



REPORTS
on the working of
GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

covering periods between

1st April, 1975

and

13th August, 1976

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Museums

(Period covered:

1st April, 1975 to 31st March, 1976)

During the year under review the three main Sections of the Department — Archaeology, Fine Arts and Natural History — continued with their respective activities of collecting, conserving and studying material falling under these general headings. As usual, the ultimate aim was to improve the scientific value of the Department's holdings through fresh material and knowledge which, wherever possible, were made available to the public in one or other of the museums run by the Department.

2. The Archaeological Section experienced another poor year as regards casual finds, but this was somehow compensated for by two sizeable excavations on two sites of Roman date: more work was done during the summer on the villa in the grounds of the Girls' Secondary School, Żejtun, while the foundations of a house at *I-Iklin*, due north of the Birkirkara-Mosta road, were thoroughly investigated and recorded. A small room at the latter site had a pavement of lozenge-shaped tiles.

3. By the end of March 1976 Mr T. C. Gouder, Assistant Curator of the Archaeological Section was half-way through his second year at the University of Rome, where he is reading for a degree in Roman archaeology.

4. Several improvements were made or initiated in the public display areas and ancillary facilities at the National Museum of Fine Arts; they included a room for drawings and watercolours, the restoration laboratory and workshop, and a room for the custodial staff.

5. The whole Armoury collection at the President's Palace in Valletta was transferred to two large halls in the ground floor of the same building, to make way for the new Parliament but at the same time permitting a better display and improved accessibility for visitors. Throughout the operation, the Armoury never closed to the public.

6. The Fine Arts Section contributed its yearly quota of restored paintings and other works of art, thanks to the improved laboratory facilities and the help of volunteer assistants. It also benefited on two occasions from bilateral

co-operation under the Maltese-Italian Cultural Agreement: in July 1975 the painting *Christ holding the cross*, a masterpiece by Guido Reni, was returned from Rome after restoration at the *Istituto Centrale del Restauro*, while in March 1976 Dr Pignatelli visited Malta to report on the restoration of the frescoes by Paladini at the Palace in Valletta.

7. The year under review has been a good one for donations and acquisitions of works of art. Besides being given a representative item by each artist exhibiting at the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Department received the bequest of the late Professor and Mrs John Borg from the heirs, adding pictures by Preti (1), Favray (4) and Schranz (1) to its collection. A number of sculptural and graphic works by the late Edward Pirotta was acquired from his family.

8. Throughout the year the Department hosted temporary exhibitions at its two principal museums in Valletta, as follows:

<i>Title or nature of exhibition</i>	<i>Exhibitor or organiser</i>
<i>National Museum of Archaeology</i>	
Books on archaeology	The British Council
The conservation of historic buildings—United Kingdom & Malta	The British Council and U.K. Department of the Environment Restoration Depot
Architectural projects by senior students	Chamber of Architects and Civil Engineers
<i>National Museum of Fine Arts</i>	
Sculpture & paintings	Jason Monet
Lithographs	Thomas Shotter Boys
Paintings	Jessie Morss
Paintings & sculpture	Women's Year Committee
Paintings	Victor Pasmore
Paintings	M. Tanti Burlo'
Etchings & lithographs	Kenneth Holmes
Paintings & sculpture	Young Artists
Paintings	Richard Saliba
Paintings & collages	Barbara Huxley
Paintings, sculpture, embroidery & illumination	Alison Urwick
Paintings	British Constructivists
Paintings	Norbert Attard

<i>Title or nature of exhibition</i>	<i>Exhibitor or organiser</i>
Paintings	Joseph Goldyne
Trends in French contemporary architecture	French Embassy
Wall-hangings & tapestries	Pat Holtom

9. The popularity enjoyed by the exhibition of relics of World Wars I and II and of other past military events mounted in the Drill Hall of Fort St Elmo, Valletta induced the Association helping the Department with its "War Museum" project to volunteer its members for opening the premises to the public every Saturday (whole day) and Sunday (morning only) throughout the year. The public have responded generously to this laudable gesture on the part of the Association.

10. The activities of the Natural History Section were mainly centred at the Museum in Mdina. Recently acquired material permitted important improvements to be made in several sub-sections: construction of show-cases for the collection of wild mammal species was commenced in a hall later to be added to the public exhibition, while the interiors of a number of display units in the bird hall were re-designed and many new and fresh specimens added. A collection of over one hundred water-colour drawings of local wild flowers was acquired and preparations were being made to display it in a small room at the top staircase landing. The reserve/

study collections of geological specimens, fossils and molluscs were given the necessary attention, several thousands of the latter being cleaned and many hundreds card-indexed and stored in plastic cabinets.

11. Mr J. A. Vella-Gaffiero was occupied most of the year in the compilation of a book on the birds recorded in Malta and Gozo in collaboration with Dr D. A. Bannerman of the United Kingdom. The work, entitled *Birds of the Maltese Archipelago*, will describe the various species in detail and illustrate one hundred-and-ninety of them in colour, the remainder by line drawings. Production of the book was in an advanced stage at the end of the year under review. Meanwhile, in December 1975 the National Museum of Natural History had published a periodical devoted to the natural sciences with special reference to the Maltese Islands and entitled *Natural Meritage*: the first number contained articles of ornithological interest. Dr G. Zammit Maempel, Assistant Curator of Natural History published the following articles: "Two *contra veleno* cups made from *Terra Sigillata Melitensis*", The St Luke's Hospital Gazette, December 1975, pp. 85-95; "Fossil sharks' teeth: a medieval safeguard against poisoning", *Melita Historica*, 1975, pp. 391-410.

FRANCIS S. MALLIA
Director of Museums

3rd June, 1976.

Comparative Statement of Visitors to Museums and Monuments during the Financial Years 1974-75 and 1975-76

Place	1974-75		1975-76	
	On Payment	Free	On Payment	Free
National Museum of Archaeology	21,834	2,369	22,816	2,307
National Museum of Fine Arts	8,614	2,844	9,246	2,948
National Museum of Natural History	14,788	10,773	17,608	12,507
Palace Armoury	36,202	13,121	30,655	12,822*
Museum of Roman Antiquities	21,967	6,487	22,781	6,929
St Paul's Catacombs	37,914	3,995	45,670	4,020
Hal Saflieni Hypogeum	24,899	6,510	29,883	4,785
Tarxien Temples	18,759	8,199	19,431	6,237
Ghar Dalam Cave and Museum	14,671	4,596	15,516	4,648
Inquisitor's Palace, Vittoriosa	2,982	712	3,441	507
Museum, Gozo	7,949	1,578	8,604	924
Ggantija Temples, Gozo	42,040	2,121	57,900	1,511
General Day Tickets	92,260	—	103,475	—
Total: ...	344,879	63,305	387,026	60,145
Total admission fees collected ...	£M21,467.22,5		£M23,741.60,0	

* Inclusive of 7,635 visitors admitted during the 8th September Exhibition.