

Valletta's Century Old Shops: Delia, D'Amato and Preca

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Abstract

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<p>Commerce in the city of Valletta started in the 16th century and is still prevalent today despite the changes it has experienced. This long essay will aim to explore three venerable shops that have graced the streets of Valletta for over a century by using top visual priorities in the city of Valletta. This will serve to restore these outlets, to their place in the lively retail atmosphere of Valletta. It will also determine if the identification of original authentic features serve to interpret commercial outlets to visitors. These storied establishments are not merely places of commerce but living monuments to Valletta's enduring traditions and vibrant history. From artisanal crafts to timeless treasures, each shop carries with it family heritage, a legacy of craftsmanship, resilience, and the spirit of a bygone era. The shops used for this study are Carmelo Delia, a carpenter shop, Preca Jewellery and D'Amato Records which stand as bastions of authenticity, offering a glimpse into Valletta's unique identity and character as well as providing a curiosity for those visiting the city. As such, they deserve to be celebrated and cherished as integral components of Malta's cultural heritage before they are lost forever.</p>	
Keywords Valletta; Shops; Signage; Preservation; Heritage; Identity	

Declaration of Authenticity



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Research Title : Valletta's Century Old Shops: Delia, D'Amato and Preca

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Dr Christine Jones

03 February 2025

Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theresa Hoban', written in a cursive style.

Student's Signature

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

Valletta is the capital city of Malta, and is the smallest capital in the European Union. The size of this capital should not be underestimated, as it also boasts UNESCO World Heritage Status. The city built by gentlemen for gentlemen, has been an important commercial centre since the 16th century when the Order of the Knights of St John relocated its operations from the city of Birgu across the harbour, to its new home on Mount Xeberras in 1571. Over time, the military city evolved and grew to cater for the needs of the occupants and officials that ruled from there. During the French rule (1798-1800), there were few changes as this was only a short and turbulent period. However, from 1800 till Malta's independence in 1964, when Malta was a British colony, there were many changes, mainly due to the environmental advancements such as the industrial revolution which impacted war and trade as well as manufacturing. One factor remained constant, Valletta was and is still an important commercial centre. What was traded, most likely depended on the daily needs of the population, fashions and trends at different periods of time.

Merchants, hawkers, and importers traded extensively in Valletta, supported by services like shipping, legal counsel, and notarial services for contracts and sales. Notarial records in Valletta offer valuable insights into turn-of-the-century commercial activity. However, beyond these formal records, surviving shop signs also reveal compelling narratives of past businesses and their customers.

It was when Isabelle Camilleri a Notary to Government employee at the Notarial Archives in St Paul's Street Valletta, delivered a talk about shop receipts she discovered at the same archives and the enthusiastic interest shown by attendees, that the inspiration for this study transpired. After an informal conversation with Mrs Camillieri, and a genuine interest in the preservation of shops and signs, it emerged that there is an opportunity to preserve and share the cultural heritage of the city by using the signage and together with her research, create a narrative that would be of interest to not only tourists looking for an authentic experience but also for locals, students, and the community in general.

Only three such commercial outlets are being used for this study. All three are family run businesses that are still active today. These are the Carmelo Delia furniture manufacturer and store; a record store named D'Amato that claims to be the oldest surviving record store in the world and a modest jewellery store called Anthony Preca.

These were chosen as they survived over 100 years and they also have a physical visual presence in the city. They are also diverse in their product offerings. Known locally by many Maltese, many tourists often pass by these same commercial spaces. Their presence and survival in the changing face of

Valletta is part of our cultural heritage and should be revered and protected, a lesson learned and implemented in other cities around Europe.

1.1 Research Background

The city, once a bustling commercial and residential centre, has undergone significant transformation due to societal shifts, online shopping, gentrification, and the influx of tourism. The city's urban heritage is being transformed 'into a product for tourist consumption' (Nasser, 2003, p. 467). The opening of numerous international franchises and entertainment venues, coupled with a shift towards tourist-oriented policies, has marginalized local businesses and the community's cultural identity. Local retailers are struggling to survive in this new landscape, and with them, the city's historical legacy is at risk.

1.2 Research Aim, Objectives and Hypothesis or Question

While Maltese residents no longer frequent Valletta for shopping in the same way they did in the past, the city remains a popular tourist destination. This raises concerns about the preservation of Valletta's commercial cultural heritage. While the city inevitably evolves, its narratives and collective history, particularly embodied in surviving shop signs, should be protected. Therefore, can preserving these signs allow the past and present to complement each other, offering both locals and visitors a tangible link to Valletta's history and a unique story that distinguishes it from other cities?

2. Literature Review

As a traveller, the author of this study takes much joy in visiting the old shops locally and abroad whether it be a bookshop, antiques, or even a grocer. These offer a glimpse to the past experiences of those who lived before us, a place where gossip was exchanged. Such recollections become part of our social past that contributes to the collective memory. Visitors enjoy discovering ‘these unique treasures in the places they visit’ (Barata-Salguieiro, 2021, p. 395). This view is shared by the author, when walking the streets of Valletta and seeing it through the eyes of a visitor, interest and curiosity is always piqued as to what life was like shopping in these stores. This interest would often be shared when taking visiting friends ‘off the beaten track’.

2.1 The Preservation of Historic Shops

In countries and cities around Europe, there are projects in place and also UNESCO supported initiatives to preserve shops.

In Italy, ‘the protection of historic shops is often the subject of dedicated regulations through the country, aimed at preserving their compositional identity and preventing the impoverishment of their urban image’ (Berlardi, et al., 2021, p. 229). The same authors go on to discuss how in Turin, even as early as 1985, there had begun the process of cataloguing historic shops. This was not just for reference, but later incorporated into the MuseoTorino portal which through digitisation and documentation was able to provide a map of these retailers. There are further examples in Lucca, Tuscany, Bologna and Veneto. The latter offers an app that ‘makes known the historical places of commerce and catering of our region’ (Veneto, 2015). Italy is not alone in such practises; other examples can be found in Amsterdam and in Portugal.

Berlardi et al, (2021, p. 230) discuss the importance of historic shops and claim that they ‘...represent a cultural heritage with a strong identity value...’. Some feel so strongly about it that one writer stated ‘If Italy loses its shops, we lose Italy as we know it. If our cities lose their historic centres all that remains are enormous residential suburbs’ (Petrini, 2020). This is a sentiment also shared locally in Malta by shop owners in Valletta.

2.2 The Maltese Scenario: Traditional Shop Fronts

At the turn of the 20th century, Valletta offered a diverse range of goods, from luxury items like sanitary ware and automobiles to everyday necessities like fresh milk delivered by shepherds. This is evidenced by period photographs and newspaper advertisements. Shops like Carmelo Delia (est. 1890) and his brother Gio.Batta Delia (est. 1901) provided quality furniture, although Carmelo has received less

historical attention than his sibling. D'Amato, originally a furniture importer (est. 1885), transitioned to selling records and phonograms, becoming the sole survivor among Valletta's record stores. Jewellery, gold, and silver were available from various shops, including Giorgio Preca (est. 1860), located on Strada Santa Lucia, known as 'Gold Street', where the business remains today, albeit under different generational names.

There is little written locally about the value or importance of shops signs in Valletta or anywhere else in Malta and yet they certainly provide an element of curiosity. However, in one article that does address the subject, Monisse (2024) discusses how businesses in Malta are increasingly incorporating traditional signage into their branding strategies and that they're finding value in preserving and revitalising historical shop signs, even if they are not directly linked to the current business or property. One such example of this is in St Mark's Street Valletta, whereby the current occupant Captain's Cut Leather installed their sign under the original British Boot and Shoe Factory signage.

Matthew Demarco of Design agency Bloom Creative, reveals that some business owners want to '...tap into the strong Maltese identity associated with these signs' (Monisse, 2024, p. 26). Demarco also shares the view that the signs are part of the country's identity and that '...businesses want something that's true to the island because it gives their brand credibility and draws customers who want the true experience of Malta. (Monisse, 2024, p. 26).

Fabrizio Tabone (2022) writes about the positive and similar experiences of various shops owners in Valletta. One in particular is of Manuel Busuttill who is the owner of a store that was established over 100 years ago, who feels that his shop's façade has a 'huge affect' in attracting customers to his shop and that it serves as a motivation to enter his shop. The store sells lace and jewellery that is locally made according to long held traditions, thus supporting what was previously stated by Demarco.

However, these opinions are not shared by all. One particular shop owner selling herbs and spices called Tal-Ħwawar (established in 1888), did not really experience any positive impact because of their traditional shop front. The cost of restoring and maintaining the façade inline with the Government planning regulations is costly. This indeed could be a threat to other stores in this predicament, especially if there is no value for such shop owners (Monisse, 2024).

One common factor that all those in the article agreed upon was that Valletta was losing its identity with the introduction and growth of international chains and that owners felt they were being pushed out and not given support to maintain such structures. Yet this is the very essence of what attracts visitors to the city.

Attempts have been made in the past to preserve what was left of old shop fronts and signage. Back in 2011, the Planning Authority granted Grade 2 scheduling '...to 62 wooden shop-fronts, kiosks and painted signs, bringing the total under protection to 112' (The Times of Malta, 2014). However, there are many shops that have been stripped of other authenticity and traditional appearance . This essay

will extend Berlardi's theoretical insights (Berlardi, et al., 2021) as cited earlier, regarding the cultural significance of historic shop signage in Valletta.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. Secondary research reviewed literature on historical signage, and heritage of the shops, informing research questions and providing context. Due to limited existing data on the significance of preserving older establishment shop signs and the histories of traditional retailers in the study area, primary data collection was necessary.

3.1 Outline

Qualitative research, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was conducted with shop owners to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives regarding shop sign preservation. The interviews explored the impact of shop signs on their businesses and their role in shaping Valletta's identity. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow respondents to freely share experiences or opinions that might contribute to the study.

Face to face interviews were conducted with various family members of the original owners of the shops. A set of questions was prepared focusing on the several key themes which included: signage of the shop; products that were sold and the family stories. Depending on the information they shared, further questions relating to this study could be asked.

The first interview was conducted with Ms Claudia Preca and her sister Daniela Preca on the 6th November 2024 at their shop in Santa Lucia Street. They are the fourth generation to continue the family business. This particular interview lasted approximately 40 minutes as there was no literature or articles about this shop.

The second interview was conducted with Mr Stephen D'Amato who is fifth generation and still passionate about the family business. This took place on 13th November 2024 at the shop before it was due to open in the morning. This was also a similar duration as a lot of the historical information was available from various articles about the record store, but were still discussed to verify and elaborate.

The final interview was held on the 6th December 2024. It took a long time to locate a direct descendent of Carmelo Delia. Eventually contact was made with Mrs Valerie Cauchi Inglott granddaughter of Carmelo Delia, who kindly invited me to her home to conduct the interview for personal reasons.

In the meantime a further interview was held with Mr Patrick Delia, who is the great grandson of Gio.Batta Delia. Although this shop is not part of the actual essay, it is a key stop on the tour and Gio.Batta is related to Carmel. This interview was held on 15th November 2024 at The Phoenicia Hotel. It was planned for 30 minutes, but continued for over an hour and a half. Two more informal interviews

were held with Keith Caruana from Captain's Cut Leather and a descendant of Francis D'Agata, another shop on the proposed tour.

Additionally, observational research was conducted on several Facebook groups where local residents frequently discuss and share photos of Valletta's shops. The author closely monitored discussions related to the study's selected shops, focusing on comments made by Maltese people including their recollections.

The data gathered through semi-structured interviews was analysed thematically. Transcripts of the interviews were carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes related to shop signage (design, historical significance, impact on business), family business history (origins, generational changes, challenges), and product evolution (changes in product offerings, customer base, and market trends). These themes provided a framework for understanding the narratives and experiences shared by the interviewees.

The observational data from Facebook groups was analysed qualitatively, focusing on the sentiment expressed in comments regarding the selected shops. This involved identifying positive, negative, or neutral opinions, as well as recurring topics of discussion, such as nostalgia, local identity, and the impact of modernisation.

3.2 Limitations

This study had several limitations. The small sample size of three main case study shops limits the generalisability of the findings to all historic shops in Valletta. The reliance on family recollections for historical information, while valuable, may be subject to memory bias or inaccuracies. The limited availability of archival material for some shops, particularly Preca, posed a challenge in corroborating certain historical details. Furthermore, the analysis of social media data, while providing insights into public perception, is limited by the self-selecting nature of online communities and the potential for skewed representation.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology effectively addresses the research objectives. The semi-structured interviews provided rich qualitative data on the personal experiences and perspectives of the shop owners, directly addressing the significance of preserving shop signs and the histories of these traditional retailers. The archival research provided historical context, while the social media observations offered insights into public sentiment and the shops' cultural significance. By combining these approaches, the study successfully explored the multifaceted role of these shops in Valletta's commercial and cultural heritage.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

The data collected from each of the interviews covered the same key themes namely the signage of the shops and its design; the family business history; and the products they sold and any changes. Data gathered on these topics helped in reaching a deeper and wider understanding of these businesses, their value to local history and Valletta's colonial visual heritage. Notwithstanding diverse histories and commercial interests this study revealed that all three families chose to continue and are deeply committed to a hundred-year-old tradition to carry on a business or craft they inherited that marks their identity as people, families and retailers. An essential component in the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of our capital city that merits a dignified place in our history.

4.1 Preca Jewellery Shop

4.1.1 Signage

The shop signage of Preca in Santa Lucia Street Valletta (appendix 2, fig.6), does not reflect its age. The frontage was changed in the 1980s to a style that was popular at that time, despite the shop being established in 1860. As a result, people do not stop to admire the shop front but they do stop to admire the jewellery.

4.1.2 Family

Giorgio Preca was the original owner who opened the jewellery shop in the 1860s. This date was not confirmed, but a receipt discovered at the Notarial Archives by Ms Camilleri states the shop was established in the 1860 (appendix 1, fig.6). This was shown to the sisters and they were then able to show an old jewellery box with the same design and name. Not much was known about why Giorgio opened a jewellery shop, but according to the Preca sisters, he had another four or five in his home city of Valletta. The current store was also apparently the stables of the order of the Knights of St John, a story passed down by their father (third generation). Over time the other shops closed, and two doors away is their cousin's shop called Giorgio Preca.

The name Giorgio Preca is also synonymous with Malta's first saint and also a famous artist who lived in Rome and painted for the Vatican. The sisters were asked if there was any relationship to the family and it transpired that they are all related most likely through the grandparents, although it was not entirely confirmed.

Interestingly, the Preca jewellery store changed name through each generation. This started with Giorgio, then it became Edgar Preca jewellery and subsequently Anthony (the father of the

interviewees). The Preca sisters did not know why it was not changed to reflect their custodianship. They did however have and showed the author the jewellery boxes that reflected the name changes between different generations.

4.1.3 Products

The interview also revealed how jewellery had changed, not only in terms of what was first sold to what is in demand today. Originally the shop would have sold handmade jewellery, especially the local filigree, long chains called 'barbazzale' and 'fili' bangles. The gold pieces were heavier in weight which has changed with more recent jewellery which is now lighter and simpler in design. This is not only due to changes in consumer trends but also as a result in the increase in the price of gold. The oldest jewellery pieces that they had for sale dated back to the 1920s or 30s. One of these items was a Fabiola brooch which was typical of the early 1900s. A receipt from the Notarial Archives of Malta dated 1870, has printed on it 'Best Malta; filigree work, lava and shell cameos' (appendix 1, fig.6).

Although the shop is patroned by visiting tourists especially from the cruise ships, the family relies a lot on repeat customers and through the years, some of these customers are also third or fourth generation clients. Their parents and even grandparents would have bought gold for traditional occasions such as births, first holy communion and confirmations. As they grew older, they too would then go back to Preca. Some still visit when they return back to Malta having migrated to countries such as Australia. This was actually the case during the interview, whereby a customer called in to purchase some gold. He was Australian, and when asked why he came to this shop, he replied that his parents used to buy from Preca. An elderly couple also called in for a valuation as they too were previous customers. One of the most memorable customers was Valentina Tereshkova; she was the first female Russian cosmonaut who, on a visit to Malta, wanted to purchase some Maltese gold and was told about the Preca jewellery shop. At the time Anthony (the father of Claudia and Daniela) had to open the store at 7am for her to shop.

These instances and stories highlight the close relationship between shop owners and their customers. This connection is so strong that word-of-mouth has been crucial for generations, fostering a genuine community spirit evident throughout these narratives.

4.2 D'Amato Record Shop

4.2.1 Signage

D'Amato is the oldest record store in the world and was established in 1885 but not as a record store. For locals and visitors alike, the shop sign is iconic and is the only one of its genre in existence. For

locals, it is a landmark and shines like a beacon calling people to the store and for visitors it is a sign that needs to be photographed (appendix 2, fig.7). The HMV dog 'Nipper' is also well renowned and is as old as the shop. Many people know the sign globally and its connection to music. On 4th July 2024 tragedy struck! The sign was damaged by a passing crane. It had been hanging since the 1950s and on this day, one of the current owners Stephen D'Amato, was devastated to be informed of the damage. This incident not only upset the family, but many Maltese and there was an outpouring of anger and support for the family on social media. This sign was important to many, and Stephen D'Amato himself states, that it is part of the street fabric. This highlights the importance of such signage and how it forms part of the collective story telling of one's youth. The nostalgia and also the fact that people missed it whilst it was being replaced, reveals its importance. The sign has since been replaced by the same company which had created the original one. The old sign is now on display in the shop.

4.2.2 Family

The story of D'Amato records started with Giovanni D'Amato an Italian who lived in Malta. He originally started his shop selling furniture in 1885, but then in the 1890s with the development of phonographs and gramophones, he decided to move into this area of retail. The title of the oldest record store is disputed by another record shop in Cardiff Wales, but D'Amato has always remained in the same location unlike Spillers in Wales. The shop, located in St John's Street Valletta was originally a small shop. However, overtime the family was able to buy surrounding shops and expand.

After Giovanni, the shop was passed down to William affectionately called 'is-Sur Willie'. It was then passed on to the fourth generation brothers, of whom there were four, and then to their sons. Stephen D'Amato who agreed to be interviewed is fifth generation and is passionate about the business. It has been successfully passed down through the generations and survived many challenges including WWII, technological changes such as digital music and even Covid. This was the only time that the shop was forced to close. In the 1930s, D'Amato was amongst the first to send Maltese artists to Italy to record local music. During WWII, William D'Amato was running low on stock and could not legally release his employees. Unless he was allowed to receive more supplies, he would have to close. The problem at this time was that imports were being heavily controlled. He was even advised by Gramophone Company to appeal to the local government, but his request was still refused.

4.2.3 Products

The transition from furniture to gramophones and vinyl was quite dramatic. Despite all the changes in trends and music, D'Amato has survived even the most challenging situations. Even when the demand

for records declined, the family believed it would get better and preserved their passion to continue the family business.

The products sold appealed to many, but purchasing a gramophone was not cheap. One receipt dated 1923 discovered at the Notarial Archives of Malta was for a purchase of 9 records and some needles amounting to £2.5.0 (appendix 1, fig.1). This purchase was made by a certain Conte Palermo Navarra, who was a high-spending customer as today this amounts to approximately €180. For the working class, this would be considered a luxury. However they could enjoy music at one of the local music halls which D'Amato would have supplied records to, especially in the 1950s with the invention of Juke Boxes.

Today, the demand for vinyl and even CDs is on the increase, especially amongst the younger generations. The shop has a reputation for sourcing rare records for the more discerning customers. Even celebrities actively seek out this shop including Patsy Kensit, Paul Scholes, Michael Cain and Joan Collins. The future seems to look as bright as the new sign for D'Amato.

4.3 Carmelo Delia Furniture Shop

4.3.1 Signage

The signage of Carmelo Delia is still evident around the city of Valletta, however the shop is no longer operational. In contrast, the manufacturing workshop in St Mark's Street is still producing quality handmade furniture but is now owned and operated by another family.

The workshop is located in an old building that was once a stable block of the Order of the Knights of St John. It is also on a busy ferry route that brings visitors from across the harbour in Sliema to Valletta. The signage is large and quite traditional stating 'The Best Equipped Furniture factory in Malta' (appendix 2, fig.5). On the shop front in Santa Lucia Street, the signage states 'House Furnisher' (appendix 2, fig.4). In today's modern Valletta, it is hard to comprehend that in the past, one would come to the capital city to choose home furniture.

The signage that one can see outside the factory in St Mark Street and that of the showroom in Santa Lucia Street are, according to Mrs Valerie Cauchi Inglott, the original installations by the family when they first opened the premises. In the interview, she commented how she is saddened that the signage has been neglected and not restored. She was unsure of who now owns the building.

4.3.2 Family

The business was started in 1890 by Carmelo Delia Senior (Sr.), the grandfather of Valerie Cauchi Inglott. Her father, also Carmelo was in charge of the factory in St Mark's Street and his brothers were responsible for the sales showroom in Santa Lucia Street. Interestingly, the brother of Carmelo Sr. also

had a furniture shop in Valletta called Gio.Batta Delia, yet they never worked together. Carmelo the younger, went on to have four daughters, one of whom became Malta's first female architect. Despite the different paths of the family, they all seem to have inherited some form of artistic trait. Valerie Cauchi Inglott still teaches a traditional Maltese craft called ganutell and also crafts beaded jewellery.

4.3.3 Products

Carmelo Delia designed all the pieces they manufactured. He took so much pride in his work and the quality of the materials used. When purchasing the wood from the UK, he would personally go and choose what he thought was suitable and then mark the wood with a red pen so that when it arrived in Malta, he would know that he received what he actually ordered. Delia Senior had high expectations and worked to deliver these, he would even allocate a different task to each carpenter. No one worker would create a whole piece of furniture so that it would not be easily replicated by anyone, one might consider this an early patenting system.

The family recalls that the furniture was highly sought-after and considered among the best available at the time. It was possible to furnish an entire home with pieces from Carmelo Delia. While owning such high-quality furniture was a luxury, it was accessible to many. Later they would go on to import some ready-made furniture, but this was limited in quantity.

Many Maltese have fond memories of purchasing furniture from Carmel Delia or inheriting pieces from their parents or grandparents. The author's own grandparents owned furniture from Delia that is still treasured today. The furniture was often labelled either on the back or underside of the pieces. Mrs. Cauchi Inglott also noted that British service personnel frequently shopped at Delia. One prominent piece is a table on which George Borg Olivier signed the instrument granting Independence to Malta in 1964 (Barry, 2011).

In the 1960s, the Delia business was sold to Carmelo's nephew, and then in the 1970s to the Big Bon group, who retained the "Carmelo Delia" name, likely due to its reputation for quality. While the Valletta shop is now closed, the workshop in St. Mark's Street continues as Carmelo Delia Joinery owned by the Gauci brothers, who also maintained the name and tradition of custom furniture making.

4.4 Preservation

Further interviews with shop owners like Gio.Batta Delia, whose original sign has been restored, and Captain's Cut, who meticulously restored their façade, reinforced the importance of preservation. Social media observations revealed local residents' fond memories and sadness over lost shops, highlighting the cultural significance of shop signs for the Maltese community and supporting the value of the proposed tour.

5. Final Arguments

5.1 Conclusions

This research has highlighted the valuable contribution that Valletta's historic retail shops and their families make to the city's unique character and appeal. It demonstrates the potential for these commercial outlets to enrich Valletta's tourism offering by integrating them into the visitor experience, rather than allowing them to be displaced by 'touristification'. This study provides a compelling starting point for further exploration of Valletta's remaining historic shops, paving the way for the development of effective policies and strategies that ensure their preservation and continued vitality.

To further celebrate and safeguard this heritage, several positive steps can be taken. Following the precedent of the Franks Perfumery plaque (St John's Street), a similar initiative could be implemented for all centennial shops, providing concise historical information directly on their facades. Furthermore, the rich narratives surrounding these shops, including their signage, stories, and customer memories, should be formally documented and incorporated into the National Archives of Malta's 'Memorja' project. This project, dedicated to recording underrepresented life stories (National Archives of Malta, 2024), provides an ideal platform for preserving these invaluable aspects of Malta's social and commercial history.

This research revealed a strong consensus among interviewees about the importance of preserving and restoring their shop signage. The public's passionate response to the D'Amato sign incident vividly illustrates the deep emotional connection these signs hold for the community. These signs are not mere advertisements; they are handcrafted testaments to a bygone era of craftsmanship, serving as both distinctive family emblems and compelling visual attractions. By celebrating and protecting these unique elements, Valletta can retain its distinct identity in the face of modern commercial trends.

A key theme emerging from this research is the profound connection between these shops, their families, and the wider community. These establishments represent more than just commerce; they are integral to the fabric of local life, embodying stories of how people lived, what they purchased, and the relationships forged between shop owners and their customers across generations. The continued loyalty of these customers and their descendants underscores the importance of these shops as living links to the past. By prioritizing the preservation of these retail outlets, this vital and engaging history of Malta can continue to unfold and enrich the experiences of both locals and visitors for generations to come.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Signage Analysis

A detailed visual analysis of the surviving shop signs can be conducted which would examine their typography, iconography, materials, and placement within the urban landscape. This could explore the evolution of signage design and its cultural significance.

5.2.2 Archival Research

Archival research can go beyond notarial records to include other sources, such as business ledgers, trade directories, photographs, and oral histories. This could uncover more detailed information about the shops, the interior design and trends, their owners, and their customers.

5.2.3 Consumer Studies

Further research can be conducted to explore the experiences and memories of past and present customers of these shops, using oral history interviews or surveys. This could provide valuable insights into the social and cultural significance of these businesses.

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Appendix 2: Shop Signs – Photos taken by the author Theresa Hoban



Figure 4 Carmelo Delia Shop Front



Figure 5 Carmelo Delia Factory



Figure 6 Preca Jewellery Store



Figure 7 D'Amato Record Shop

Appendix 3 : Tour Itinerary

Valletta Gate - Introduction Valletta in 20th Century

- Introduction to guide and tour
- Valletta, a city built in the 16th century by the Knights of St. John, has always been a commercial heart. This very street, now known as Republic Street, was once Strada Reale – the city's vibrant hub. Imagine Valletta in the early 1900s: a bustling metropolis with a population of nearly 22,000.
- Valletta's Population – Description.
- Economy
- Transport into Valletta
- A century of retail therapy

Gio.Batta Delia

- Gio.Batta as he preferred to be called first opened a furniture shop in Cospicua back in **1901** but moved to Valletta in **1908** and have four stores. These were located in St Paul's Street and St Ursula street. This is a pattern we will see.
- They moved to these premises in **1933**.
- From the beginning, the store always prided itself on quality high end furniture.
- Dowry - Preca (another Preca later)
- Queen to be, Princess Elizabeth II, inaugurated a trade and commerce exhibition 1948. During her residency in Malta (1949-1951), she was esteemed client along with lady Mountbatten. Even Mussolini before the war, was gifted a piece of furniture after an international fair in 1928. There are even some pieces at the Grand Masters Palace.
- The store front would be beautifully decorated for major events such as coronations. They had even won a silver medal for the decoration of the store during the coronation of King George VI.
- Family stories as per interview.
- The transition in products.

Wembley Store

- Established in **1924** by Emanuel Gauci, The Wembley Store has been a Valletta landmark for a century. How did it get its name? It was inspired by the British Empire Exhibition, which happened to be held at Wembley in London that same year. Remember Malta was a British Colony and Valletta would have been busy with service men and women as well as with Maltese and other nationalities.
- Renowned for its high-quality food offerings, the store has withstood the test of time, adapting to changing times while preserving its core values.
- The Wembley Store has grown under the guidance of three generations of the Gauci family. The store's commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction has solidified its reputation as a premier destination for discerning food lovers.
- Today, The Wembley Store continues to offer a curated selection of international and local products. The recent store refurbishment pays homage to its rich history while embracing the future.

Blackley's

- Started in neighbouring Pieta making bread for the admiralty, and also confectionery items to the locals, this was a real British tea room. There was no waste as anything left over was donated to the poor houses.
- Many Maltese have fond memories coming here even till the 1970s which was still a special treat for many

The Viscount

- Valletta experienced fluctuations in population depending on what was happening and rise of service people in the city also meant that demand for tailors increased.
- There were many tailors in Valletta - Numbers and history - women

D'Amato Records

- Welcome to the world's oldest record shop – only Spillers in Cardiff Wales (1894) claim this title – but for D'Amato, this is has always been the location, but didn't start life as a record shop.
- Story of HMV
- This sign dates to the 1950s but more about that later.
- In the **1890s**, the arrival of the gramophone (1887) and the subsequent flood of phonographs onto the market prompted D'Amato to expand into selling records. By the 1930s, they were even sending local musicians to Italy to record their music – a testament to their dedication to the local scene.
- Over the decades, D'Amato's has attracted everyone from celebrities
- William (Grandfather) war story never closed even during the war. The importance of music for morale during the war even prompted William to petition for more gramophones to be sent from the UK, but this was declined.
- Despite the war and all the changes in the music, the shop only closed for six weeks during Covid. No rent to other shops. Young people are returning to vinyl and cds and if anyone can source an album for you it will be D'Amato records, who are renowned for this!
- The importance of this shop and its community spirit was recently highlighted in July.

Frank's Bazaar

- Show bronze plaque
- 1893 Cospicua was the commercial centre of Malta in the late 19th century.
- Story of the origins of the name 'Frank'
- 1915 Salvatore had six sons and story of the legal issues surrounding the shop name in Valletta.
- After the 2nd World War, business was taken over by one of Vincent's sons, Joseph Abela. Story of how the brand grew to a leading chain.

Economical Shoe Store

- Regain the local stories from memories shared.

Captains Cut

- Barbara – family had the store for over 100 years repairing shoes
- Toni was the last remaining family member to have started working here at just aged 14. Story of how they got into shoe making – services – from cardboard cutout of foot he would make shoes for wives and girlfriends
- Leather tradition and working by hand is a skill that has continued today albeit in the a different product. It was important for the new custodian to restore the shop to how it would have been, honouring the tradition.

Bakery

- Bakery hidden secret Explain the connection with this baker to my family - personalise

Carmelo Delia

- The bakery of the knights, now we have the stables of the knights.
- Story of buying the wood
- Other family stories as per interview
- Table Independence treaty
- Now back to roots of custom made furniture

Miceli

- Explain – ironmonger what it would have sold in the past – even wedding presents
- Today only three in Valletta

Laglegin

- Imitates old shop fronts

Rubino

- Rubino opened its doors back in 1906. The original store was established and run by Vincenzo Rubino, a sweet maker from Palermo.
- One of the oldest establishments in Valletta still operational today and although they focus on Maltese cuisine, you can still get a traditional Sicilian cassata.
- Former Italian Prime Minister Lamberto Dini, veteran actor Peter O'Toole and Oscar-winning director Ridley Scott.

Frances D'Agata (1921)

- Gloves, ladies personal items and indicate signs etc indicate what it sold.
- Story from Mr D'Agata

Entrance to Santa Lucia Street - Point out signs of airlines and services

Preca

- This is one of the remaining shops of the family although at one time they had several in the city
- Started in approximately 1860s the shop is now 4th generation.
- Hand crafted jewellery and changes in styles and demand
- Tradition of buying gold
- Repeat customers for generations
- Family stories as per interview

Carmelo Delia Shop

- A popular store it eventually closed down, but we are still fortunate to see glimpses of the past in a city that is forever evolving and changing. These signs are a reminder of time gone by, and each has a story to tell.
- **Conclude Tour**