

## Ta` Cejlu church and the MV Pampas bell

The church, built in the Maltese baroque revival style, is dedicated to Our Lady of Graces colloquially known as Ta` Cejlu. The church was built on one of the main quays of the so called "New Port" developed between 1859-66 in Grand Harbour by the British Governor Gasper Le Merchant (1858-64). This project was for a substitute base for the substantial Maltese merchant fleet needs, including slipways in lieu of the so called French Creek up to then their base requisitioned for the needs of the Royal Navy. The project coincided with the untimely death of the Prince Consort (1819-1861) and thus the new town then being built with the new port was officially named Albert Town and remains so called to date.

The church was built by the Barrister Giuseppe Zammit in 1870 and was to serve the spiritual needs (RC) of the then newly built town's residents. Unfortunately, the transition period of ship building from wood to iron caught up soon after the completion of the New Port project and the Maltese merchant fleet builders ended up with new facilities but without work. Maltese ship owners ordered their new iron hulled ships from England and shipbuilding crews found new jobs and acquired new skills with the Admiralty in the two newly built graving docks in French Creek. Thus, Albert Town never really caught up as a major town and was subsequently amalgamated into the newly established parish of Marsa in 1913 dedicated to the Holy Trinity with a new far larger church built and donated by the Marquis Lorenzo Balbi.

Shortly after the end of WW II a ship's bell was installed in Ta` Cejlu church. The ship's bell in question is that of MS Pampas which together with MS Talabot, MS Breconshire and MS Clan Campbell set out in convoy (MW 10) to Malta from Alexandria in March 1942 escorted by the Royal Navy, enduring German and Italian aerial bombings by an estimated 300 bombers and Italian naval units bombardments. Unfortunately, Clan Campbell was sunk 20 miles from Malta and Breconshire was hit and stranded 8 miles from Malta. She was subsequently towed to Malta but was bombed again, turning turtle with part of her bottom remaining above water. Still, some of her oil was salvaged by fitting valves to her bottom. Talabot & Pampas made it to Grand Harbour during an air raid. Talabot was hit and set on fire in Grand Harbour and had to be scuttled as the danger of the ammunition cargo exploding was too dangerous. Pampas had two direct hits by unexploded bombs which precluded unloading of cargo. It was hit again in harbour whilst bomb disposal was in process, ultimately sinking at its moorings. Two of her holds were still intact & much of their cargo was salvaged. Another convoy that of June never made it and as the situation grew more desperate, the defenders salvaged sea water soaked flour from Pampas to augment rations. Moral was still high. Some joked that at least the Pampas flour was already salted and water included. Of the 26,000 tons of cargo sent from Alexandria, only 5,000 were landed in Malta.

Ultimately an August convoy (Operation Pedestal) turned the odds and the desperate situation. The meagre cargo salvaged from Pampas, although barely enough had seen Malta's population of 250,000 and 30,000 defenders through on restricted scanty rations until August.

Fr. Alfred Tabone OFM, Rector of the church co-operated with the Malta Maritime Museum to have the bell replaced. Mr. Kenneth Cauchi, Malta's campanologist came up with a scheme to have a smaller bell to compliment and tonally fit in with the original two 19th century Maltese bells of the church cast by Giulio Cauchi. The Pampas bell, being a ship's bell, was too loud with the original bells contrary to the replacement bell from the church of St Matthew, Treorchy, Wales.

With the replacement of the MV Pampas bell by one supplied by the Keltek Trust, the Malta Maritime Museum has added another bell to its collection which includes both Breconshire's and Talabot's bells plus some of the RN escort ships' bells.

Article written by Emmanuel Magro Conti, Senior Curator Heritage Malta Maritime and Military Collections.

## Storage depots are pounded

Right: April 26, 1942, the bonded stores and customs verandahs A, B, C, D in Bridge Wharf near Ta' Ċejlu Street.

Below right: The Ta' Ċejlu Church dedicated to Our Lady of Graces was also badly damaged. This baroque temple was built in 1870 on land donated by Dr Joseph Zammit to serve the growing community of Marsa and the port workers as the inner basin of the Grand Harbour was being expanded to meet the increase in shipping resulting from the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Below: Church Wharf, Nos. 32 to 44.



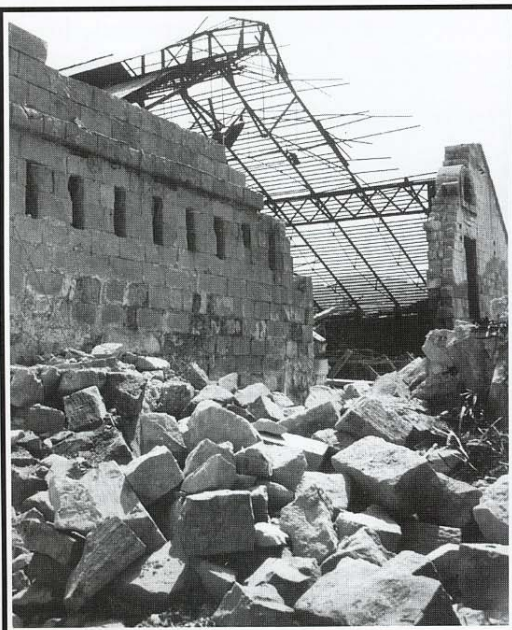
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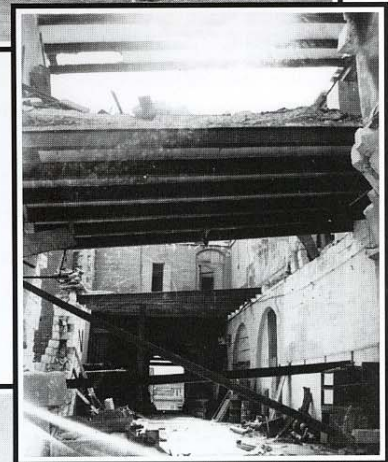


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Left: The premises of the Malta and Mediterranean Gas Works at Bridge Wharf, Marsa, were hit, interrupting the distribution of the service.

Right: 16 and 17 Timber Wharf, Marsa on the following day.

Below: Customs verandahs A, B, C, D in Bridge Wharf, Marsa.



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