

THE BUILDINGS OF THE ORDER AT H.M. VICTUALLING YARD, MALTA

By J.F. DARMANIN

SOURCES: Files of "Vittoriosa" in the Valletta Museum; Typewritten Sketch by Mr. A.W. Griffiths (Cashier, H.M. Dockyard, Malta) "Brief Outline of the Foundation and Development of H.M. Naval Establishments at Malta" (1917); G. Darmanin-Demajo, "The Naval Establishments of the Order" (Daily Malta Chronicle, 1927); "Statement of Property transferred to the Military and Naval Authorities from 1816 to 1875", published by the Government in March, 1877, and P.P. Castagna "Malta bil-Gzejjer Taghha" (1888).

Buildings in H.M. Victualling Yard

The Valletta Museum has no detailed plans of these buildings but shows them on a general plan of Vittoriosa, indicating their locality by key number to correspond with the description on the pertinent file.

Plan No. 16. Casa dei Cani.

Plan No. 77. Residence of the "Capitano delle Galere".

Plan No. 76. Residence of the "Capitano delle Galere".

Plan No. 77. Residence of the "Generale delle Galere".

Plan No. 78. Residence of the "Capitano delle Galere".

Plan No. 79. Galley House and Slaves' Prison at the rear.

Plan No. 80. Darsena (Arsenal).

Griffiths states that in 1772 "the residences at Vittoriosa were described as being the Palace of the *Captain General* of the two Squadrons of the Order and of his Lieutenant, the *Commandant of the Squadron of Vaisseaux*, and the houses of the *Captains of the Galleys*. In the Galley Arsenal were the residences of the *Commandant* and the *Prud'homme*".

The Drawing Office of the Public Works Department has no detailed drawings of these buildings, but there is a general plan of Vittoriosa, with short notes as to the dates of their transfer.

A "Statement of Property transferred to the Military and Naval Authorities from 1816 to 1875", published by the Government in 1877, with Appendices, was laid on the Council Table at Sitting No. 32 of March 1877. It gives the following property transferred to the Naval Authorities on 1st July, 1818:—

MAGAZINES IN THE MOLO GRANDE: Nos. 1 to 9; 11 to 14; 16 to 21; 23 to 26; 28 and 29.

HOUSES (IN THE MOLO GRANDE): Nos. 10; 15; 22 and 27.

GALLEY ARSENAL: No. 33.

THE GRAND PRISON AND ITS DEPENDENCIES: Houses Nos. 5; 6; 16 and 83 in Strada della Prigione.

ROOMS: Nos. 143 to 147, in Strada San Lorenzo.

MAGAZINES: Nos. 148 to 151 (Strada San Lorenzo).

HOUSE (Strada Stretta No. 1) and Magazine No. 2.

Notes in Appendix "A"

The Magazines Nos. 1 to 29 were built by the Treasury of the Order; some of these were for the Services of the Arsenal, and those not required were leased out.

The Galley Arsenal was built by the Religion in 1597 and rebuilt in 1696.

The Grand Prison and its dependencies were built in 1532 by the Religion, and after the transfer of the Convent to Valletta in 1571, they were given out on lease.

The Magazines and rooms Nos. 143 to 151 in Strada San Lorenzo were built for the use of the General of the Galleys and for the Captains of the Galleys, and those not required were given on lease.

Griffiths says: "The houses in the Marina Grande, Nos. 10, 15, 22 and 27, were handed over by the Government on 9th October 1816".

Between the Arsenal and St. Angelo four blocks of buildings were erected on sites purchased on four successive occasions in the years 1631, 1641, 1660 and 1667. (Mss. 390 at the R.M.L. gives the years 1659, 1660, 1661 and 1667).

Darsena

The Arsenal for the Galleys was originally proposed to be built in Marsamuscetto Harbour, but after some considerable progress was made, the scheme was abandoned. The ditch below the Upper Barrakka was used as a Building Slip until it was destroyed by fire. In 1597 it was built in the Marina Grande at Vittoriosa with three arches or sheds for the galleys, and in 1696 was enlarged by Grand Master Adrian de Wignacourt, adding magazines for the storage of naval, victualling and ordinance stores.

In 1819 the three arches were converted into a Mast-House, but in 1842 the old Galley Arsenal was demolished and on its site the Building of the Naval Bakery was taken in hand and completed in 1848.

Building near the Clock-Tower

In 1545, a two-storeyed edifice was built; the ground floor was turned into a bakery, part of the upper floor reserved for canvas weaving, and the rest for the office of the Treasury. This edifice is the oldest on the shores of the Borgo (Vittoriosa) and it had been repaired, modified and altered several times. Part of it had been screened, in later years, by the erection of the "Marine Clothing Depot".

At present this is No. 23 A Storehouse, and when visited on 23rd July 1956, my attention was drawn to the peeling off from the whitewash on the ceiling which has partly revealed some old painting of figures and also what looked like a frieze. The Foreman, Mr. H. Digweed, inspected these and after peeling off other patches of whitewash, said he would call the attention of the Superintendent, so that the Curator of Arts at the Museum may be informed.

Close to this building on Carmine Wharf the Order built a room for the Guardian or Watchman of the Arsenal.

In 1821 a Porter's Lodge was built and was later occupied by the Admiral Superintendent's Boats Crew. It is presumed that the room of the Watchman was either incorporated in the new building or demolished.



*(From an oil painting in the possession of Canon Lawrence Segona,
Dean of the Chapter of the Collegiate Church of St. Lawrence, Vittoriosa).*

Near the other end of the Carmine Tunnel there was a Police Lodge or Quarters but I failed to turn up the date of its erection.

On the front of the Admiral's Boats Crew Quarters there was a wooden figure-head with its head painted dark chocolate colour and the robe, in sea-green, was girded by a yellow band. I could not find out to which ship it belonged or why and when it was put up there.

Both of these quarters were showing signs of cracking some years later and were bonded by iron or steel straps to prevent them from subsiding, and in the last war they were destroyed.

Residence of the Captain General of the Galleys

(Formerly No. 27 on the Marina Grande).

The Palace near the Carmine Church was erected for the official residence of the Captain General of the Galleys, during the rule of Grand Master Adrian de Wignacourt (1680-1697). Two defaced coats-of-arms are still seen on the façade of the building, one of them bears the fleur-de-lys of Wignacourt in its two quarters, the other, the Cross of the Religion. It was handed over by the Civil Government in 1818 to be the Residence of the Admiral, Commander-in-Chief (formerly used as a Military Mess). The Admiral finding it too hot and damp, it was turned into quarters for the Captain and Officers of ships under refit.

The building is of a baroque style, with ornamented windows and stone balconies on the front, two of which have been partly broken and converted into wooden ones. The main entrance opens into a spacious hall which leads to a large yard, where a balustrated balcony at the level of the second storey runs around it. This edifice now goes under the name of "Scamp's Palace" because Mr. Frank Scamp, the Engineer who built the first dry dock at Malta, had installed his offices there during 1844-45.

Griffiths says: "The mutilated escutcheon of Grand Master Cotoner can still be seen (1917) over the entrance of Scamp's Palace, now part of the Admiralty House, Vittoriosa.

This building is now No. 19X Storehouse and has been utilized as such since the beginning of the last war. To meet the exigencies of the Services the balustrated balcony in the yard was pulled down and a wooden platform added on a level with the stone floor. The top was also covered in with corrugated sheeting and a skylight fitted in the middle.

At one time this palace was used as a residence by the Flag Lieutenant of the Admiral Superintendent of the Dockyard.

The Residence of the Prud'homme of the Arsenal

This house was built in 1634 and adjoins that of the Captain General of the Galleys. The Prud'homme (Superintendent) of the Arsenal built it for his official residence. It is a historical coincidence that it should be occupied later by the Admiral Superintendent of the Dockyard, having its entrance through No. 22, Marina Grande.

According to Griffiths, the shields of arms of the Religion and of Nicola Cotoner (1663-1680) are in the Hall of the Admiral Superintendent's Residence. It appears that the year given by Darmanin-Demajo is incorrect, as the sites were purchased between 1659-1670.

The whole of the building, with the part of the colonnade, the Admiral's Boats' Crew Quarters and the Police Lodge were totally demolished during the last war.

Residence of the Commander of the Arsenal

The next building is formed of two adjacent edifices, which at first sight are not discernible from each other, as they form one whole block.

The house at this corner of the block, separated from the Admiral Superintendent's residence by a stepped street (Sda. Stretta), was occupied by the Commander of the Arsenal. According to a Latin inscription on a marble tablet fixed under the balcony, it was built in 1721 (Griffiths gives 1730), out of funds left by the Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena.

It was in later years occupied by the Captain of the Dockyard, but no vestige of it remains, having been totally demolished during the last war.

Residence for two Captains of Large Vessels

The adjoining edifice, which is much larger than the house of the Commander, served the double purpose of private quarters for two Captains of the Large Vessels, in the upper storey, and the ground floor for stores and warehouses. It was first occupied by the Second in Command of Troops in Cottonera District, and later assigned to the Agent Victualler as his residence. The next house, separated by a lane, was to be his office, and quarters for his Chief Clerk. Griffiths locates this building in the Marina Grande No. 15.

This building was erected in 1689 during the Grand Mastership of Carafa, as recorded by a marble slab bearing the inscription "ANNO SALVTIS MDCLXXXIX" embedded on the facade, above the niche of the Crucifix. There are also two defaced coats-of-arms, one of which might have been that of the said Grand Master — three silver bars crossed by a green branch. In October 1818, it was occupied by the Second in Command of the Regiments in Cottonera District.

In the days of the Order the upper floor housed the Arsenal's staff.

On a level with the roof of the Colonnade there were fan-lights with iron gratings and wire netting, having the Roman figures I to VIII cut into the lintels. The hard stone lintel of No. VIII has been replaced by a wooden beam. There are two more fan-lights over the last two stores under the balcony of the Superintendent's Office without markings.

The site on which this building stands was purchased by the Order from the Parish Priest of St. Lawrence, Vittoriosa, on condition that a niche should be cut in the facade having a stone cross in it, in memory of the church of St. Andrew, which was pulled down on the erection of the building.

The painted images and emblems inside the niche, which were retouched about 1906, need further urgent restoration by the Authorities responsible for their preservation.

In St. Lawrence Street, opposite the old Auberge d'Italie and some private houses, there are four square windows with gratings and wire netting over five arched doorways which are blocked up and having the Roman figures incised over the arches, from I to IV. These may be connected with the upper floors of the Storehouses which I failed to notice in my rounds.

On the wall, near the house of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of

Egypt, I noticed a large blocked doorway with ornamental pilasters and cornice which must have had some communication with the back of the Admiral Superintendent's residence.

Galley House and Slaves' Prison at the Rear

This may be the stores No. 2 and 4 but it cannot be confirmed as no plans are available.

In No. 2 Store there is a round stone block, hewn from the rock a few feet above the floor, which has been handed down by tradition as being a bollard for making fast the galley hawsers. The front of this Store was demolished by bombing.

In No. 4 Store bomb shelters were dug out during the last war, and the passage leads to the Tennis Court which was completed between 1904-06. On the face of the wall of the Tennis Court a pear-shaped excavation is visible which might have been a grain vault.

On the ceiling of the passage leading from this store to the Tennis Court, there are also some well-shaped domes which might have been once a grain vault.

These four grain vaults were excavated in 1665 by the University of Grains, and a Magazine for storage built near them. This Magazine was in later times used as a smithery by the Royal Engineers, who established their administrative office for the Cottonera District in the corner house of Strada Prigione. When St. Angelo was used as a Wireless Station, a latticed mast for the aerials was erected near the granaries and used until the Rinella Wireless Station was put into use. However, the four stone slabs over the mouth of the vaults can still be seen.

This Latin inscription, which has since vanished, was placed on the site. It is recorded in Manuscript No. 372 at the Royal Malta Library:

REGNANTE DNO. MAGNO. MAGRO.
DNO. FRA. NICOLAO COTONER
PRINCIPE DIGNISSIMO GRANARIA
HOC UNIVERSITATIS HORREUM JURATI
JOANNES LAGNANO. JO. LEONARDUS ROSELLI.
JOANNES MARIA CARDONA ET OLIVERIUS PONTIS
CONSTRUI FECERUNT
ANNO DNI. 1665.

(During the rule of Grand Master Nicola Cotoner, these granaries were constructed by the Jurats of the University of Grains, John Lagnano, John Leonard Roselli, John Mary Cardona and Oliver Pontis. The Year of our Lord 1665).

Casa dei Cani (Dogs' House)

This place is shown as No. 16 in the key plan, near the Carmine landing place. I could not find out why it was so named nor for what purpose it was used. It is on the site of the Admiral Superintendent's Boats Crew quarters.

Galley Prison

This prison was excavated in the year 1532 after the slaves that were lodged in the Castle of St. Angelo attempted to capture it on

28th June 1531. Its site was opposite the steps of Strada della Prigione and its dependencies in that street, but Griffiths locates them in Strada San Lorenzo "and the prison was surrounded by many houses of evil repute, in which over 200 paupers lived until they were ejected in 1843". But Castagna states: "The premises were occupied until 1848, and the order for their ejection caused great commotion in Vittoriosa. The matter was settled by the Governor, Richard More O'Ferrall, who granted them financial help to find accommodation elsewhere". This historian gives the number of people ejected as 500 consisting of indigent families of boatmen and other labouring classes.

Parts of the prison was, at one time, used as a wine cellar by Messrs. Woodhouse and Co.

No vestige of this underground prison remains as it was blasted about 1906, when the work for the extension of the Victualling Yard was taken in hand. Some Storehouses were built at sea-level and a Dockyard Officers' Tennis Court established.

However, a set of four photographs, taken by Richard Ellis of Valletta, before the demolition, was hung up in the passage of the Admiral Superintendent's Office at the Dockyard. These four frames have vanished and their fate is not known. The Valletta Museum has one, and another is kept in the official album at the Captain's Office, H.M.S. "St. Angelo".

A Key Plan of this Prison, which was listed as No. 526 in the Manuscripts Catalogue of the Royal Malta Library and stated to be framed in the Great Hall, is now hanging in the room used as an office by the late Librarian, Dom Maurus Inguanez, O.S.B.

J. Quentin Hughes in his book "The Building of Malta 1530-1795" published in 1956, describes and illustrates the first modest Auberges of the Langues and the Inquisitor's Palace in the Birgu (Vittoriosa), but for some reason he excludes the buildings erected by the Religion between the Arsenal of the Order and the Castle of St. Angelo.

Finally I wish to express my indebtedness to Kenneth A. Hayward Esq., Superintendent, Victualling Yard, who afforded me every facility to go round the buildings. My thanks are also due to Mr. H. Digweed, Foreman of Stores, and to Mr. F. Gatt, Storehouseman, for their valuable assistance during my visits.