

invitations

Guests to history

A collection of old wedding invitations take Fiona Vella down memory lane.

One would probably spare only a few moments of consideration at the receipt of a wedding invitation. However, for Baron Igino de Piro d'Amico Inguanez, these endearing solicitations were cherished so much that he kept a collection of them, carefully organised according to their date.

"Were it not for my grandfather's interest to keep these wedding invitations, we would have lost this fascinating information," Marquis Nicholas de Piro tells me as we walk towards an elegant table in one of the rooms at Casa Rocca Piccola where he has laid out a number of these invitations.

I glance at the wide selection of wedding invitations tastefully set on the polished wooden surface, noticing the different sizes, shapes, writing, designs and paper. The earliest ones date back to 1815, 1829 and 1832. They are quite plain and small, slightly bigger than a credit card, and written in Italian.

"Here are two of the prettiest ones", Marquis de Piro says as he pulls them out of the rest.

These two invitations had been issued at the end of the 19th century. They are larger than the earlier ones and are quite different from each other. The one dated June 1896 is elegantly designed with an intricate cross in one corner and consists of an invitation to the wedding between the noble Maria de Piro and Dr Alfredo Stilon. The second invitation dates back to October 1899 and is more colourful. Rather than an invitation, it is more of an announcement of the wedding which was to take place between the noble Maria Teresa de Piro and Marquis Paolo Apap Bologna. Once again, both were written in Italian.

"Now look at this note which accompanies this wedding invitation," Marquis de Piro tells me as he hands me the invitation.

The presentation of this wedding invitation is simpler than the previous two and the writing is in English. Here, Judge and Mrs L Camilleri were requesting the company of Baron and Baroness I

de Piro d'Amico Inguanez and family to the wedding of their noble daughter Inez to Marquis Mallia Tabone on January 26, 1920. Yet this celebration was not destined to take place as a smaller card which was sent some days later informed those invited that this wedding had been indefinitely postponed.

"From these invitations, one can also observe the traditional customs of the various eras. For instance, this wedding invitation dated 1935 shows clearly that people who chose to get married during the period of Lent had to abide to some limitations."

Indeed, a formal note which was inserted together with the invitation that was sent by Chev and Mrs E Moore and Mrs H Xuereb to announce the wedding of their daughter Alice Moore to Godfrey Xuereb, provided this information with direct instructions: 'It is much regretted that in view of the restrictions imposed by Canon Law for weddings held in Lent, only a few guests may attend the religious ceremony at the Archbishop's Palace. You are therefore invited to meet the bride and bridegroom immediately after the ceremony at the residence at 4pm.'

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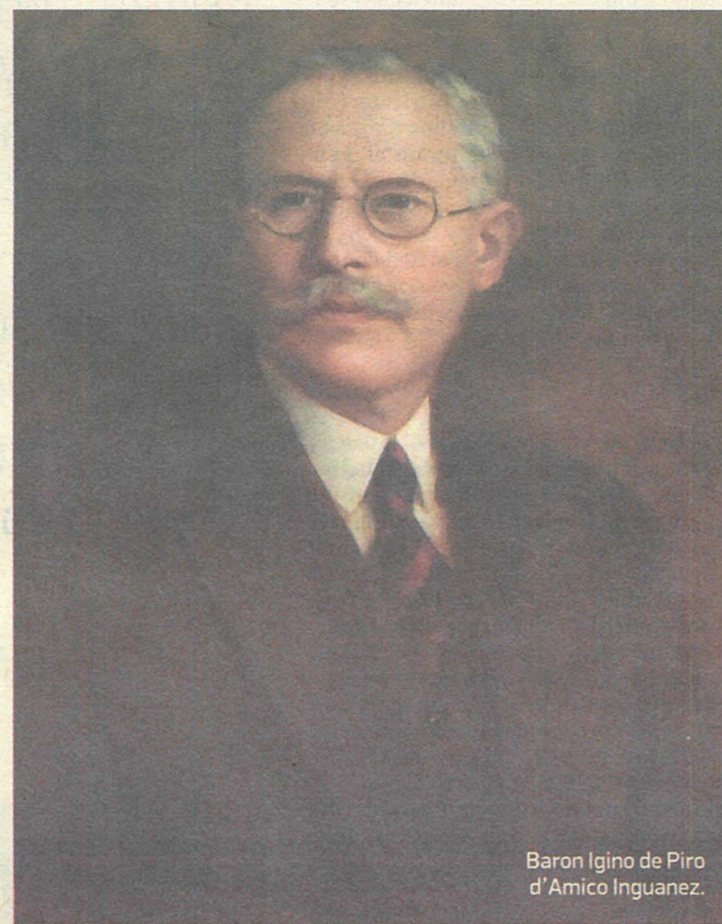
As we read the different invitations that were sent along the years to Baron Igino and his family, we can also trace some of his friends and acquaintances, their residences, the chapels and churches where the weddings took place, and the selected locations for the receptions. Although many of the churches still exist today, some of the street names

have changed from Italian to English or have been altered completely. A number of the residences mentioned have become quite renowned today while a few others were turned into commercial properties. Sadly, some of the lovely villas which provided exquisite entertainment in the bygone days were demolished to make place for large modern complexes.

Among these, there was the wedding between Hilda Scicluna and Paymaster Lieutenant W Eric Brockman that took place on March 4, 1928. Their marriage was celebrated at the Archbishop's Palace in Valletta which seems to have been quite a popular venue for such occasions. On the other hand, the reception was held at the bride's parents residence that was located at 86, Strada Merkanti, Valletta. This house originally belonged to Sir Oliver Starkey, Balli of Aquila and Latin Secretary to Grand Master La Valette. Being an English Knight, he had assisted the Grand Master during the Great Siege of 1565 and was later given the privilege to be buried in the crypt of St John's Co-Cathedral, close to La Valette's own burial place.

The Cathedral in Mdina seems to have been another prominent place for marriages. On January 24, 1937, Adelina Maempel was married to Edwin England Sant Fournier. A reception followed at Villa Luginland in 26, Boscetto Road, Rabat. This lovely villa was built by Baron Max von Tucker, the German consul who was serving in Malta in the early 20th century. Unfortunately in recent years, this remarkable place has languished in an abandoned state.

The only wedding invitation which came from Gozo looks quite distinguished and it boasts a silver wax seal. The marriage of Carmela and Paul Vella took place on August 4, 1937 and their reception was organised at the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel in Victoria, Gozo. Alas, in recent years, this splendid hotel that was beautifully constructed in Victorian architec-



Baron Igino de Piro d'Amico Inguanez.

ture was demolished in order to make way for a commercial centre and a number of residential units.

"Some of these wedding invitations pertained to our relatives. Incidentally, this one which announces the marriage between my aunt Mona de Piro to Major John E J Nelson on December 28, 1940 is a favourite of mine, particularly because she was quite a character and she kept her high spirits even when she was over 90 years old. Well, there she is, looking at us," Marquis de Piro exclaims as he points to a delightful portrait on the opposite wall.

My eyes meet those of a young, graceful girl, defiantly posing with an off-the-shoulder silver dress which melts in the greyish background behind her.

"That portrait created much talk when her relatives saw it since it was regarded as being too sen-

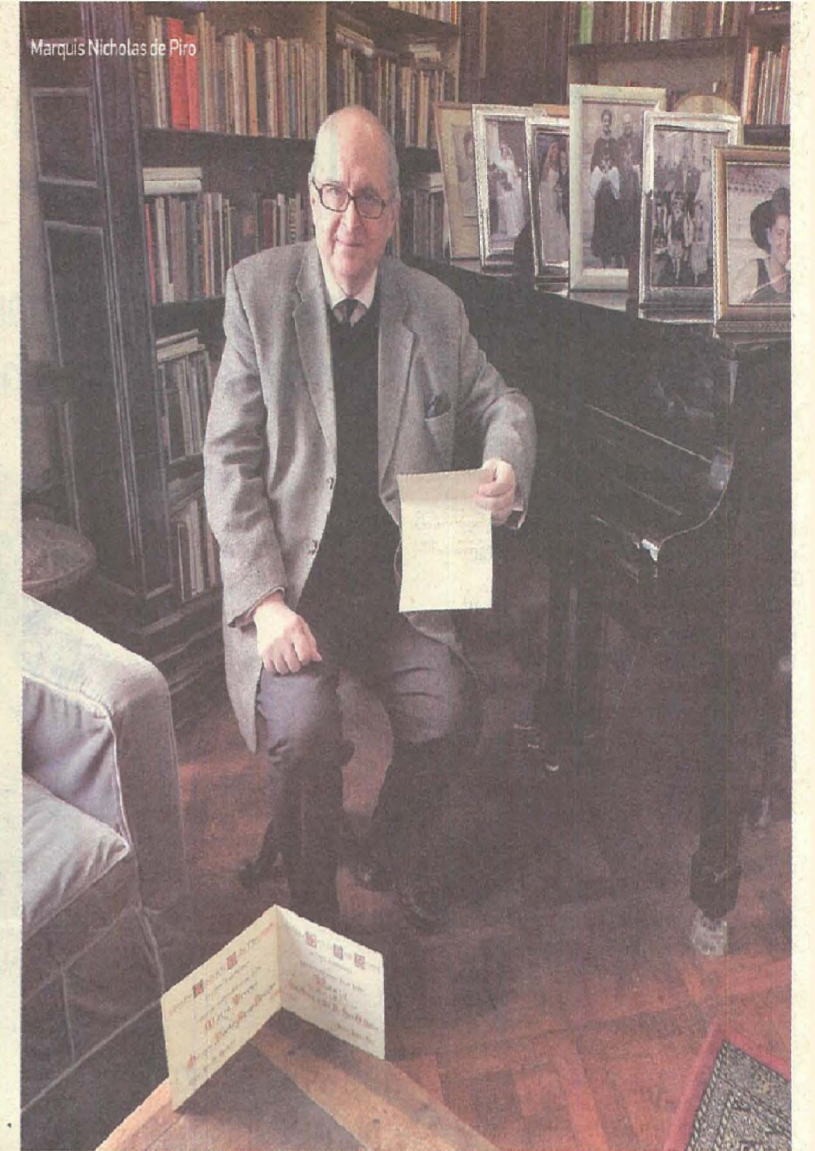
sual at the time. It was commissioned by her Italian boyfriend, Marquis Onofrio Bartolini Salinbeni, and the painting was done by Arthur Acton who lived in a palace in Florence. Onofrio was madly in love with Mona but unfortunately, their relationship ended and when she returned to Malta, a relative of hers went to Italy to claim this painting since it was not deemed fit for him to keep it," Marquis de Piro smiles as he adds some logs to the fire burning in the hearth.

A warm gush of air embraces the room as the logs protest and pour a glowing light on the wedding invitations lying in front of us. For a short spell, I think I can hear the tinkling of the glasses filled with red velvety wine and golden sizzling champagne as the guests toast the newly married couples.

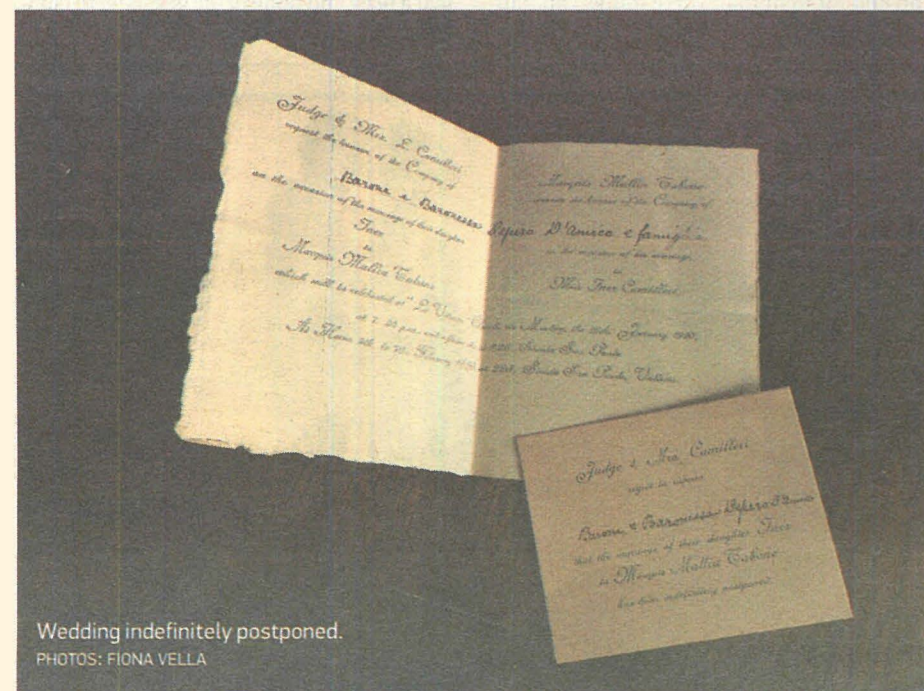
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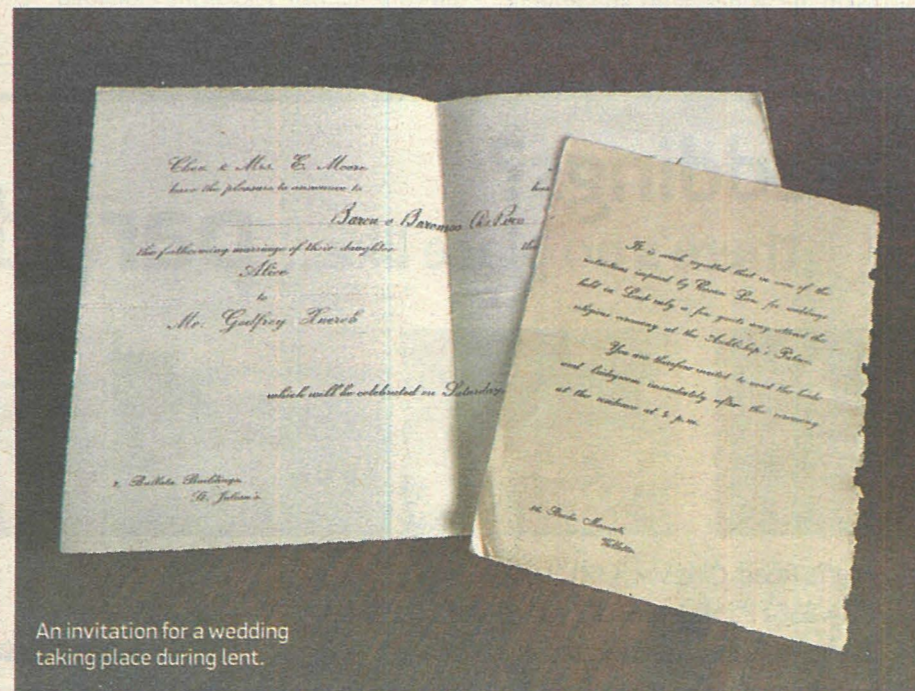
Portrait of the noble Mona de Piro watching over the wedding invitations.



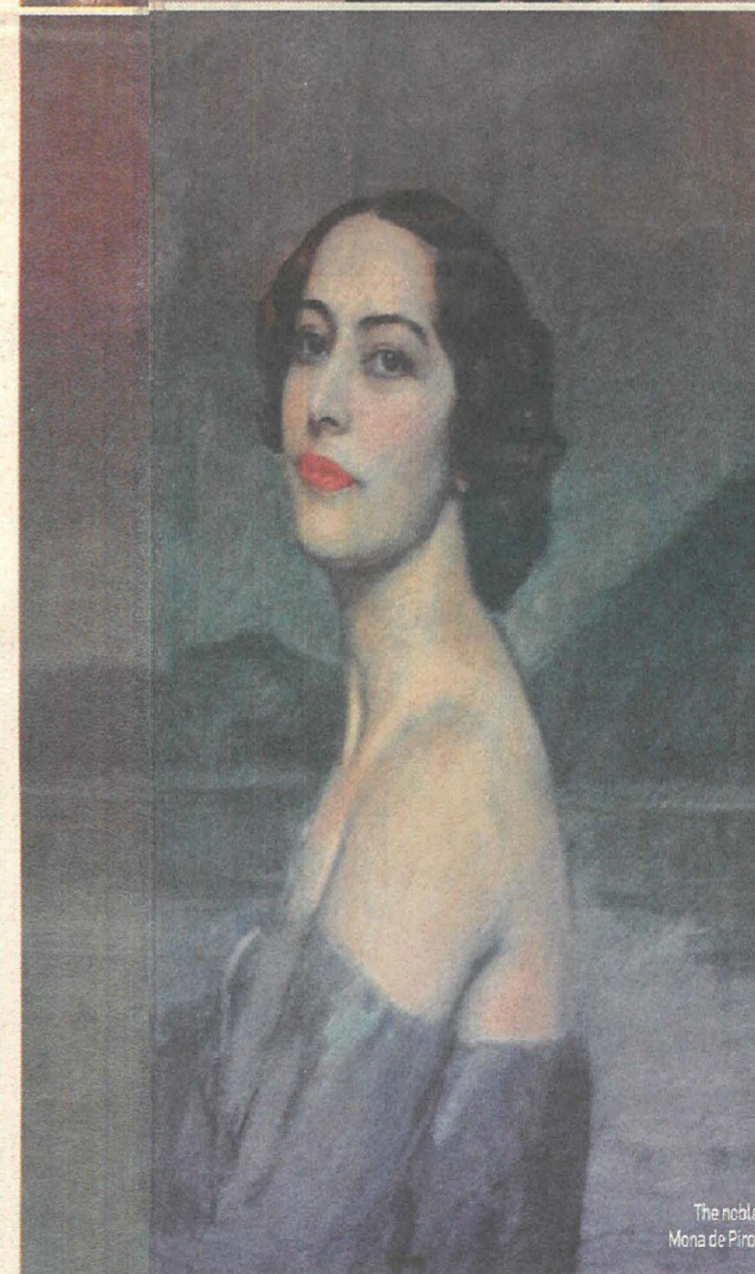
Marquis Nicholas de Piro



Wedding indefinitely postponed. PHOTOS: FIONA VELLA



An invitation for a wedding taking place during lent.



The noble Mona de Piro.