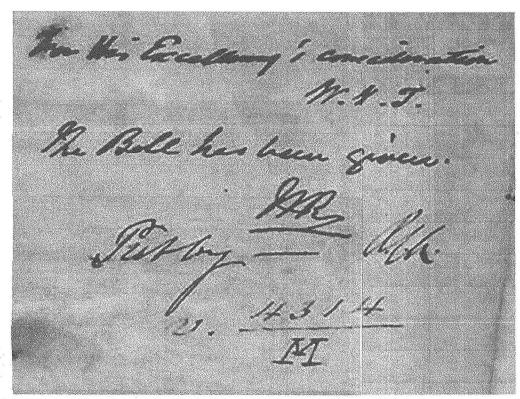
One of the new bells being hauled up to the bell tower in 1937. PHOTOS: STELLA MARIS PARISH ARCHIVES





Members of the Bells Committee with Fonderia Bianchi staff at the Varese Foundry during an inspection of the new bells before shipment. PHOTO: STELLA MARIS PARISH ARCHIVES



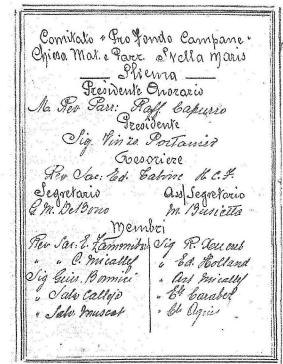


THE SUNDAY TIMES OF MALTA

The first page of the 1853 petition to the Governor requesting the grant of a bell for the proposed church at Sliema. Right: Sir William Reid's approval of the grant. PHOTOS: NATIONAL ARCHIVES, RABAT



An old photograph showing the original facade of Stella Maris church with bell cots. PHOTO: STELLA MARIS PARISH MUSEUM



The first page of the minute book of the 'Bells Committee', showing its composition. PHOTO: STELLA MARIS PARISH ARCHIVES

The bells of Stella Maris

DAVID DANDRIA

Sliema did not exist. In fact, the site on which the town now stands supported a small rural community of farmers and herdsmen.

ing in the area was a small chapel in what is now known as Tigné, built in the early 17th cenchapel, which was dedicated to the Nativity of Mary, is reputed to be the origin of the toponym 'Sliema', as the crews of vessels sailing past used to salute the Virgin Mary by saying the Ave

Maria (Sliem ghalik Marija). After some time this chapel fell into disuse and was desecrated in 1659; it was replaced by another chapel on the same site in 1741. In 1798, this second chapel was completely destroyed during the French Blockade.

Six years later, another church was built further inland and this survives to the present day and is known as the chapel of the Vira dense urban complex.

suspended from a beam, while a third bell is cracked. Tradition has it that one of these bells used to be rung whenever someone Before the early 19th century, was hung on the gallows situated across Marsamxett Bay in Floriana. The three balls are now was an expanse of arable land that found in the parish museum.

This chapel continued to serve the religious needs of the com-The only ecclesiastical build- munity for a number of years. By the middle of the century the population had increased considerably and the chapel of Ditury, situated across Marsamx- vine Graces, with a maximum ett Bay from Valletta. This capacity of 50 worshippers, became totally inadequate. The need for a new church was

> felt, and in 1851 a number of respected residents signed a petition to Bishop Mario Sant in which they pointed out the inadequacy of the existing chapel and proposed the building of a new church. The Cathedral Chapter owned land known as Talwas laid on April 28 by the Dioce-

gin of Divine Graces. It was com- who had been involved in the ne- acting as bell cots. pleted in 1804 and for a long gotiations for the grant of the This façade is no longer in exisbuilding works started right The chapel of the Virgin of Dia away but, just before building longer than expected and was comas it is now popularly known), concerning "the bad condition bells were found on the roof ring additional expenses.

On August 9, 1853, 52 Sliema reed to the Governor, Sir William Reid, in which they requested the donation of a bell formerly at the chapel of the Civil Hospital in Merchants Street, Valletta, and then lying at the arsenal of the Royal Engineers. In support of their petition they cited the mentioned unexpected increased expenses connected with the foundations.

The petition was looked upon favourably by the governor, who had already contributed to the funds being raised for the buildgranted on October 10. The church was completed two years later when it was blessed by Mgr Chappelle on August 11, 1855, and dedicated to Our Lady Star of the Sea, or as commonly known, Stella Maris.

The new church had a simple construction. The only entrance Gioacchino Trigance. Katidral opposite the chapel and, was framed by a simple mouldin early 1852, the chapter donated ing in front of which a neothis land. Permission for the classical portico was erected building of the new church was featuring ionic columns sursoon granted and the first stone mounted by a triangular pedi-

> 19th century. This work took parish of Birkirkara in 1878.

The enlarged church featured façade divided into three sections: a large central portico flanked by twin bell towers. These bell towers have a combination of early Christian and Renaissance motifs, and the very distinctive, having a pleasing impact on the skyline.

The bell cots of the old church housed three bells, two of which are still hanging in the new bell towers. The smallest one bears an inscription stating it was doing of the church, and it was nated by Dun Karm Casha Gerada and that it was manufactured by Giulio Cauchi in 1875. It now strikes the quarter hours.

The mid-sized bell, which now strikes the hours, bears the arms of the Order of St John and the date 1796. It was cast by deliver the five the renowned bellfounder

The Trigance family came to Malta with the Order in 1530, and between 1700 and 1798 they were responsible for the Order's foundry in Valletta. I have not ment. Above the roofline, a short been able to confirm whether san Vicar, Mgr Vincenzo Chapelle. blocking course served as the this was the bell that was given ernor Sir William Reid in 1853. Edmondo Tabone.

The largest bell, which has a time stood alone in open coun- land, was entrusted with the tence as the church was further beautiful tone, was manufac- in raising the necessary funds and Look to the star, call on Mary". tryside. It is now surrounded by design of the new church. The enlarged and redesigned in the late tured in Ghajn Dwieli by Giulio issued a tender for the purchase As already mentioned, these but, fortunately, the two bell who first drew my attention to vine Graces (or Il-knisja ż-żghira began, a problem cropped up pleted in 1909. In the meantime, mained in the new bell towers of Bianchi of Varese, Italy, whose found in the pre-1909 church Bishop Carmelo Scicluna had the new church until 1937 when representative in Malta was Maes- which are now used in conjunc- December 20, 1942, after heroic in this article is based on the book boasts two important paintings of the rocks" on which the founblessed and separated the church it was sold for £50 to the parish tro Ettore Lucia. They had submitten the church clock which by Mattia Preti. Two functional dations were to be laid, incur- of Stella Maris from its parent of Marsaxlokk after the installated an offer to supply and deliver had been installed by Mikelang tion of a new set of five bells.

Following the completion of sidents signed a petition address- a completely new two-storey the new church façade, the transported on trailers to the parishioners of Stella Maris felt the need for a new set of bells that would complement the beautiful bell towers. Accordingly, an ad hoc committee with parish priest Fr Raffaele Casculptural reliefs at the top are purro as honorary president was set up in 1933 tasked with raising the necessary funds and with the eventual purchase of the new bells; the minute book of this committee is still found in the parish archives.

"Fonderia Enrico Bianchi of Varese, Italy, submitted an offer to supply and bells for £1,189"

The prime movers of the committee, entitled 'Pro fondo Campane Chiesa Mat. E Parr. Stella Maris' were Fr Carmelo Micallef, who made several personal contributions to the expenses Architect Giuseppe Bonavia, basis for two small structures to the Sliema petitioners by Gov- incurred, and treasurer Fr parted - I calm the tempests - O Stella Maris parish church Calleja (grandson of Salvu

Cauchi in 1885 and weighed nine of the new set of five bells. This five bells are supplemented by towers were not hit and the bells the petition to Governor Sir qantar (just over 700kg). It re- was awarded to Fonderia Enrico the two smaller bells originally survived intact. the five bells and accessories for Sapiano of Luga in 1875.

the sum of just over 120,000 lire, equivalent at the time to £1,189. Following inspection in Varese

by members of the committee, the bells arrived in Malta in early August 1937 on the Italian vessel *Donizetti* and they were courtyard of St Patrick's Institute, a short distance away from the parish church. Here they were consecrated on Sunday. August 8 by the Bishop of Gozo. Mgr Michael Gonzi, who was representing the Bishop of Malta, Dom. Mauro Caruana.

The bells were given the follow-

ing names: Maria Stella (4,495kg, 'sol', sponsored by Vicar-General Mgr Pawlu Galea); Maria Dolores (2,012kg, 'si', sponsored by Marchioness Violet Scicluna, Baroness of Tabria), Maria Rosaria (1,150kg, 're', sponsored by Carmelo Cassar Torreggiani, hon. president of the Stella Maris Band), Giuseppina (664kg, 'fa', sponsored by Carmelo Agius, president of the Stella Maris Band Club) and Carmela-Teresa-Raffaela (485kg, 'sol', sponsored and donated by parish priest Fr Raphael Capurro).

Each of the bells bore a suitits name. That of Maria Stella I pray for the souls of the de- works out of his own pocket.

FONDERIA BIANCHI PRIMA FABBRICA ITALIANA DI CAMPANE

The invoice for the new bells from Fonderia Bianchi, Varese, Italy, dated July 17, 1937. PHOTO: STELLA MARIS PARISH ARCHIVES

The new bells were transported to the parish church on August 14 and 15, accompanied by the Stella Maris Band. The delicate job of hanging the bells was supervised by committee praise of Our Lady, Star of the Sea. able Latin inscription related to member Salvu Calleja, who had also made the necessary prepatranslates as follows: "I praise ration in the bell towers for the the true God - I summon the hanging of the new bells on steel people - I assemble the clergy - beams. Calleja paid for these Stella Maris, Mgr Anton Portelli,

holy, powerful immortal Lord - sustained severe damage during Calleja) and John Bisazza for Praised be the name of God - World War II when it was hit by their invaluable assistance. I am enemy bombs on March 1, 1942, also grateful to Vincent Peresso

mason Felice Mifsud.

The feast of Stella Maris is being celebrated this week, albeit in a reduced form due to COVID-19 restrictions. The bells will, of course, still be ringing out in

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the Archpriest of Dr Charles Delicata, Mr Victor William Reid at the National The church was reopened on Archives. A lot of the information work by the parish priest, Don by the late Maurice Busietta, Tas-Giuseppe Inguanez, and master Sliema - Il-Knisja u l-Paroċċa ta' Stella Maris, published in 1977.