MATTHEW VELLA

FEW would have known the history of Frank Saviour Mifsud, one of Sliema's many residents who could be seen walking on the seafront promenade, where he spent the last years of his life.

The one-time traffic policeman had left Malta in the 1950s to make a name for himself in the vice world of London's Soho, where his 18-stone build would ultimately earn him the moniker that hinted at a violent temper: 'Big Frank' Mifsud, who recruited the Maltese to the Soho gang that would become known as 'The Syndicate' a vast call-girl empire built up in London over 20 years.

The foundations of the gang were laid by a family of Sicilians who at one time lived in Malta, the Messina brothers, who followed on their father's footsteps as brothel-keepers. In the UK they took up English names - Eugenio became Edward Marshal, Carmelo became Charles Maitland, Alfredo became Alfred Martin, Salvatore became Arthur Evans and Atillio became Raymond Maynard - by the late 1940s they were operating 30 houses of prostitution on Queen Street, Bond Street and Stafford Street.

When Scotland Yard swept the gang away in the 1950s, the foundations for Maltese gangsters were

a Jewish family from the East End, principal of the Syndicate.

Italian Messina Brothers gang. in Bower Street, by the late 60s a Belgian bank, and property inter-Mifsud and Silver controlled some ests in the Channel islands. "That's Soho vice trials 19 of Soho's 24 strip-clubs.

tween £200 and £500 a week. The 30 Soho prostitution houses. they paid £100-a-week rent.



here in the 1970s when he was acquitted of

So famous... Mifsud is extradited to the UK to face charges in the Silver-Mifsud gang vice bust that also led to the corruption trials of Scotland Yard detectives, but Mifsud lived to see another day when he was cleared of ordering a hit on protection racketteer

Bernie Silver gang of 1974, the Maltese Syndicate met its demise. Silver and nine men, mostly Maltese, were charged with living off noral earnings between 1955 and 1973. Frank Mifsud dodged arrest when the gang was rounded up, but was detained in Switzerland

In the vice crime trial of the

and held in custody there. Bernie Silver, born in 1922 into With Silver, Mifsud was the main

liceman Frank Mifsud, their rise to a rich living," prosecutor Michael keeping in the background al the ing small-time criminals, and ofprominence beginning in the 1950s Corkery said at the trial. Docu- time. They hid behind the others fering not to press charges in exby taking over the remnants of the ments found in Silver's Knights- successfully for many years until change for money or information, bridge flat revealed ownership of a the day of reckoning came," the started to slowly unravel the Syndi-Starting off with one strip-club twin-diesel yacht, credit facilities in prosecutor had said. in Soho and Mayfair earned be- acted as rent collectors from some

floors above, prostitutes operated Mifsud and Silver almost never ring. collection to the their front-men, influence, most of the Metropoli- sulted in 13 detectives - including

titutes, deducted their own fees, Squad were in the Syndicate's pay, then passed the remainder on to including its head Detective Chief the bosses. "So the Syndicate pros- Superintendent Bill Moody. But a joined forces with former traffic po- "These men indeed have made" pered with the main characters 1969 Times exposé of police fram-

just the tip of the iceberg," Corkery The day of reckoning came in police-criminal links. Particularly The prostitutes operating for it told the court, saying the Syndicate December 1973, when freelance favoured were Silver and Mifsud, reporters working for the News with the discovery of a detailed of the World investigated the vice ledger of the Syndicate's police pay-Syndicate acquired property in The Met police said the Syndi- world in and around Soho, leading offs during a raid on the home of Soho, running strip clubs in the cate would collect over £100,000 in Scotland Yard to carry out inquir- Silver associate Jimmy Humphreys. basement or ground floors. In the rents from prostitutes every week. ies that led to the bust of the crime It led to hundreds of dismissals,

full-time in separate flats, for which dealt directly with girls, leaving the At the height of the Syndicate's ruption trials of 1976–77 which re-

who collected the cash from pros- tan Police's Obscene Publications cate's network.

a violent vice enterprise in London's Soho

for some 20 years. Prostitution, gambling,

bribery and even murder was the legacy

Maltese Syndicate'

JAILED VICE BOSS PLANNED GANGLAND WAR OF TERROR

of the Silver-Mifsud gang they called 'the

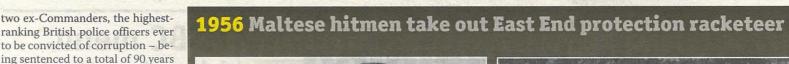
A series of other trials and exposes revealed a general picture of forced retirements and the cor-



Syndicate controlled

Soho vice racket

for 18 years'



Just as the 1973 police raids were due, Silver and Mifsud took off on an 'extended holiday' after being tipped off. But the newspapers later obliged with an elaborate pretence by Scotland Yard of having the warrants withdrawn and given up on the case. The ruse led to the Syndicate members to return to London. Bernie Silver returned from France and was arrested while he was having dinner with his girlfriend at the Park Tower Hotel on 30 December 1973.

News

One of the men who collected takings from the prostitutes was Big Frank's own brother Joseph Mifsud who "acted in a managerial role and was also a shareholder. From time to time, in his brother's absence, he also received this money collected from the girls."

Two other Syndicate members Victor 'Bajzu' Micallef and Fred Brett faced charges of kidnapping another Maltese associate, Frank Dyer, suspecting him of having shopped the crime ring to the po-

Dyer originally had come to London in 1947 where he married a Soho prostitute and collected rent for the Syndicate. He was twice jailed for living on her immoral earnings and left the country for Malta in 1959 after a warrant was issued for his arrest for again living off immoral earnings. Dyer later returned in August 1973 to discuss the purchase of a Berwick Street property in Soho as the crime ring started selling off the properties after the News of the World reports. But when the Syndicate suspected Dyer of having given the police a statement, they kidnapped him from a London pub, beat him up in a basement cellar and threatened him with a gun, and then offered him £20,000 to disappear so as not to turn up as a witness at the trial of the Syndicate.

Silver would be sentenced to six years in prison before Mifsud got extradited from Switzerland to face the same charges. But he would later get his sentence quashed on appeal.

Smithson murder trial

In the UK, Big Frank was also tried and cleared of the 1956 murder of gangster Thomas 'Scarface' Smithson, 36, having denied ordering the killing of the protection racketeer. Silver was convicted on 8 July, 1975 of the murder, sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and to ten years' imprisonment for conspiracy to murder, but later cleared on appeal. Mifsud's trial followed informa- something, and turning around, I

go. On the first occasion when he of Thomas went to collect the money, Smithson arrived with ten men armed (above) with iron bars, and Caruana paid Vince Farrugia, a Maltese national who also ran a gambling club in the East End, heard Mifsud say of Smithson: "We will have to get rid

Up to no good:

Philip Ellul

and Victor

Syndicate,

found quilty

of the murder

Spampinato

were members

who were later

It was alleged he hired underworld gunman Philip Ellul, also a Maltese, to kill Smithson.

in the 1973 bust.

Mifsud had a share in a gam-

bling club run by Maltese national

George Caruana, who, however,

had to pay Smithson protec-

tion money - five shillings in the

pound. Caruana later closed the

club and moved to the East End,

but Smithson would not let him

Ellul had been charged along with Victor Spampinato in 1956 for the murder of Smithson, by shooting him with a revolver in a Maida Vale boarding house.

Ellul claimed Smithson had already threatened to kill him. On the evening of 25 June, 1956, he and Spampinato went to see George Caruana at 'Blondie Bate's' boarding house, where he found Smithson there. "While talking to Miss Bates I saw her looking at

> sors in his hand," Ellul had told week-long trial. He jumped up in no time and was would." hit me and I shot him."



with the landlord, and that while the murder of Smithson. Sultana, he waited in a flat, Ellul came in then aged 45, denied conspiring and shot him in the neck. with others. That prosecution alleged Mifsud Frank Mifsud was also found guilty and jailed five years and

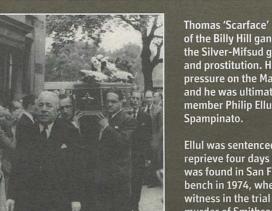
helped organise Smithson's killing, and that shortly before a remand appearance in 1975 at a London court, Mifsud said of Smithson: "He was a blackmailer. He only got what he deserved, He was always making me look small. I'm sorry, but he deserved it."

Ellul was sentenced to death but reprieved four days before execution. He served 11 years of a life sentence and went to America.

But in 1974 he was found destitute at age 47 on a park bench in in Soho, had given false evidence San Francisco, and he voluntarily in the trial of the two men. came to the UK as chief witness in the case against Bernie Silver and jailed for two years along with Jo-Frank Mifsud. But he changed his seph Fenech and Emmaneul Borg, mind and returned to the USA. for trying to bribe Stocker not to The jury of six men and six wom- appear as a witness. en took more than eight hours to But Big Frank was until the last saw Smithson with a pair of scis- bring in a verdict at the end of the minute undeterred to see him-

The prosecution, however, said for five nights after being found officer... because [Mifsud] could Smithson had gone to the board- guilty of plotting with others to be free [from] a mental hospital





Thomas 'Scarface' Smithson was a member of the Billy Hill gang who was muscling in on the Silver-Mifsud gang's interests in gambling and prostitution. His protection racket put pressure on the Maltese Syndicate's activities and he was ultimately killed by Maltese gang member Philip Ellul, who was aided by Victor

Ellul was sentenced to death but given a reprieve four days before the execution. He was found in San Francisco, living on a park bench in 1974, where he was asked to be chief witness in the trial of Frank Mifsud for the





According to the Met police, the Syndicate would collect over £100,000 in rents from prostitutes every week

ing house for a business meeting pervert justice over inquiries into inside 12 months."

self avoid prison time. Witness the court. "He said, 'I am going to After the Old Bailey acquittal of Dr George Grant, senior medihave you now and made a swing 22 March, 1976, Frank's brother cal officer at Brixton Prison, was at me and I pulled out the gun. I Joe claimed he was the victim of scolded by Judge McKinnon for ducked and hit him on the chin a frame-up. "He has never mur- attempting to have Mifsud rewith my fist and he fell on the bed, dered anyone in his life and never manded into a mental institution without any prison sentence. "This after me. I thought he was going to Carmelo Sultana, a Maltese cook, seems to indicate a lack of touch was however jailed in June 1976 with reality, for a senior medical

£50,000 for suborning

Harold Stocker to commit per-

jury during a criminal court trial

of Maltese gangsters Anthony

Cauchi and Tony Galea. The of-

fence was the result of three petrol

bomb explosions at the clubs at

the end of 1966 and the beginning

of 1967, allegedly at the behest of

Mifsud. Cauchi was jailed for five

years and Galea for two years. Har-

old Stocker, who ran a hotdog stall

