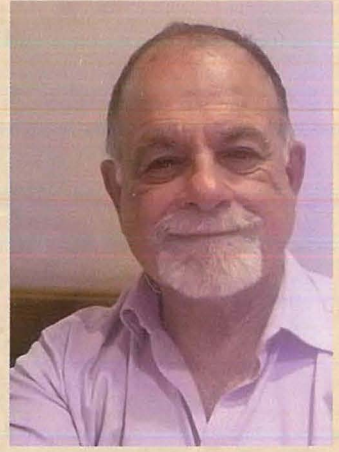


# Some Streets of St. Julian's

by **Albert Storage**



When the editor of this magazine asked me to write yet another something about St. Julian's for the annual *festa* magazine (and that was months ago), I scratched my mostly bald head as to what I was to write about this time. It was a mere two weeks ago that I made up my mind as to what the subject would be. I decided on highlighting some of the streets of our town.

Since the saying goes "charity begins at home" I shall begin with my street, Triq il-Karmnu/ Carmel Street. Very much mine and doubly so because I have always lived here, in the very house where I was born. Now why Carmel/il-Karmnu? It has nothing to do with the relatively young Carmelite parish centred on the church of Our Lady of Mt.Carmel in Balluta Bay. The connection is a direct one with the Carmelite convent of Mdina, or the Notabile of bygone centuries. That convent owned land in this area. In fact the street parallel to mine, Sant'Elija/ St. Elijah or Elias named after the prophet Elijah whose connection with Mt. Carmel in Israel is documented in the Old Testament. He is venerated by the Carmelite Order and so is a Carmelite martyr called Angelo hence the name of the street upon which both the top ends of my street and St. Elijah converge is called Triq Sant'Anglu/St. Angelo Street.

Interesting to know too that the land covered

house was sold and the new owners decided to remove all the whitewash covering most of the façade the inscription emerged. It is in (abbreviated) Italian as Malta's official language was when it was written. It reads thus:

"CLAU[SURA] TA GEBELIN/SPETTANTE AL VEN/[ERABILE] CON[VEN]TO DEL CARMINE/DELLA NOT[ABI]LE/CONCESSA A CENSO A MICHELE/XUEREP P[ER] ANNI 99 IN/ATTI DEL N[OTAIO] SALVATORE/VITALE LI 22 MAGGIO 1776."

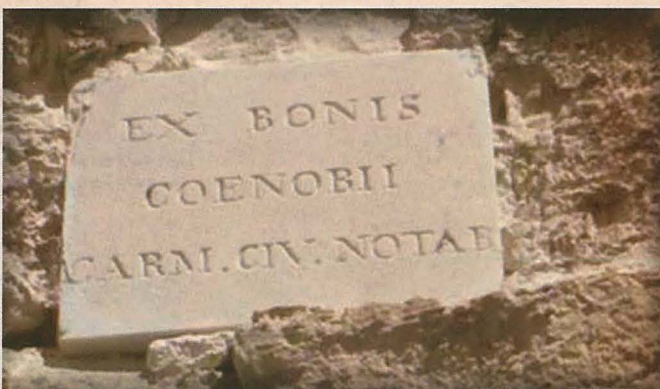


*The 1776 inscription*

Meaning that

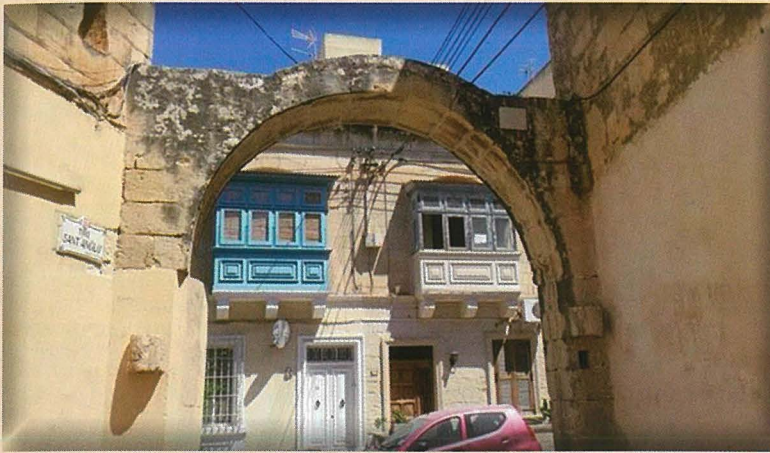
"The enclosure known as Ta' Gebelin belonging to the venerable Carmelite order of Notabile, granted in emphyteusis to Michele Xuerep for 99 years, in the acts of Notary Salvatore Vitale on 22 May 1776."

Note the old spelling of Xuereb ending in a "p". The Notary was the father of the future patriot Notary Emanuele Vitale (1759-1802), one of the prominent Maltese leaders during the uprising against the French. According to this notarial deed, ground rent would have to be paid by Xuerep and his heirs to the Carmelites of Mdina up to 1875. The area which as locals know is an uphill one on many sides, was eventually built over. Michele Xuerep and whoever inherited the lease built property in this former farmland and while charging householders a rent the landlords in turn paid the ground rent to the monks. The inscription on that façade and the street names are not the only proof of this connection and the use to which the land was originally put. There are



*Inscription in Carmel Street corner with Main Street*

by these streets and the buildings thereon was once an enclosed agricultural area and there are several clues still visible to confirm this. First of all there is an inscription engraved on stone which goes slightly deeper into the surrounding wall and which for decades had remained hidden under various layers of whitewash on the façade of a house just on the corner of St. Angelo Street with Birkirkara Hill. When the



*The arch in St. Angelo Street*

marble tablets inscribed in Latin high up behind the arch in Triq Sant'Anglu, and one each on the left hand jamb of the old gates at the bottom of Sant' Elija and Karmnu corner with Triq il-Kbira/Main Street. The inscriptions differ slightly only in their abbreviations. That at the bottom end of my street reads thus

"Ex bonis coenob/Carm. Ord. /Civ Notab."  
(Pertaining to the Carmelite Order of the City of Notabile.)

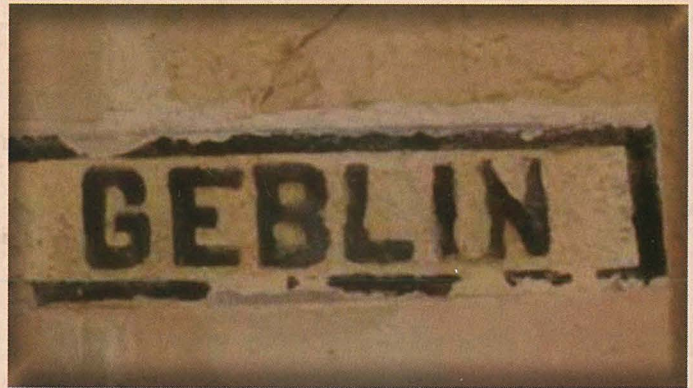
Now all the street corners on the outer edge of the old enclosure had gates and pairs of stone brackets fashioned from a single block of stone which was inserted in the jambs. I remember the only one at the bottom of my street. A combination of erosion and carelessly invasive use of heavy vehicles damaged it beyond redemption. One survives intact at the bottom of Sant'Elija. Its opposite counterpart, and which the builders of N. 92 Main Street had so carefully inserted into the outer wall of the house, was intact until in at least two separate bits were knocked off by heavy vehicles and only a fragment remains sticking out. Fortunately, the only surviving pair is in good shape and these are the ones behind the arch at the Birkirkara end of Sant'Anglu.

As the notarial deed states, the area is known as Ta Gebelin (old spelling). Gebel in Arabic means mountain, from which the Maltese Gebel means an area at high elevation such as the cliff area of Gebel Ciantar close to Dingli Cliffs. Gebelin means something lower, a hilly prominence. As far as I know only two houses, one in Sant'Anglu (Ta' Geblin) and another in Triq il-Kbira/Main Street (Geblin) keep alive the locality's old name.

I have just mentioned Triq il-Kbira. Those not in the know, and so do foreign visitors, find it hard to fathom why Main Street, which begins where it borders on Tower Road (Sliema) and Old College



*The remains of the stone brackets*



Street, round the corner from Balluta Bay instead of following the promenade disappears behind the City of London bar and into its narrowest point running parallel to the promenade going on towards Spinola Bay. They think that Main Street is more suitable as a name for that part of the promenade which for many years bore the name of British Governor Lord Grenfell (1841-1925) whose tenure in Malta was from 1899-1903. It was during his governorship that the wider road was built linking Balluta with St. Julian's (Spinola) Bay. Before then Main Street was the only street linking the two bays. Some years ago the name Grenfell Street was changed to (Triq) Gorg Borg Olivier/(Street) in honour of the late Prime Minister of Malta who died in 1980. Grenfell's name survives in the short junction (Trejjet Grenfell) linking Main Street half-way along the promenade.



Some ask what's in a name and I remember the controversy when Birkirkara Street/Triq Birkirkara was changed to Birkirkara Hill/it-Telgha ta' Birkirkara. It is a bit of a misnomer because once one goes up the slope one does not find Birkirkara as the street dips into an area still within the border area of St. Julian's with San Gwann. It reminds me when the old painted street name of Forrest Street close to Spinola Palace was replaced for a time with "Forest" and translated as Triq il-Foresta. In actual fact Forrest was the name of a highly placed medical military personality who was in charge when the nearby palace was used as a military hospital in World War I.



Some years ago I wrote in some detail about the Spinola family whose name is remembered in the Palace they built close to the bay which bears their name, as does Spinola Road/Triq Spinola. Lapsi Street/Triq Lapsi was never translated into English as "Ascension Street" when our street



names were still in the two official languages and which I think should be the case, with Maltese being on top. Lapsi is a reminder of the several decades in the 19th century when some wanted to have the titular of the future (old) parish church changed to the Ascension of Our Lord. This was resisted and although the church has been nicknamed Ta' Lapsi the titular remained St. Julian, as it had always been since the late 16th century. There are many other streets I could mention but space does not permit.



I end as I started, with my street, because at the bottom end corner with Main Street there is a little bit of history testifying to the complicated historical language issues which raged in Malta up to a few years before World War II. It is the only case of its kind which I know. The ceramic street name in Maltese is attached to the high wall of the corner house N.96 Main Street. A little bit bigger and partly covered by the ceramic plaque remain fading traces of the old bilingual street name. However the unique thing is that there are unfortunately ever decreasing traces of the original old name in Italian "Strada Carmine" in use until 1934 when Italian was abolished as one of Malta's official languages and replaced by Maltese.