

Ships' Names connected with Senglea

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Over the centuries several ships bore names that link them to or remind us of Senglea. They range from galleys built in the Birgu Arsenal for the Order of St. John to merchantmen built during the nineteenth and twentieth century's. Following are five examples of different types of ships worth to be remembered.

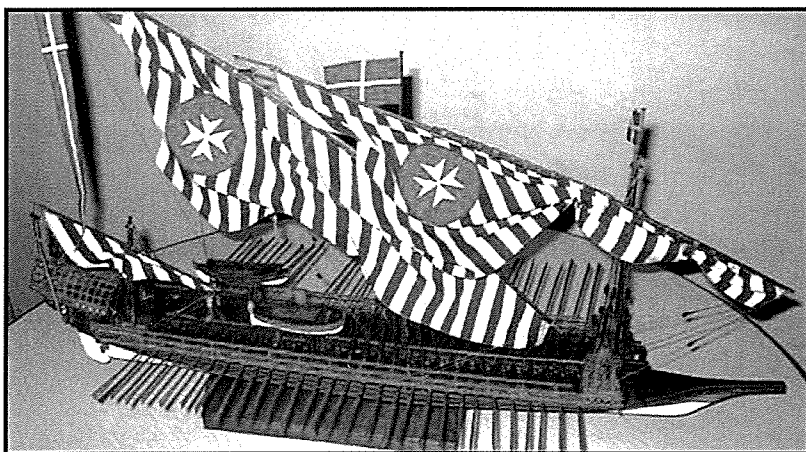
In 1554 at the Birgu Arsenal the Order's *Capitana* or flagship named *Maria della Vittoria* was launched and afterwards was commissioned to form part of the galley squadron. The *Capitana* was usually the largest ship of the squadron and carried up to thirty benches for the rowers on each side. This was a lateen sail type of warship armed with five cannons placed on the bow. Since 1551 the galleys were moored at Birgu with sterns to the wharf as practised in other Mediterranean harbours. When the squadron was increased to six units three of them were berthed at Senglea. It was the *Capitana Maria della Vittoria* that brought the new Grand Master of Malta Fra Claudio de la Sengle from Italy to Malta since he was elected in *absentia*. This *Capitana* replaced the older one by the name of *San Michele Arcangelo* that was under the command of the Captain General of the Galley Squadron Fra Giovanni di Valletta. The name of the old *Capitana* was in a way connected with the locality since it was called *l' Isola di San Michele* and there was also Fort Saint Michael.

The brig called *Porto Salvo* was built in Malta in 1829 by the yard of Giuseppe Camilleri that was situated in French Creek. She was 25.5 meters long and 7.8 meters wide displacing 25 tons. The brig was fitted with two masts and was adorned with a man bust figurehead that was affixed on the bow and underneath the bowsprit. The vessel was built by order and account of Giovanni Battista Vella of Valletta who was a merchant. On 5 March 1829 Paolo Gaffiero and the brothers Michele and Salvatore Gaffiero, both master mariners from Senglea purchased the brig 14,000 *scudi*. Regrettably the vessel was lost at Newport in 1834. Indeed the brig reminds us of the Church dedicated to Our Lady of Safe Haven popularly known as *Porto Salvo*.

The motor vessel named *Maria Bambina* should have drawn the attention and curiosity of the local community of mariners because of her name. One rarely comes across a steamer bearing this name despite that many others were named after the Holy Mother but under other titles. The *Maria Bambina* was a steel trawler built in 1892 by Cochran and Schofield of England. The trawler was 31.2 meters long by 6 meters wide and had a gross tonnage of 157. The vessel was equipped with a compound engine having a single shaft and therefore a single screw. The engine was manufactured by the same firm and was completed also in 1892. Ironically when the vessel reached Malta in 1917 the owners changed her name to *Lara*. Charles Sant Fournier and Joseph Pace bought the vessel while she was in Malta. Unfortunately the vessel was lost on Lampedusa in February 1933 during a severe storm.

The National Shipping Line 'Sea Malta Company Limited' was established on 10 November 1973 with the aim to assist the Maltese industry. The first ships purchased by Sea Malta were the old steamers *Marsa*, *Gudja* and *Mdina* that were owned by the Maltese National Lines. Most of the ships were named after various local towns and villages. In 1996 Sea Malta bought one of the largest ships that comprised the fleet by the name of *Senglea*. The ship was of the type classified as a RoRo meaning Roll on Roll off that is

to say that the containers and the trailers were loaded onboard by means of a large ramp aft. The *Senglea* did not serve for a long time with Sea Malta because she was decommissioned in 1997.



Mudell ta' galera tipika tal-Ordni ta' San Ġwann mahdum minn Joe Abela.

Model of a typical galley of the Order of St. John made by Joe Abela.