20 – From Valletta to Mdina

Hamrun, Santa Venera and Birkirkara

For a newcomer, your best bet may be to take the northern tourist route on the Hop-On Hop-Off bus from Valletta. For the initiated, the local bus (51, 52) from the City Gate terminus works well. En route either way, you pass through Hamrun, Santa Venera and Birkirkara which, from the main road, is simply ribbon development from Valletta. There is no hopping on and off here, though you can, of course, from the local bus, but you would need to know where you are going to explore.

If you don't fancy venturing behind the main road, look out, as you pass, for a grand-looking building behind railings with an important gate. This was the **Vincenzo Bugeja Institute**, founded for poor girls in 1880 by the Marquis Bugeja and his wife Anna (Chapter 11). They are both buried in the San Vincenzo chapel in the grounds. The complex is now a ministry.

The institute is also bounded by Triq il-Kbira San Giusepp which contains two other historic sites. The Whitmore family's summer residence was the **Casa Leone Palace** and Gardens (also known as Palazzo Manoel, 1730). Here they entertained the new governor, the Marquis of Hastings, Lady Hastings and their daughters on the night of the Feast of St Venera some time after 1824 (Chapter 9). The gardens, now called Romeo Romano, were opened to the public in 1977. In the same street, Adelaide Cini set up the **Cini Institute**, as Chapter 11 describes, initially for unmarried mothers, some time after 1858. She is buried in the chapel there.

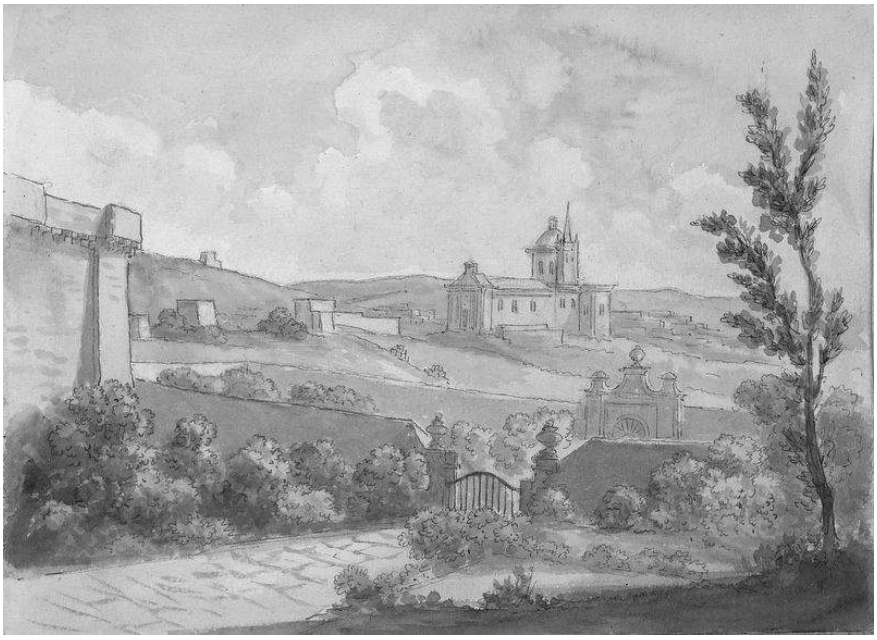
When Harry Luke was lieutenant governor, from 1930 to 1938, he lived in the Casa Leone with his wife **Joyce Luke** (née Fremlin, 1894–1973). She was on the advisory board of Cecilia de Trafford's Malta Industries Association until it became a company (Chapter 14). During the Lukes' occupation of the Casa, the Warren sisters (Chapter 15) put on several Malta Amateur Dramatic Club productions in the garden, including Shakespeare.

In 1903, Maria Teresa Nuzzo, who had earlier been a school teacher (Chapter 10), set up what became the Nuzzo Institute and founded Daughters of the Sacred Heart (Chapter 11). The headquarters and a school are in Triq S Frangisk, Hamrun.

Eighteenth-century baroque **St Helen's Parish Church**, Birkirkara, has no obvious woman connection beyond its name and the sketch overleaf by Cornelia Knight made in 1800 when she visited Malta with Nelson and Lady Hamilton at the time of French occupation (Chapter 8). It is worth seeing because this area looked rather different then. On Wednesdays and Fridays a large market surrounds the church.

Attard

The first major stop from Valletta is Attard where there are two unmissable places. The tourist bus drops you a few yards from the **San Anton Palace**

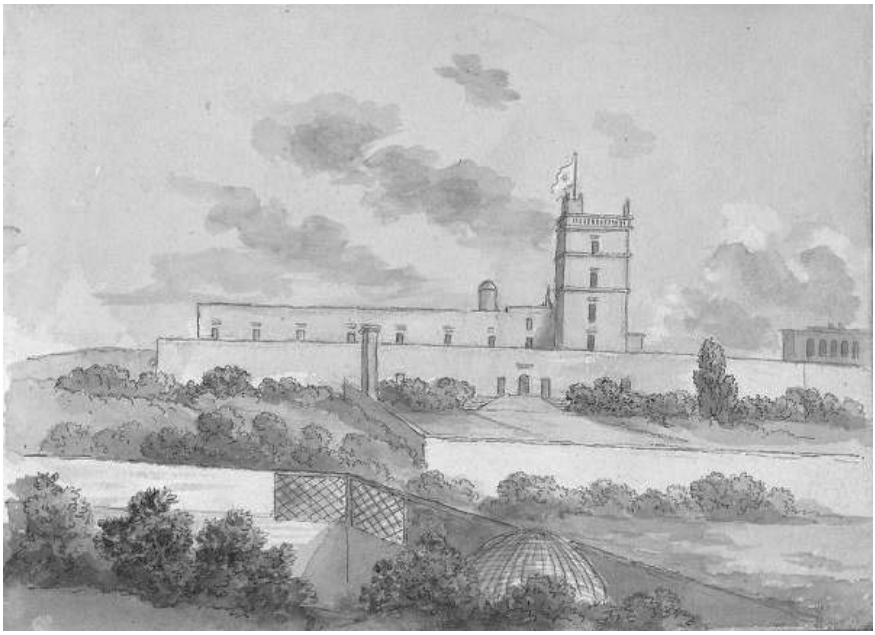


48. St Helen's Church, Birkirkara by Cornelia Knight, from *Foudroyant* Sketchbook, courtesy of James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

gates; the local bus does so on a parallel road, meaning that you have to rely on the driver telling you where to descend and then trot down a wide road, past the side of the Corinthia Palace Hotel – a useful pit stop – on your left, to the San Anton gates ahead.

After 1800, everyone who was anyone during the British period visited San Anton or stayed there. But it was built in 1623 by Fr Antoine de Paule as a summer retreat shortly before he became Grand Master, and there he entertained his mistress Flaminia Valenti (Chapter 6). You can see the wooden door through which she entered the grounds in the top right hand wall of the private part of the gardens, and if you go out of the back gate into St Anthony Street (Triq Sant'Antnin), and turn right until you reach No. 25, now private property, you will be in front of the villa he built for her. After de Paule's death in 1736, Flaminia entered the Maddalena and San Anton became the country residence of the Grand Masters.

Lady Hamilton and Cornelia Knight visited Captain Sir Alexander Ball there in 1800 when it was the headquarters of Maltese resistance against the French; Cornelia's sketch shows San Anton from a distance and how Attard, too, has changed. After Emma Hamilton, the most noteworthy guest was, in 1810, Lady Hester Stanhope who stayed there with her lover and entourage (Chapter 9). Of those who visited, Lady Grosvenor, in 1840, introduces us to an unexpected guest:



49. San Anton by Cornelia Knight, from *Foudroyant* Sketchbook, courtesy of the James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

> We stopped, in passing at St Antonio, the governor's country house, the garden of which is pretty, with numbers of pepper trees and geraniums, but quite dried up by the heat, no effectual rain having fallen in Malta for three years. This place was then inhabited by the Emir of the Druses, with his wife and suite, who, having revolted from Mehemet Ali, had abandoned Mount Lebanon, and were about to proceed to Constantinople.

The Emir and his wife are out-of-the-ordinary denizens of San Anton. Their presence is best described by the 'governess' to Governor Bouverie's children quoted in Nicholas de Piro's *The Sovereign Palaces of Malta*. It was Bouverie who lent the Maronite Chief of Lebanon – not a nice man – and his wife the residence after a British man-of-war had brought him, his family and his suite from Sidon to Malta. She was not very impressed by 'Mrs Besheer' (Bechir):

> The Emir's wife was said to be about 23 years old although the Emir himself was about 80 and had two pretty children about 6 and 9 years old. – Mrs Emir was a pretty pleasing woman richly dressed in a tunic of green velvet and trousers of white exquisitely embroidered in gold – a cap of red velvet sitting close to her head, and richly studded with jewels and a plait of brown hair crossed over her forehead – This sounds pretty and becoming, and might have been so had a little more neatness prevailed,

> but her skin looked unwashed, her hair uncombed, her fingers unfit to wear courtly ornaments and in short, her whole appearance denoted a Slovern who might have slept in her finery.

Lady Montefiore, who knew about these things, having often visited that part of the world, calls the young woman **Princess Báheeyát Eddoonyá** (Beauty of the World).

There were other royal inhabitants. The Connaughts lived there, and Lady Layard describes in her diary her stay with them in 1908. Queen Victoria's son, Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, and his wife since 1874, **Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna of Russia** (1853–1920), lived there from 1886 to 1889 when he was Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet. Their daughter **Princess Marie** (1875–1938), later Queen of Romania, was 11 when they arrived and describes with nostalgia many years later their happy, if privileged, years at San Anton and in Malta in *The Story of My Life* (1934); of their first morning she writes:

> Our bedroom opened out on to a wee stone flight of stairs leading into the garden. Half-way down those stairs was a little flat roof on to which you could step. The first look down from that roof into San Antonio gardens belongs to 'ecstasies' I can never forget. …

After exploring the garden with her sister she continues,

> … An enchanted world indeed. … Fairyland!
>
> Hand in hand Ducky and I stood looking down upon all this, amazed, speechless. It was a revelation, its perfect beauty actually made tears of emotion well up in our eyes.

It might be a bit over-blown, as was much of Marie's life, but the full account of her stay in Malta is nicely done. Ducky, then aged nine, was **Princess Victoria Melita** (1876–1939), born in Malta during their father's earlier Royal Navy posting, as her second name suggests, at San Anton. She was to become Grand Duchess of Hesse and the Rhine and later eloped with Grand Duke Kyril of Russia.

The large public gardens as you enter the main gate are worth visiting, particularly on a hot day, and you can walk through the concourse of the palace to the back gate, but not visit the interior of it, which is now the President's residence. I was particularly keen to see the Russian chapel and did manage, for the sake of this book, and much escorted, to do so.

Albert Abela in 'A Note about the Russian Chapel at San Anton Palace', contained in Elizaveta Zolina's book of essays, suggests that Maria Alexandrovna, Duchess of Edinburgh, a devout Orthodox Christian, worshipped in the chapel. Following their departure, it was known as the Russian Chapel, and was used again with that in mind when Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna of Russia passed through Malta as a refugee in

50. Daughters of the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, San Anton, 1888: *left* Princess Marie; *right* Princess Victoria Melita, from Van der Kiste, *Princess Victoria Melita*

1919 (Chapter 13). Lord Methuen's ADC, Captain Robert Ingham, noted in his diary that April:

> All this week we continued to make everything more perfect in the Palace and fitted up an old Chapel, making it conform as far as possible to a Greek Orthodox Church. We had a simple but beautiful stone altar carved from the local soft stone, which took only a few days …

In the chapel is an icon of St George presented by the first Russian woman pilot-cosmonaut, **General Valentina Tereshkova** (b.1937) in 1995, prompted by interest in the chapel by the President's wife, **Gemma Mifsud Bonnici** (née Bianco), and the efforts of **Dr Elizaveta Zolina** (d.2004), Director of the Russian Centre for Science and Culture.

Some royal visitors planted a tree to celebrate their stay. Maria Feodorovna, having planted the oak *Quercus Rober*, jabbed at the Kaiser's tree with her parasol and declared, 'Horrid man – why don't you pull it up?'

At the back gate of San Anton, turn left into St Anthony Street, cross over Lord Strickland Street, and continue. On the opposite side of the road, on your right, is the sign for Villa Bologna – the wedding present Fabrizio Grech had built in 1745 for his daughter Maria Teresa when, as recounted in Chapter 7, she married Nicola Perdicomati Bologna, 2nd Count della Catena.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the home of Lord Strickland, 6th Count della Catena, his wife Edeline and their family, including Cecilia and Mabel (Chapter 14). Soon after the family's return from Gerald Strickland's postings abroad in 1918, Edeline died. His new wife, Margaret, came to live at the Villa in 1926. She was a keen gardener, and she was rich, so that the work she initiated, inside and out, was nothing but the best, and there the Stricklands entertained.

Gerald died before Margaret and, when she died in 1949, her step-daughter Cecilia, by then de Trafford, moved into the villa in 1951. Her earlier philanthropical and her political ventures are detailed in Chapters 14 and 16. In 1950 she decided to set up a pottery again and did so first in what had been her father's workshops. It moved to the stables after a few years and expanded.

Following Cecilia's death in 1982, most of her enterprises, already in decline because of local economic and political circumstances, ceased, in spite of her son Anthony's efforts to develop the weaving. But the pottery continued and, in 2009, her grandson Jasper de Trafford returned with his wife from London and took over management of pottery and Villa Bologna. Today, the shop at the villa thrives. **Annie** from Rabat, who was a weaver in Cecilia's Rabat weaving enterprise from 1954, serves in it. The grounds, open to the public, are available for events; Chapter 9 tells how, in 2013, Lady Flora Hastings' 'The Maltese Evening Song', composed some time after the governor and his family arrived in 1824, was performed there.

Lija

When, as a result of the changes at the Villa Bologna, Mabel Strickland had to find a new home, she chose Lija – which is not far by car from Attard. **Villa Parisio**, where she settled for the rest of her life, is in the little square that opens out from narrow Mabel Strickland Street. Given her larger than life nature and political activities, it is not surprising that untoward events occurred there, typified by one described by her biographer, Joan Alexander. The King of Sweden, Princess Alice and the Mountbattens had been invited for lunch,

> The time came to leave, and on these occasions the big double front doors were usually thrown open, but now the doors stuck and would not open. Princess Alice, who was slightly deaf, impatiently nudged Edwina inferring they should leave, not realising what had happened. On the other side of the door where the official cars waited the sailors began pushing, whilst

> indoors the smart guests began pulling. This went on for some time until suddenly the doors gave way with a resounding crash sending the sailors flat on their faces and the royal guests flat on their backs. As with so many things connected with Mabel everyone was rolling about with laughter.

Princess Alice was probably Lord Mountbatten's sister, **Princess Andrew of Greece** (1885–1969)

Ta' Qali and the Aviation Museum

Mabel Strickland and Lija may have followed on naturally for the story, but it was a diversion: this itinerary is now back on the tour bus. Hop on outside the Corinthia Palace and hop off at the next stop, Ta'Qali Crafts Village and the Aviation Museum. Apart from any purchases you may wish to make at the former, it is the Museum that I direct you to because there you find the Memorial Garden to wartime heroine Henrietta Chevalier (Chapter 15).

Mosta and the Cumbo Tower

Back on the bus, descend again at Mosta, not to admire the historic dome of the cathedral that resisted wartime bombing but from there to walk for 20 minutes via Triq Kurat Calleja, into Triq I-Torri to the Cumbo Tower. From here, as Chapter 4 relates, the legendary Bride of Mosta, Marianna Cumbo, was kidnapped on her wedding morning in 1526 by Turkish corsairs.

51. Cumbo Tower, photograph by Caroline Bayly Scallon

The tower, attached to its walled villa, is on the outskirts of Mosta, but I approached it by car from another direction, without seeing other buildings, in some ways more atmospheric. It seemed to stand there, unprotected, vulnerable, in the open landscape. It is privately owned. I also arrived at the Gnien L-Gharus public gardens overlooking Mosta in the same way. Though named for the kidnapped bride, it did not catch my imagination.

Mdina and Rabat

Back on the tour bus, as you bowl along towards a walled city on a hill rising out of flat fields, it is time to get ready for medieval Mdina, the Melita of Roman times, Mdina (the Fortress) under the Arabs. Its story starts in Chapter 2.

The first time I saw Mdina, many years ago, was at night and we seemed to be the only people there. Not for nothing has it been known as the 'Silent City'. That is rather as Lady Grosvenor experienced it by day in 1840:

> We continued on our way to Cittá Vecchia, a small handsome city, six miles from Valetta, placed upon a rising ground near the centre of the island, with houses, like large palaces, of stone, solidly built, and much ornamented in the Vanburgh style; but the appearance of the town reminded me singularly of the city in the Arabian Nights, of which the inhabitants had been changed to stone – so grandly desolate and depopulated it seemed.

That is not how it is today, though it is still a must, even as you dodge tour groups in the main street. I suggest you read Chapters 3, and 5–7 to gain an overall impression of Mdina, its women, of course, its position before the arrival of the Knights in 1530, how it survived attacks by the Turks and how, in the time of the Knights, the Order sucked out its status. But it is still possible to reconstruct its importance through its places.

The Hop-On Hop-Off bus drops you in the gardens a few steps away from the **City Gate**, the local bus a little further away; you need to be alert because the driver may or may not remind you to descend. Once through this impressive entrance, look back up at it. On the right is a statue of patron saint St Agatha, beneath that is the Inguanez coat-of-arms, a family we met in Chapter 3 and are about to meet again.

A step away, bearing left is Villegaignon Street which runs the length of the town. The first place on the right hand side is **St Agatha Chapel**, built in 1417 by Paola Castelli, heiress to the Barony of Buqana, which she inherited from her mother Marguerita Murana, and *Capitano* and *Castellan* Francesco Gatto, 3rd Baron di Djar il Bniet (Chapter 3). It was badly damaged in the earthquake of 1693, but rebuilt.

Next to it is **St Peter's Church**, running through to the **Benedictine Nunnery**, of which it is a part, facing the parallel street, St Paul's. Margarita d'Aragona was responsible for the foundation of this complex (Chapter 3).

Chapter 5 tells how the nuns moved from Mdina to Birgu at the time of the 1565 Great Siege and their not entirely virtuous behaviour there. Chapter 11 introduces Maria Teresa Pisani, later Sister Maria Adeodata, who joined the community here in 1828 and was elected abbess in 1851 – not an easy task, as it turned out. It is still a closed order.

Opposite St Peter's in Villegaignon Street is the **Inguanez Palace**, home of Paola Castelli's daughter Imperia Gatto Inguanez who, when she married Antonio Inguanez in about 1421, united two of Mdina's most powerful families. What you see here is the servants' entrance and where the carriages entered. Walk a little further, turn left into Mesquita Street and you come to the grand front entrance, firmly closed because it is still lived in by the Inguanez family.

If Imperia was an important personage, and probably a strong woman, so was at least one of her descendants. Sir Harry Luke, lieutenant governor from 1930 to 1938 wrote of her and Maltese titles in *An Account and Appreciation of Malta* (1949):

> There are twenty-nine of these Maltese peerages, most of them feudal grants by the Grand Masters but one of them going back as far as the year 1350. The holder of this venerable title and the *doyenne* of the Maltese Nobility for the unprecedented period of sixty-seven years before her deeply regretted death in 1947 was the Most Noble Mary Sceberras Trigona D'Amico Inguanez, twentieth Baroness in her own right of Diar-il-Bniet and Bukana and sixteenth Baroness, by a different descent, of Castel Cicciano.

But the Baroness was more than a string of titles: Governor Charles Bonham-Carter, who dealt with her both socially, often, and as a committee member (Chapter 14) records a flesh and blood woman. He introduces her on 26 April 1936:

> On Saturday we dined with Luke and met Baroness Inguanez, the head of the Maltese nobility, a perfectly charming and very beautiful old lady who looks about fifty and is I suppose nearly seventy … a very pleasant evening.

She was 71. On 14 June that year he wrote, 'We have dined out twice, first on Friday with Baroness Inguanez – a charming party, beautifully done by a perfect hostess.' But she wasn't always perfectly charming: he had to record on 9 April 1937:

> Dinner was a great success and everyone played up, the only contretemps was that Baroness Inguanez cut Baron de Piro d'Amico dead in the morning room. She really is a naughty old woman and I must tackle her about it. If she cannot leave her private enmities behind in my house, she shall not come here again.

52. Baroness Mary Sceberras Trigona D'Amico Inguanez, courtesy of Casa Rocca Piccola Trust

What caused the *froideur* one can only guess. They both had d'Amico blood, so it could have been a family feud, or they may have had political differences. He was a nationalist; she was the widow, since 1933, of a former British army officer, Colonel Alexander McKean. They met when he was ADC to the lieutenant governor, and military secretary, married in 1890 and he retired to Malta in 1898 (or 1908), becoming a member of the Maltese senate in 1923. The Inguanez coat-of-arms above the Mdina gate had been removed by the French – along with all titles – in 1798; the British re-installed the titles and, in 1886, when Mary reached her majority, the Inguanez coat-of-arms.

Swivel round and you are in Gatto-Murina Street at the back of what was the **Palazzo Gatto-Murina**. There is an entrance there; you can also go in from Villegaignon Street, but I'm afraid you are in for a bit of a disappointment: the tourist trade has taken it over. There is a café (Palazzo Gatto Murina Mdina Café) and a touristy shop, both empty of customers when I ventured in past a smoking assistant. 'How are the mighty fallen?' comes to mind. Neither Paola nor Imperia, nor even the Baroness, would be impressed.

On your right is St Paul Square and the **Cathedral**; it, too, was badly damaged by the earthquake, and rebuilt. Joan Alexander introduces us to one of the reasons for entering at the beginning of her biography:

> Outside St Agatha's Chapel a fine drizzle blurred the mourners' faces, the outline of the coffin, and the edges of the honey coloured buildings of Mdina. Surreptitiously the occasional mourner shook open a black umbrella. A teasing wind slightly raised the mantillas of the women …
>
> … At an unbalancing but suitably slow pace the cortège moved past the Palazzo Inguanez, past Casa Testaferrata, the Banca Giuratale and Palazzo S. Sofia, until it reached St Paul Square, and crossed to the Cathedral entrance.

It was, of course, the 1998 funeral cortège of one of Malta's greatest *grandes dames*, Mabel Strickland or, as she was better known, 'Miss Mabel'. She is buried under a slab set into the floor immediately to your left as you enter the Cathedral. If you say what you have come for you won't have any fuss.

Back in Villegaignon Street, on the left, on the corner of **Triq San Pietru**, is a large marble Madonna and Child. The church and 'The Old Priory' at No. 3 belong to the Carmelites and are another of Margarita d'Aragona's foundations, though Cosmana Navarra contributed funds for the building of the church and monastery in 1660 (Chapter 6). Part of the priory is a museum and there is a quiet courtyard garden, but monks still live there. A French attempt to ransack the church in 1798 led to the Maltese insurrection against occupation (Chapter 8).

Back in the main street, on the right, is the thirteenth-century **Palazzo Falzon** (also known as the Norman House, though it is medieval), open to the public; but nowhere in its visitors' literature, or in guide books, can I find mention of either women in general or, in particular, Maria Teresa Navarra. But Claude Busuttil, in 'A Double Act for the "Norman House": Palazzo Falzon or Palazzo Cumbo-Navarra?' (1999) details the history of the house, including various women owners over the centuries, and also makes clear that it was from here that Maria Teresa Navarra eloped with Fra Samuele in 1754 (Chapter 7). So, if you do decide to tour the palazzo, at least think of her, though, unfortunately, she may have eloped from the Palazzo in Gudja later owned by Bettina Dorell.

At the end of the street, on the right, is a building of a different architecture called ***Beaulieu***. This was the Benedictine St Scholastica nunnery before it moved over to Birgu in 1604 (see Chapter 18 itinerary). The front of the building looks out on to the bastion from which you get a marvellous panoramic view of the island stretching to the sea. I can't help thinking that it was here that the Benedictine nuns processed round Bastion Square in 1551 with their image of St Agatha held aloft and cowed the besieging Turks below into retreating (Chapter 5).

A less fortunate street scene occurred, as Chapter 4 relates, in 1545 when Paula Kibeylet, concubine of a cleric, was 'sentenced to be led on an ass through the public thoroughfares of Mdina and Rabat … and to be whipped'.

From Bastion Square, too, looking over to the ridge opposite to the left, you can see **Mtarfa** (Imtarfa) **Military Hospital**. VAD Vera Brittain was

taken there when, arriving in Malta to nurse in October 1916, she was so ill. She rather pleasingly describes the women doctors who treated her (Chapter 13). During the Second World War, Maltese VAD Meme Cortis nursed there (Chapters 14 and 15), and colonel's wife, Florence May Hamilton, died there of injuries received during a bombing raid. You can get to the Mtarfa itself if you stay on the local bus, No. 51, on which you travelled to Mdina. After a wait of a few minutes it does a turnaround here. Archaeological finds have been excavated on Mtarfa Ridge (Chapter 2).

If after all that you are hungry for lunch, and if you are with someone who needs to sit out the sites while sipping prosecco and waiting for you, we find the **Trattoria AD1530** on the ground floor of the Xara Palace Relais and Chateaux (hotel) in St Paul Street and facing the Museum of Natural History, fits the bill. From the cathedral you turn left. The hotel itself is said to be 'exclusive' with, I believe, a restaurant upstairs to match. Lunch apart, the baroque **Palazzo Xara** was built in 1624 for Baroness Xara, a member of the Moscato Parisio family. The palazzo was converted into a hotel in 1949 by Mabel Strickland, but needed restoration under new ownership in 1995.

After lunch, wiggle round to the right to the nearby main gate or, if you are at Bastion Square, make your way back to the main gate, out into the gardens and, bearing right, you will reach Rabat in a few steps. Go straight through the wide square, with gardens to the right and, at the end, facing you, is the Roman ***Casa Domus***. Malta was, as Chapter 2 relates, Roman for seven centuries. *Casa Domus* is your best chance to gain even an inkling of how Roman women, rich ones at least, probably of the mercantile class, lived at some stage, probably 125–75 BC.

In the modern lobby, just through the turnstile, is a large, headless statue of Astarte, indicating continuing Punic influence. The *casa* is noted for its fine mosaics, one of them a satyr being attacked by two women or nymphs. One of the marble heads is probably Antonia the Younger, and a headless statue may be of (Claudia) Antonia. Bone hairpins are also displayed.

Leaving the *Casa Domus*, bear right and turn down St Paul Street. In passing, should you need a pit stop or, indeed, an unexpected place for lunch, don't turn up your nose at the **Rising Sun Bar** on the right of the street. You will see why.

Further down on the right is the **Cosmana Navarra Restaurant** which is where we had expected to lunch but it was overwhelmed with bus tour clientele. This was a pity because, as Chapter 6 suggests, Cosmana, whose house this was, dominates this part of Rabat. She had built the parish church, **St Paul's**, which is in the square upon which the restaurant fronts. From her house she could watch the construction progress of years. She is buried in the side chapel of the church with her coat-of-arms above. This is not totally accessible: it seems to form part of a tour of the St Paul Catacombs beneath, which starts in the Wignacourt Musem. I eschewed the tour but, citing this book, was allowed to race upstairs in the Museum to view the portrait of Cosmana in Chapter 6.

More interesting than the St Paul's Catacombs, famous though they may be, are those of Sicilian-born St Agatha whose time in Malta is described in Chapter 2. From the exit on the left furthest away from the church in Parish Square is St Agatha Street. On the left of that is another entrance to St Paul's Catacombs; opposite that is a locked gate saying St Agatha – ignore it. Further on, on the right, are the **St Agatha Catacombs**, museum and church. Here Agatha took refuge for some months in AD 249. It is just as likely, I suggest, that early seeds of Christianity were sown in Malta by her as by St Paul.

The grotto tour takes about 20 minutes and includes not only frescoes of St Agatha, and other women saints such as St Lucy and St Barbara, but also evidence of a Jewish community in Rabat, in particular an inscription indicating the burial of Eulogia, an elder of the Synagogue in her own right in the fourth or fifth century. It can be hot down there, and a bit claustrophobic. In the museum upstairs there is an alabaster statue of St Agatha, martyred on her return to Sicily. Inside the church is another statue of her, said to have been what was paraded by the Benedictine nuns round Bastion Square when the Turks were besieging the walled city in 1551.

You might assume that the **Lunziata** (Annunciation) **Church**, Rabat, is but a step away. Funded by a bequest in Margarita d'Aragona's will, and attached to her country estate at San Leonardo (Chapter 6), it is not so easy to track down, and is a good mile away. I failed to get there but Caroline Scallon, whose photograph this is, did it for me by car and also advises

53. Annunciation Church, Rabat, photograph by Caroline Bayly Scallon

taking the Rabat-Dingli bus, No. 52, via Barka. People do hike there, as information on the internet suggests, and the rector might open the church for you. Marriages can be held and it is here that a new altar was provided by Marietta Bonello in 1644 (Chapter 6). Margarita's estate became a Carmelite monastery attached to the one in St Peter Street, Mdina; it is now a Carmelite House of Prayer and retreat centre.

You can now catch the 52 bus back to Rabat, Mdina or Valletta or, if you have stayed in Rabat, the 51 or 52 back to Valletta from the garden side of the square; alternatively, if you are on the northern tour you can hop on the bus going in the opposite direction.