

Restored Works of Art in Our Lady of Victory Church

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Portrait of Pope Innocent XII

One of the first items to be restored by *Din l-Art Helwa* after it was awarded guardianship of the Church of Our Lady of Victory in 2011 was this important 18th century painting of Antonio Pignatelli, Pope Innocent XII, who had been the Grand Inquisitor in Malta between 1646 and 1649 before becoming pope.

The painting was found to be in very poor condition, exposed on a high wall in the entrance corridor of the sacristy. It now hangs in the room in the Sacristy Museum dedicated to the period of the Order of St John, its restoration having been made possible by PwC Malta.



Pinto vestments

A set of magnificent vestments bearing the coat of arms of Grand Master Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1773) were restored in 2013 with the support of PwC Malta and the showcases within which they are displayed were built with funds from the Vodafone Malta Foundation and the ERDF Malta Tourism Grant.

Volunteers Neville Cassar and Jonathan Grech assist DLH handyman John Gafà to finish the showcase built to house the set of vestments.



**Painting of St Anthony the Abbot,
Protector of Animals**

This charming, naive votive painting of St Anthony Abbot dates to the early 18th century and was restored this year, with the support of PwC Malta. It is to be displayed in the church museum, in a corner dedicated to St Anthony Abbot, the protector of animals. Seen here with his traditional iconography of fire, a bell and a piglet, St Anthony Abbot was born in Middle Egypt in AD 251 and was much revered by the Knights of St John, who held him in high esteem for his strength and power over the devil.

His feast day is celebrated on January 17 and *Din l-Art Helwa* hopes to reinstate the annual tradition of the blessing of the animals which would take place from the church on this day each year. This saint has a particular connection with the Church of Our Lady of Victory, as this was dedicated to St Anthony Abbot when the Church was made Parish of the Order on 16 July 1617.

The inscription V.F.G.A. on the lower left-hand side of the painting is the acronym for '*Votum Fecit, Gratiam Accepit*': 'I made a vow and received a grace'. This means that the painting was executed in thanksgiving after a blessing from the Saint had been received.



The painting of the Holy Virgin and Child, bearing the Guttenberg coat of arms

This painting was found at the foot of the titular painting of St Philip Neri, on the first altar on the right-hand side and is currently displayed in a showcase in the church.

It is a copy of an original painting by Carlo Maratta (1625-1713) which is in the Pinacoteca Vaticana (the art gallery of the Vatican Museums). An interesting feature of the painting that hangs in Our Lady of Victory Church is the coat of arms of Fra Wolfgang Philippus von Guttenberg (1647-1733), depicted below the image of the Virgin and Child. In all probability this means that von Guttenberg was the donor of the painting and that it dates from the late 17th century and early 18th century. Fra Wolfgang Philippus von Guttenberg was Bailiff of Brandenburg and a notable dignitary of the Order of St John who lived in Malta for 63 years and contributed to several landmarks in Malta. In fact, a small *mezzo busto* portrait of this great benefactor of the Order still hangs in the sacristy of the church, over its dedicatory plaque. The Holy Virgin and Child painting was restored in 2013 with the support of PwC Malta.



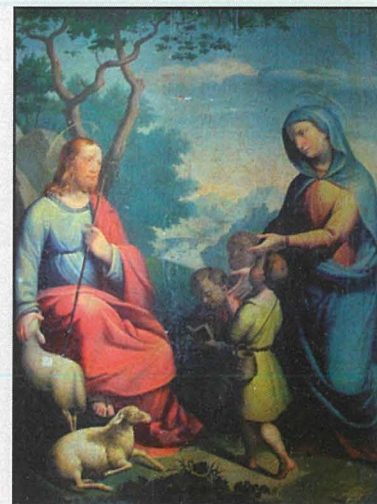
Painting of The Good Shepherd – Il Buon Pastore



This charming painting of the Good Shepherd, signed 'AF 1864', is by the Maltese purist artist Antonio Falzon (1805-1865). It is one of the latest artefacts to have been restored by Din l-Art Helwa – again with the support of PwC Malta. Antonio Falzon studied in both Malta, under Giuseppe Hyzler (1793-1858) and in Rome under Tommaso Minardi (1787-1871) and his artistic output is quite esteemed.

It was following the foundation of the Congregation of the Good Shepherd by the Reverend Gavino Mamo in 1859 that the painting was commissioned. The mission of this congregation was that of teaching catechism to young children. Four churches in Valletta were dedicated to this mission and Victory Church was used for the instruction of under-privileged boys. The Ordine del Buon Pastore, as the congregation was known, left a multitude of items at Victory Church all of which are identified by the initials OBP, or Opera del Buon Pastore.

As evidenced by 20th century photographs discovered in the church annexe, the painting of the Good Shepherd, now on display in the sacristy used to be hung over the main altar during ceremonies and feast days, highly decorated and festooned. *Din l-Art Helwa* hopes to dedicate a room in the Church annexe museum to the Opera del Buon Pastore and to the period between 1859 and 1920 when the teaching of Christian doctrine to children took place in the church.



The painting of Our Lady of Good Counsel

Commissioned by Giovanni Ignazio Fenech, a chaplain of the Order of St John, this painting was executed by Antoine Favray (1706-1798) in 1759. Originally venerated in the Grand Hospital of the Order, the painting was transferred to Rome by Giovanni Fenech, who petitioned Pope Clement XIII to enhance it with plenary indulgences after which it was returned to the hospital in Malta in 1767. The great devotional fervour aroused

by the painting caused much disturbance to the hospital's patients, as a result of which – by magisterial decree – it was permanently transferred to the Church of Our Lady of Victory – the parish church of the Order – on 27 April 1770. To confirm its authenticity, 11 wax seals were placed on its strainer that are still present, amongst them the seals of Grand Master Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca and Prior Fra Bartolomeo Rull.

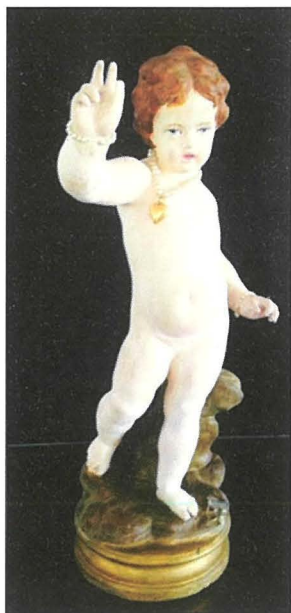
The painting was restored in 2014 by Amy Sciberras, restorer and former curator of Our Lady of Victory Church.



Terracotta statue of the Infant Jesus

This delightful, mid-19th century terracotta Infant Jesus – *Il-Bambin* – was restored in 2014 with funds received from the ERDF Malta Tourism Authority Grant for restored visitors’ venues. It was found in the Sacristy cupboards of Victory Church, broken in several places. Its elaborate fine silk dress has also been restored, as has its *ganutill* base – which is not shown in the photograph.

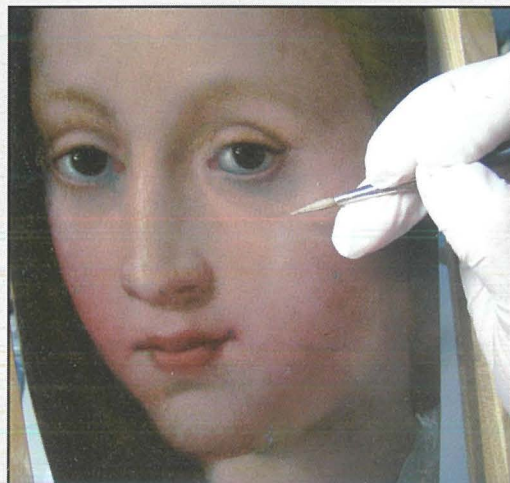
The statue depicts the Child Jesus aged about 18 months, with his arm raised in blessing. It is thought that such statuettes of *Il-Bambin* were displayed at Easter time as a visual image of rebirth and resurrection.



Icon of Our Lady of Victory

One of the most important artifacts in Our Lady of Victory Church has to be the icon of the same name. It is composed of 18 elements in four different materials: the stars, a crown (including some imitation stones), a necklace and the *riza*, all of which are in silver; the portrait of The Virgin Mary on a copper sheet, the brocaded fabric background and the wooden case. All these elements required specific work, which was carried out using a wide range of techniques.

The restoration was entrusted to Preverti Co. Ltd under the direction of Pierre Bugeja and was made possible through the generosity of PwC Malta. The new silk damask was kindly donated by Messrs. Camilleri Paris Mode.



Painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

An oval painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is a modest copy of the work of Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787) in the Church of the Gesù in Rome, was restored by Amy Sciberras, former curator of Our Lady of Victory Church.

The painting is neither signed nor dated, but a detailed examination of the painting technique – carried out both before and during the conservation work – revealed that the painting probably dates from the late 18th century. The restoration was made possible through the generous sponsorship of PwC Malta.



Main altar

Although at first it seemed that the altar required little more than a superficial cleaning, a detailed inspection revealed that there were more deeply-rooted problems. The altar was washed with a conservation-grade detergent, followed by more specific cleaning to remove any stains or thick deposits. Various missing pieces of marble were replaced with similar pieces cut to shape to obtain a uniform surface.

Hidden gaps in the structure of the altar, discovered through light tapping on the marble, were filled by injecting them with a conservation-grade liquid adhesive and the same material was used to seal cracks and loosened pieces. Open mortar joints were filled with a conservation-grade mortar and, finally, protective coatings were applied. Two corbels, which at some point had been removed from the altar and relocated on the wall close to the sacristy entrance for use as a shelf, were reinstated in their original position.

The restoration was entrusted to Heritage Resco and was generously sponsored by the Alfred Mizzi Foundation.



Silver gilt wooden statues of the apostles

A set of six 19th century silver gilt wooden statues of the apostles was used on the high altar during special celebrations in Our Lady of Victory Church. These are being restored by Silvia Orsi of the firm Giuseppe Mantella Restauri.

They will eventually be displayed in the new Treasures of the Sacristy Museum which is being set up with funds obtained through the ERDF Grant for Sustainable Tourism and from various sponsors. The restoration of these artworks is being made possible by PwC Malta's sponsorship.

