



The Backstory to the Backlot: Where History Meets Hollywood at Fort Ricasoli

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Abstract

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<p>This long essay will be focusing on the relationship between Fort Ricasoli as a historical location and its involvement in the filming industry. The site's original purpose as a fortification has become obsolete but its existence still constitutes it as cultural heritage that deserves recognition and preservation.</p> <p>The historical background behind Fort Ricasoli will first be explored. From its inception in the 17th century as a fortification for the Knights of St John, to its involvement in the French invasion of Malta, its occupation by the British up until the Second World War and its post-Independence use culminating in it being leased to the Malta Film Commission.</p> <p>In addition, the challenges that MFC might face in the management of a 17th century fortification that is being used to build film sets will be researched. Beyond this there are also the benefits that arise from using a historical site for the construction of sets to shoot films and television such as the very location lending itself as a part of the set.</p> <p>Finally, how this adaptation of Fort Ricasoli has influenced the site in terms of its cultural and historical value will be delved into. There are questions such as whether MFC is sufficiently preserving the site from degradation, especially on its sea fronts and what role it can play for tourism in Malta taking into consideration recent events such as the open day for the Gladiator 2 film set. Its potential as a cultural venue that hosts various events will also be explored and how this will lean more into its potential as a touristic site rather than solely for filming purposes.</p> <p>This research aims to bring Fort Ricasoli to the forefront in Malta as more than just a filming backlot but also as a site of great historical and cultural value for the country without taking away from its worth as a filming location which itself works hand-in-hand with bringing its own touristic niche to the islands.</p>	
Keywords Fort Ricasoli, fortifications of the Knights of St John, cultural heritage, films, television	

Declaration of Authenticity



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Ricasoli

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 Tara Darmanin.

30/01/2025

Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Grech', is written over a horizontal line.

Student's Signature

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1. Introduction

Fort Ricasoli, located by the entrance of the Grand Harbour in Malta, is a historical structure that has served multiple purposes over the centuries. Constructed in the 17th century by the Knights of St. John, the fort was a key military fortification designed to protect the Maltese Islands from maritime invasions. Over time, its role evolved, reflecting historical shifts that have shaped Malta's past, including the French invasion of Malta in 1798, British occupation throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, and its strategic importance during the Second World War. However, with the decline of traditional fortifications in modern warfare, Fort Ricasoli's original function has become obsolete. Today, it has taken on a dual role as a cultural heritage site that represents centuries of Maltese history and as a backlot for major film productions. This research explores the delicate balance between these two roles, examining how they intersect and influence the fort's preservation, cultural significance, and modern identity.

The study is grounded in the understanding that Fort Ricasoli is a living testament to Malta's strategic, cultural, and architectural legacy. At the same time, its adaptation as a filming location has transformed it into an economic asset and a tool for Malta's global visibility, having featured in high profile productions such as *Gladiator* (2000), *Troy* (2004), and *Game of Thrones* (2011). While this dual use highlights the potential of historical sites to adapt to contemporary needs, it also raises important questions about conservation and the prioritisation of cultural values when high-level decision making is being carried out in this regard.

Fort Ricasoli is being treated here as a case study for broader debates surrounding cultural heritage management in Malta. The fort's leasing to the Malta Film Commission (MFC) represents a practical and creative repurposing of a historical site. However, it also underscores challenges related to balancing preservation with modern industrial usage. Given its deteriorating condition, particularly along its sea-facing fronts, questions arise regarding the preservation efforts undertaken by the MFC and the potential impact of heavy activities related to film productions on its structural integrity. Furthermore, while its role as a filming backlot attracts international attention, the fort's historical and cultural narrative risks being overshadowed by its cinematic identity.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to investigate these dual roles that Fort Ricasoli plays, focusing on how its historical and cultural value can be preserved while supporting its modern use as a film location. This will involve exploring the fort's history, its current condition, and the management strategies employed by the MFC in collaboration with other governmental entities such as the

Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (SCH). The study will also assess the opportunities and risks associated with its adaptation for film production and its potential to contribute to Malta's tourism sector.

In doing so, this research seeks to highlight Fort Ricasoli's potential to become more than just a filming location. It aspires to position the fort as a site of national pride and international significance, a testament to Malta's rich history and an example of how historical sites can be adapted sustainably to meet contemporary needs.

2. Literature Review

In this study the relationship between the cultural heritage of Fort Ricasoli in Kalkara and its functional use as a filming backlot will be explored. This will require exploring the available literature on the construction of the fortification by the Knights of St John back in the 17th century to its use by the British throughout the 19th and 20th centuries until it became a storage depot post-independence and finally culminating in its leasing to the Malta Film Commission. However, this will only cover the historical context of the site. In order to establish its cultural value, I will delve into the literature behind what actions the government has taken to preserve the site over the years and furthermore, what potential the film industry has for tourism in Malta. Bringing this together I will be able to create a clear picture of the site's possibility to be utilised as a cultural venue that can host various events in the future alongside continuing to facilitate the productions of film and television.

2.1 Background History of Fort Ricasoli: From its Construction till Today

First and foremost, it is necessary to briefly discuss the geography of where Fort Ricasoli is located. It is one of the many peninsulas that jut out of the main island of Malta into the Grand Harbour, one of the islands largest harbours and probably its most protected with deep waters that allow it to host large ships. Across from the tip of the Mount Sceberras peninsula, where there is Valletta, there is the peninsula Rinella Point. Its positioning at the harbour's entrance makes it the perfect location for the first line of defence along with Fort St Elmo. The area would go on to play a role in one of Malta's most important historical events, the Great Siege of 1565 where it was used by the invading Ottoman army to bombard Fort St Elmo across the harbour on the peninsula of Mount Sceberras. This use of the location would cement its strategic importance as a military site, important to defending not only the harbour but also to the city planned for Mount Sceberras by the Knights (Spiteri, 1988, p. 114).

However, it seems that this aforementioned importance of the location would not come to be addressed until the following century when in 1602 a small battery called San Petronio Battery was built and then further supplemented by a tower in 1629. Both were constructed to prevent the escape of slaves from the island. It would not be until the reign of Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner that a fortress would be commissioned to be constructed in 1669 due to fears of another large-scale Ottoman invasion and so a fort began to be built the following year, financed by the Florentine knight Fra Giovanni Francesco Ricasoli. It was named Fort Ricasoli in honour of this knight when fully completed in 1698. A century

later, during the French invasion of Malta in 1798, the fort saw significant action. Initially resisting the French but ultimately surrendering after Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch capitulated to General Bonaparte, the fort would remain under French control throughout the following Maltese uprising and bombarded insurgents at nearby San Rocco Battery (Spiteri, 1988, pp. 114-120).

Under British rule in Malta, the fort was used as an active military base seeing significant action during the Froberg Mutiny of 1807 when foreign soldiers from the Froberg Regiment rebelled, blockade themselves inside the fort and blew up the fort's gunpowder magazine. This damage would be repaired after the British snuffed out the rebellion, however, the repairs were not exactly to the fort's original design. The fort would go on to be used as a temporary naval hospital in the 1820s and during Malta's cholera epidemics throughout the 19th century. During the Second World War Fort Ricasoli played a defensive role, notably repelling an Italian attack in 1941. The fort would also suffer damage from German bombing during the air raids of 1942 (Spiteri, 1996, pp. 181-196).

When Malta gained independence in 1964 Fort Ricasoli was transferred to the Maltese government who repurposed it for industrial use as a container depot and for tank cleaning (Grima, 2015). The surrounding area around the fort was developed into an industrial estate until this was eventually demolished to make way for the construction of Smart City (Zammit, 2007). The Malta Film Commission was formed in 2000 after the filming of *Gladiator* (2000) in 1999 and Fort Ricasoli was leased to them to be used as a filming backlot. This would lead to the incorporation of the the nearby filming water tanks and their surroundings into what is now the Malta Film Studios (ScreenMalta, 2024). Over the last 25 years the fort has been used to produce several Hollywood blockbusters including *Troy* (2004), *Assassin's Creed* (2016), *Napoleon* (2023) and most recently the filming of *Gladiator II* (2024).

2.2 Film Tourism: Destination Marketing Organisations

This brings us to the question of film tourism. Film tourism, which leverages the popularity of films and TV series to attract visitors, is increasingly recognised as a powerful tool for destination marketing and economic growth. Despite the evident long-term benefits, many Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) and film commissions remain hesitant to fully embrace film tourism due to budget limitations, lack of research, or concerns about losing control over how destinations are portrayed. However, the potential benefits are substantial. For example, in the UK, 10% of international visitors cited films as a motivator, contributing around £1.8 billion to the economy in 2006 (Hudson, 2011, pp. 165-172). Destinations like Malta, New Zealand, and Australia have integrated film tourism into their strategies,

offering incentives to attract productions and promote local landmarks. New Zealand, for example, capitalised on *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-03) through coordinated campaigns across tourism and government agencies, while Australia invested millions in branding around the release of *Australia* (2008) and Malta reutilized the set of *Popeye* (1980) as a theme park which attracts 100,000 visitors annually (Hudson, 2011, pp. 165-172).

DMOs can support film tourism across four stages: pre-production, production, pre-release, and post-release. Early-stage collaboration allows destinations to secure credits and endorsements, while assistance during filming builds goodwill with producers. After a film's release, DMOs often run promotions and create film-themed itineraries or maps to sustain visitor interest. Film tourism's success depends on proactive collaboration between DMOs and film commissions, but many still underutilise it due to resource constraints. Strategic partnerships, however, demonstrate that film tourism can establish a "film-friendly" reputation and benefit both local tourism and film industries (Hudson, 2011, pp. 165-172).

2.3 Film Tourism: Set Jetting

The idea of locations featuring in films or TV series in order to promote these destinations to tourists can be referred to as "set jetting". Researchers conducted a pilot survey in October 2023 with 216 adult Polish respondents to assess their motivations and expectations surrounding set jetting. Findings show a strong correlation between screen locations and destination appeal, with 90% of respondents believing that settings of films or series increase area recognition, while 43% of participants reported visiting a place after seeing it in media. The survey shows that the motivations for set jetting vary: 73% of participants are interested in experiencing local attractions, while 69% are drawn by the chance to engage with events tied to the storylines. Additionally, 55% expressed a desire to connect with favourite fictional characters in these settings, highlighting the emotional appeal of set jetting (Sawinska and Smalec, 2023).

The study found that non-intrusive, experiential marketing through films and series enhances destination desirability, as audiences prefer immersive, unconventional tourism experiences. Additionally, the research suggests that platforms like Netflix, favoured by respondents, are valuable for promoting destinations through cinematic placement. The authors argue that set jetting can benefit local economies and foster unique tourism identities but emphasise the need for sustainable tourism products, like events or museums, to maintain visitor interest. However, they caution that excessive focus on screen-inspired tourism may risk distorting a place's identity. Effective set jetting should blend

authenticity and appeal, reflecting a location's true characteristics rather than fabricated media portrayals. This way the cultural integrity of the targeted destination can be maintained while promoting it as an attractive destination to potential visitors (Sawinska and Smalec, 2023).

2.4 Malta as a “Mini-Hollywood”

Malta's location between Europe and Africa has made it a perfect location for filming, not only for its favourable climate, but also for its varied locations in terms of both landscape and architecture. Malta has increasingly positioned itself as a major film production hub, becoming a favored location for international cinema. Supported by government initiatives and local infrastructure, Malta's film industry has seen substantial growth with the country increasingly posturing itself as a “mini-Hollywood” in order to boost film tourism. Banking on scenic depictions in movies and the growing influence of “emotional” tourism, both seasonal and long-term economic benefits are being seen. Cinematic representations contribute to reimagining Malta's landscape, often transforming it into an integral “character” in film narratives. Such exposure not only attracts European tourists (up by 5.4%) but also new international markets, including a 6.2% rise in arrivals from Asia-Pacific. Efforts to brand Malta through online marketing and word-of-mouth (which accounts for 35.6% of tourist awareness) have further strengthened its appeal. With a focus on creating immersive experiences, Malta's strategy includes fostering “experiential” tourism to sustain its growth and appeal (Graziano, 2015).

2.5 Fort Ricasoli's Ongoing Restoration

Following the campaign of *Assoċjazzjoni Wirt il-Kalkara* in 2018 directed towards raising awareness of Fort Ricasoli's deteriorating state, the government invested €1,000,000 in 2019 with support from the Kottonera Foundation.. This restoration was carried out during 2020 and focused on structures such as St. Dominic Counterguard and No.1 Casemated Battery. The counterguard, designed by military engineers like Bali de Tigné and Antoine Etienne de Tousard, suffered significant damage from exposure to the sea and so its remaining masonry was stabilized. The No.1 Battery, constructed by the British for coastal defense, also faced severe deterioration, prompting restoration to prevent collapse. *Assoċjazzjoni Wirt il-Kalkara* has urged the government to allocate additional funds to address critical areas at risk of collapse (*Assoċjazzjoni Wirt il-Kalkara*, 2024).

3. Methodology

The chosen methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the fort's historical significance, its management challenges, and the opportunities arising from its use as a film location in relation to film tourism. A qualitative research approach was chosen, making use of semi-structured interviews and to gather in-depth insights from people relevant to the site.

3.1 Chosen Methodology

A qualitative methodology was deemed most suitable for this research as it allows for an exploration of subjective experiences, expert opinions, and institutional practices. The study required insights into the management, preservation, and cultural value of Fort Ricasoli, which could only be captured through discussions with people who are either currently involved in its operations and protection or else have a deep historical understanding of the site.

Quantitative methods, such as surveys or statistical analyses, were refuted as they would not provide the depth or context needed to understand the fort's historical and cultural complexities. The nature of the research required expert opinions rather than views derived from the general public. Similarly, experimental approaches were not applicable since this research does not seek to test a hypothesis but rather to interpret existing dynamics.

3.2 Primary Data

The primary data for this research was collected through three semi-structured interviews with individuals representing different perspectives on Fort Ricasoli's dual roles:

1. Jean Pierre Borg, Cultural Manager of the Malta Film Commission, provided insights into the Commission's role in managing the fort during film productions, ongoing restoration efforts and initiatives to educate the general public on film industry opportunities.
2. Vincent Zammit, a Maltese historian, tourist guide, and lecturer at the Institute of Tourism Studies, shared his expertise on Fort Ricasoli's historical and architectural significance, its importance within Malta's cultural heritage and the need for better public engagement in order to appreciate this.
3. Kenneth Cauchi, from the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, explained how the Superintendence collaborates with the MFC and other entities to preserve the fort during and after filming projects.

The interviews were conducted between the 5th of December, 2024 and the 22nd of January, 2025, ranging from 45 to 80 minutes in duration for the two that were held in person. These discussions were guided by a set of open-ended questions tailored to each participant's expertise, allowing for flexibility to explore emerging themes. One of the participants opted to submit written responses to their set of interview questions.

Despite efforts to secure interviews with the Minister for Cultural Heritage and the Malta Film Commissioner, there were scheduling conflicts with the Commissioner and the Minister's recent appointment meant that he was not in a position to provide any insight on the topic being researched. Their absence, while limiting, was mitigated by the insights provided by other participants.

3.3 Criteria for Sample Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with specialized knowledge and involvement in Fort Ricasoli's management and preservation. The selection criteria included:

1. Expertise in relevant fields, such as cultural heritage management, history, and filmmaking.
2. Direct involvement in the fort's operations or preservation.

This approach ensured that the data gathered was relevant and reliable for addressing the research aims.

3.4 Methods of Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the following methods:

1. Thematic Content Analysis: Interview transcripts were reviewed to identify recurring themes, such as preservation challenges, the fort's historical role, and its value as a filming location.
2. Historical Analysis: Insights from the historian and archival documents were analyzed to contextualize the fort's historical significance.
3. Field Observation Analysis: Notes and photographs from on-site visits were examined to assess the current state of the fort and remaining material from the previous film production.

These methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the fort's dual roles and their implications.

3.5 Limitations

This study faced several limitations:

1. **Access to Interviewees:** The inability to interview the Minister for Cultural Heritage and the Malta Film Commissioner limited the perspective on high-level decision-making regarding Fort Ricasoli. The interview with the representative from the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage did not take place as an open discussion but rather as a submission of written responses. This format meant there was no opportunity to elaborate further on the participant's answers and extract the detailed insight that was possible with the other interviews.
2. **Restricted Access to the Site:** Certain areas of Fort Ricasoli were inaccessible due to safety concerns, limiting the scope of observations.
3. **Document Availability:** There is limited research on Fort Ricasoli which may have limited the historical analysis in its scope.

Despite these challenges, the data collected provided sufficient insights to address the research objectives effectively.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants were notified about the aims of the research being carried out and on the nature of the semi-structured interviews by means of participant consent, information and permission documents. These documents were signed by both the researcher and the participant. The documents informed the participants that the interviews would be audio-recorded and that they have the choice to redact their names from the study.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

Fort Ricasoli, originally constructed by the Knights of St. John in the 17th century, has undergone a significant transformation over the centuries. From a strategic military fortification to a hub for global film and television productions, its journey has been studied through a review of existing literature and three interviews carried out with relevant personalities who unfolded a clearer picture to better understand this current interplay. From this research, an analysis on how this dual role has evolved is made possible. This analysis seeks to highlight the challenges and benefits of Fort Ricasoli's adaptation and to evaluate its influence on the preservation of Malta's cultural heritage.

4.1 Fort Ricasoli as a Filming Location: The Genesis of its Dual Role

According to Jean Pierre Borg, Cultural Development Manager for the Malta Film Commission, Fort Ricasoli first gained recognition in the film industry during the 1980s. Early productions, such as *Iron Warrior* (1987) and *Black Eagle* (1988) were filmed inside the fort, setting the stage for its use as a backlot. However, it would not be until the release of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) that the fort's status was cemented as a premier filming location. This production led to the formal establishment of the MFC, which took over administrative responsibilities for the site in 2000.

The fort's rugged aesthetic, large size, and strategic coastal positioning made it an attractive option for productions requiring historical or war-themed settings. Films such as *Troy* (2004), *Assassin's Creed* (2016), and *Game of Thrones* (2011) capitalized on its visual appeal. These productions were a part of the journey in bringing international attention to Malta as a filming destination and therefore integrating Fort Ricasoli into the global cinematic landscape.

4.2 Balancing Heritage Preservation and Filming Logistics

The Malta Film Commission functions as the custodian of Fort Ricasoli but does not own the site outright. This creates a delicate balance between preserving the fort's heritage and facilitating its use as a filming backlot. The MFC works closely with entities like the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage to ensure that filming activities align with cultural preservation standards. For example, Kenneth Cauchi from SCH outlined that all filming requiring structural modifications or set construction must obtain planning permits cleared by the SCH. These modifications are designed to be reversible, ensuring no permanent damage to the fort.

Despite these efforts, logistical and technical challenges persist. The fort's age and exposure to environmental factors, such as saltwater erosion, have caused significant degradation along its sea-facing walls. While productions bring economic and cultural value, they also present risks, such as accidental damage or strain on the already fragile structure. Cauchi emphasised the need for wave-calming measures and selective restoration to mitigate these risks.

Film productions often contribute to the fort's upkeep by funding minor restoration projects or repairing temporary damages caused during filming. However, these contributions are insufficient to address the fort's long-term preservation needs. Furthermore, while the cinematic use of Fort Ricasoli introduces the site to global audiences, the fort itself remains largely inaccessible to the Maltese public. This raises questions about the inclusivity of cultural heritage and whether such sites should prioritise public engagement over private commercial use.

4.3 Film Tourism and Public Engagement

The MFC has taken strides to promote film tourism as part of its broader strategy. As outlined by Borg, initiatives such as movie maps, open days, and educational programs aim to attract visitors interested in exploring filming locations. The recent open day for the *Gladiator II* (2024) film set demonstrated the potential of Fort Ricasoli to draw this niche in tourism. These events not only boost Malta's tourism industry but also foster local appreciation to the fort for both its cinematic and historical value. However, the SCH has no direct involvement in promoting public access, leaving a gap in coordinated efforts to engage both tourists and locals with Fort Ricasoli's heritage.

The historian, author and senior lecturer at ITS, Vincent Zammit, advocates for more consistent public engagement strategies. Historical reenactments, guided tours, and collaboration between Heritage Malta, the MFC, and the SCH could enhance the site's accessibility and educational potential. Similar initiatives as carried out by MIDI at Fort Manoel, which successfully combined historical storytelling with cultural events, could serve as a model for Fort Ricasoli.

4.4 Preservation Efforts and Long-term Vision

Fort Ricasoli's preservation faces significant financial and logistical hurdles. Current restoration efforts prioritize urgent interventions, such as stabilizing damaged walls and restoring the Knights' barracks. These measures are necessary to ensure the fort remains film-ready while preserving its historical integrity. However, the SCH's long-term vision extends beyond immediate repairs. Cauchi highlighted

goals such as reconstructing lost elements, demolishing unsympathetic additions, and securing additional funding for extensive restoration projects.

The MFC's vision for Fort Ricasoli includes expanding its use beyond filmmaking. Proposed developments, such as film schools, workshops, and small theaters, aim to create a multifunctional space that supports both the film industry and cultural activities. However, these plans must carefully balance the site's dual role as a filming location and a heritage site. Zammit and Borg both stressed the importance of preserving the fort's identity while maximizing its utility. Such multifunctional initiatives could generate sustainable revenue for the fort's upkeep, serving as a win-win scenario towards the fort's dual identity.

4.5 Challenges and Benefits of Dual Functionality

The cinematic adaptation of Fort Ricasoli has brought numerous benefits, including economic revenue, international recognition, and opportunities for film tourism. Films shot at the fort have showcased Malta's rich cultural heritage to global audiences, reinforcing its identity as a historical and cinematic hub. Moreover, the MFC's educational initiatives aim to inspire younger generations to pursue careers in the film industry, creating long-term cultural and economic benefits.

However, the dual functionality of Fort Ricasoli also presents significant challenges. The constant need to balance film productions with historical preservation often leads to compromises. The SCH's limited resources hinder comprehensive restoration efforts. Additionally, public access remains restricted, limiting the site's potential as an inclusive cultural venue.

4.6 Summary of Findings

Fort Ricasoli has successfully transitioned from a military fortification to a global filming backlot, attracting high-profile productions and boosting Malta's economy. The MFC and SCH work collaboratively to ensure that filming activities do not compromise the fort's structural integrity. However, environmental degradation and financial constraints remain significant obstacles. Open days and educational programs highlight the fort's existence as a heritage site whilst bolstering its cinematic value, but overall public accessibility and engagement require further improvement. The setting up of multifunctional developments, such as film schools and cultural events, could also enhance Fort Ricasoli's sustainability, provided they align with preservation goals.

Fort Ricasoli stands as a testament to Malta's rich history and its adaptability to modern cultural demands. Its dual role as a heritage site and filming location demonstrates the possibilities and challenges of repurposing historical landmarks. Moving forward, a cohesive strategy involving the MFC, SCH, other government entities and public stakeholders will be essential to preserving Fort Ricasoli's legacy while maximizing its cultural and cinematic potential.

5. Final Arguments

How Fort Ricasoli has been transformed into a prominent filming location has been thoroughly examined through an analysis of the fort's historical context, its cinematic adaptation, and ongoing preservation efforts. Additionally, the questions regarding the challenges and benefits of this dual role and its influence on preservation have been effectively addressed by the various entities who work in the roles pertaining to these issues.

Fort Ricasoli's transformation is a testament to the adaptability of cultural heritage sites. Originally constructed in the late 17th century as further defensive for the Grand Harbour, it became a crucial part of Malta's military history. However, as its military significance waned after the Second World War, it transitioned into industrial use and later into a filming backlot. Its rugged aesthetic, large parading ground, and coastal positioning, along with the addition of the Malta Film Studios, made it ideal for productions requiring historical or war-themed settings. Films such as *Gladiator* (2000), *Troy* (2004), and *Napoleon* (2023) have showcased the fort's cinematic potential, helping to cement its status as a premier filming location. This transformation of the fort into a globally recognised backlot occurred due to strategic repurposing and a push towards garnishing international attention.

The challenges and benefits of Fort Ricasoli's dual role as both a heritage site and a filming location has brought numerous benefits, including international recognition, economic revenue, and the promotion of Malta as a "mini-Hollywood." Initiatives by the Malta Film Commission, such as open days and movie maps, have further strengthened its position as a film tourism destination. These benefits, however, come with significant challenges. The fort's age and exposure to environmental factors, particularly saltwater erosion, have caused substantial degradation. The dual functionality of the site necessitates a delicate balance between facilitating film productions and preserving its historical integrity. Although the Commission collaborates with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage to ensure that filming activities are minimally invasive, the fort's long-term preservation requires far greater financial investment and strategic planning than is currently available.

While film productions have occasionally contributed to minor restoration efforts, these contributions remain insufficient to address the site's extensive preservation needs. Government investments, such as the €1 million restoration project in 2019, have focused on urgent interventions, but a long-term vision for comprehensive restoration remains elusive. The fort's cinematic appeal has introduced it to global audiences, yet public access remains limited, raising concerns about the inclusivity of cultural heritage. Greater public engagement, such as guided tours and cultural events, could enhance appreciation of the fort's dual role while fostering local support for its preservation.

Fort Ricasoli has successfully transitioned from a military fortification to a prominent filming location since its decommissioning in 1964 and it will hopefully remain a vital piece of Malta's heritage, bridging the gap between its storied past and its dynamic future. Potential future research on the fort that might be interesting could focus on uncovering the precise location of the polverista (gunpowder magazine) that was destroyed during the Froberg Mutiny of 1807 and how this explosion might have accelerated the fort's decay along the sea-facing front. There is also the matter of the fort's ditch being used as a part of the Grand Harbour's tank cleaning facilities and how this form of industrial use affects the site's preservation and structural integrity. Ultimately, what is most important is that Fort Ricasoli still stands today and it is still in use for Malta's benefit, albeit from an economic standpoint rather than a defensive one. This continuous use for nearly three and a half centuries will hopefully be recognised further by means of this research paper for posterity's sake.

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Appendices

Interview Transcript – Jean Pierre Borg: Cultural Development Manager for the Malta Film Commission

Stephen: I'm here with the cultural development manager for the Malta Film Commission, and his name is Jean Pierre Borg, good morning or good afternoon, Jean Pierre. My name is Steven Grech. I'm a student for the tourist guiding diploma at ITS and I'm just going to interview him, ask him some questions related to the Malta Film Commission and Fort Ricasoli and the adjacent film studios. So, let's just jump right into it. My first question for you, Jean Pierre is, when was the Malta Film Commission leased Fort Ricasoli to be used as a filming back lot? A follow up to this would be, which government ministry at the time oversaw this handover?

Jean Pierre: Okay, so thanks for the interview. Thanks for this opportunity to give my feedback. As cultural development manager within the film commission, I'm responsible for three aspects, which are screen tourism, film heritage and film education. So, film education, I work with youngsters. To outreach about film and work in film and film education in general. Film heritage, we're starting to look into preserving Malta's rich cinematic materials. Where screen tourism is concerned, is where most of my energy is taken. In, we need to develop screen tourism products. Now you're asking me specifically about Fort Ricasoli. Fort Ricasoli, was first used in film in the 80s and in the 90s, the first film to use Fort Ricasoli was *Black Eagle*, which was a Van Damme film shot in, I think, 1980s but...

Stephen: So, this is, this was Jean Claude Van Damme?

Jean Pierre: Jean Claude Van Damme, yes. They had the climactic fight scene shot inside Fort Ricasoli. So that was 1988. Another film which had shot in Fort Ricasoli was *Iron Warrior*, and that was 1987. So, 1987, 1988 were two films which started using Fort Ricasoli or areas within Fort Ricasoli. The first big film to shoot inside Fort Ricasoli was *Gladiator*, that was in 1999. Before *Gladiator* Fort Ricasoli was a container depot, so customs, the customs authorities in Malta used to, you know, used to run Fort Ricasoli. At the time, Fort Ricasoli was used by customs, was used by the Arts Council. They had various warehouses which used to store materials related to the Maltese carnival. You know the stands where people sit, you know there's the carnival. So, there were various entities using it. When *Gladiator* shot at Fort Ricasoli, obviously, *Gladiator* needed more space, so it was made available for different production. The Film Commission was only set up in 1999 so right around when *Gladiator* was being shot and was being prepped for the constructions were being done, different commission was set up. So, the Film Commission was set up as a direct result of *Gladiator* being shot here and *U-571* being

shot here, and the government realizing that there's an economic multiplier to the film industry. So, the Film Commission was set up in order to regulate the sector, in order to work at attracting other film productions, and thus at attracting further investment, because film created a multiplier effect in the economy. So, the first ministry, to answer your question, the Film Commission was set up under was the Ministry for Economy. Since 1999 the Film Commission has moved from Ministry of the Economy to Ministry of Interior, to Ministry for Tourism, and finally, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. So, the Film Commission has been moving around various ministries, but at the time, the very first ministry under which the Film Commission fell was the Ministry for Economy. After *Gladiator*, other films needed the same space. Because the same space Fort Ricasoli offers these huge parade grounds, which allow for huge sets to be built. It's a gated property, so people cannot just stroll into on a set. So yes, Fort Ricasoli as a site, you know, forget the historical aspect of it, as a site is already excellent, because it's, you know, gives us privacy. Privacy, which, unfortunately, you know, with the advent of drones, is no longer as, you know, as with drones, you know, we've lost a lot of this privacy. I was mentioning earlier *Gladiator II*, the sets were barely ready. We already had drone footage, you know, make the rounds on the internet. Well, it happened even in *Gladiator*. But that was, you know, a helicopter which was flying over and took some photos from, from aerial shots. But anyway, so as more films started requiring the use of this space, the Film Commission became the default operator. The film, sorry, Fort Ricasoli, still, until this day, is the responsibility of the Lands Authority. So it's the Lands Authority which runs Fort Ricasoli. The Film Commission is a sort of, you know, I don't know the word, you know, we administer it. We administer it on behalf of the government, for the Land Authority. *Isna il-custodians*. We are the custodians taking care of the site. And yes, since the Film Commission has been responsible of Fort Ricasoli, we have overseen many productions shoot there, including *Gladiator*, *Troy*, *Helen of Troy*, *Julius Caesar*, *Game of Thrones*, *Assassin's Creed* held their gladiatoren, *Munich*. Most recently, we had *Napoleon*, we've had *Gladiator II*. So many different productions have shot in there. *Devil's Double*, *Last Voyage of the Demeter*, you know, the list goes on and on and on. *Sinbad*, yes. Fort Ricasoli is the heart of the film industry. It offers a huge space where films can be shot. Now, looking at the historical aspect of it, the parade grounds offer the space, but the vaults built by the Knights, the barracks built by the British, offer a natural, authentic backdrop which gives unique value for money to the film productions. Ridley Scott was quoted as saying that, you know, the fabric of the stone workings within the Fort Ricasoli extended the set which he built, you know, and gave a lot of value for money. If Ridley Scott were to build also that extended spaces, you know, the film would have cost much more both *Gladiator* one and also *Gladiator II*.

Stephen: So, yeah...

Jean Pierre: Your question...

Stephen: Just, just the... what was, just because I actually did some research and I couldn't find an exact date of when Fort Ricasoli itself was being leased to the Film Commission. I know when it was set up. It was set up in 2000, January...

Jean Pierre: 1999 and 2000 was when the Film Commissioner was set up, and the Film Commission was set up, and the law was drafted. There is no official date when Fort Ricasoli started being administered by...

Stephen: Technically, you were already using it in 99 for *Gladiator* but in 99 the Film Commission was not set up.

Jean Pierre: The Film Commission was not set up exactly. So, in 99 it was a small company which applied to use the fort, and the fort was leased out to them. But then, when the Film Commission was set up, it became the de facto custodian of the fort because...

Stephen: So, the answer is 2000 when it was set up.

Jean Pierre: Well, you mentioned the word "lease". I wouldn't use that word because the Film Commission is custodian. Is...

Stephen: So, there's no rent being paid.

Jean Pierre: I don't know exactly the arrangements between the Film Commission and the Land Authority. Film Commission and Lands Authority are both government entities.

Stephen: So, in a sense, basically it's owned by the government and, and the Commission administers it, manages the site.

Jean Pierre: Yes, the Film Commission is the custodian on behalf of the government representing film.

Stephen: There's no need for leasing in that, in that sense. I've done research online that uses the word "lease".

Jean Pierre: No, there's nothing which...

Stephen: And then in terms of finding a date, it was unclear...

Jean Pierre: No, you will not find that, because currently it is the Film Commission, which is the custodian, and I think, you know, I hope there is never a change in use because, as I said, if the film if Fort Ricasoli were to be taken away from the film industry, the film industry would be at a huge loss, at a huge disadvantage, because we would have lost, you know, the lungs of the film industry, the heart of the film industry in Malta. It's a major infrastructural asset for the film industry. If the film, if the Fort Ricasoli was no longer used for film, you know, the government might ask somebody else to custode it for, for other purposes. But as things stand, the Film Commission is the custodian, and Fort Ricasoli is set to remain as a film location. The Film Commission has been proposing the regeneration of Fort Ricasoli, and the redevelopment of various areas to include spaces for various film trips, for film school, for a small theater, for, you know, an infrastructure which would be homogeneous with the film production requirements of Fort Ricasoli. We cannot take over Fort Ricasoli, you know, to convert into a film school if that hinders the film production environment which Fort Ricasoli offers. But the Film Commission has been making proposals and studying options and opportunities to make you know, to restore Fort Ricasoli and use it for uses which are idonei, which go in line with the film industry.

Stephen: I think you might have already answered some of the next question, but I'll ask it anyways. Can you tell me about the role of the MFC? We've kind of touched on that a bit. And what is your current position within the Commission, and how long have you held it?

Jean Pierre: Yes, I've been a cultural development mentor for the past year and a half now. I've held many different roles within the Film Commission. I was responsible for inquiries, I was responsible for marketing, I was responsible for HR. So, I have hopped from one department to another for quite some time. I was also responsible for inquiries which is the department responsible for attracting film productions. Most of my work used to be reading scripts, suggesting locations, then hosting a small recon group, show them around the island, show them around the various locations I would have suggested, and, you know, facilitating that part of the exploration before they decide to shoot in Malta. So, yes, I had done that job for quite a few years.

Stephen: There's some guiding elements to that work. So, you've done some guiding yourself.

Jean Pierre: There are some guiding elements but when you are a film scout, you don't go into the historical merits of a site, you go into the aesthetic, into the logistical aspects. So if they're looking at, I don't know, a main square in Mdina, they're not bothered with it's, you know, built in the Middle Ages,

or it was the Arabs or the Ottomans, or in which essentially it was built, or whether there was an earthquake. What they're bothered with, or what they're interested in, is the actual look, whether it can stand in for a particular period, whether in that square, there's any other influences. I don't know, if you're shooting a film in Mdina like if *Napoleon* did, and there's Art Nouveau, which is a 1920s architectural aspect, you know, those are the things which they would be bothered about, or which would be concerned about. They would be concerned about finding parking spaces which are close by, or grounds which are close by, so where they can set up a unit base. They would be interested in logistics. They would be interested in how the sun rays changes throughout the day. So, when you are showing around film producers with the aim of attracting them to shoot in Malta, you know, it's, it's different qualities they're interested in, rather than, you know, what a tourist would typically be interested in.

Stephen: Maybe to sort of add, just to kind of close the question about what is the role of the MFC, if you can, if you can give me, like a sort of statement, a statement plan, or your goal or your mission.

Jean Pierre: Ok, what is the role of the Film Commission? The role of the Film Commission is to generate, well, there's an entire law, okay, a chapter writing 475. Film Commission Act. Yes, 47, Chapter 478 of the Laws of Malta is the law by which the Film Commission was set up, and its main purpose is to serve as a regulator and as a policy maker where film is concerned. Recent developments have led the Film Commission to focus primarily on servicing, not on the indigenous film industry. The indigenous film industry, that is supporting local filmmakers, is now within the responsibility of the Arts Council. The Arts Council have the fund aimed at Maltese filmmakers. So, the Film Commission's primary focus is creating in Malta a healthy climate, a fertile space where films can be shot. And that means training crews, ensuring that there's film schools, ensuring that we have ample supply of crews. And crews we understand, you know, hair and makeup artists, wardrobe assistants, people to work in the camera department, people who will work in the sound department, people who work in the construction department, people who work in the art department, people who can be stunts, people who can be divers. So, when we're telling, when we're speaking about the film industry, we are not referring to actors, directors, producers, script writers. You know those who are directly involved in film, but all the, you know, other crew, you know, people who are responsible for extras, people who are responsible, you know, from all these departments I have just mentioned. So, the Film Commission is responsible for ensuring there's an infrastructure, that there are equipment, hire outlets, that there's businesses which are equipped to deal with films, caterers which are equipped to deal with films, hotels which are equipped to deal with films, suppliers, crew, spaces. So, the Film Commission works in creating infrastructure, works in training crew. It works in instituting policies which govern filmmaking in Malta. The Film Commission works with other entities like tourism, heritage, transport, the army. So, the Film

Commission is the catalyst to encourage filmmaking in Malta, but it is also the mediator between the film people and the other government departments. So, whenever a film is required to be shot in Malta, there's a lot of non film related chores, like, for example, getting work permits for the crew. Like, for example, visas. Like, for example, taxes. So, the Film Commission is the mediator between all the government departments, health and safety, Commissioner for public revenue, lands, authority, heritage and the actual film people, the producers, the studio people. So, Film Commission, there's training, there's funding, there's incentives, there's mediation, you know, all with the purpose of creating a healthy environment, a fertile environment where films can come to Malta, feel taken care of, find a welcoming environment, find a film savvy environment. They're not coming into a region where nobody has heard about the film. No, they're coming into a region where Malta is film savvy. Our crews have worked alongside some of the most famous film directors. So, the Film Commission is there to facilitate, you know, this specific language film with, you know, the bureaucratic language of, you know, institutions working in various fields in Malta. Yes, the Film Commission is also responsible for the Malta Film Studios alongside, you know, Fort Ricasoli. So, Malta Film Studios and Fort Ricasoli being the two main infrastructural assets of the Malta film industry. Until now, there's no film stage. There's no sound stage, but that is, you know, on a proposal, and hopefully we'll see the first proper film soundstage built in the coming years. Yes, the Film Commission is also looking at policy making, with regards to having a gender balance, having green initiatives, ensuring that films abide by health and safety regulations, working conditions. So, the Film Commission is also looking at the wider picture, not just ensuring that films are made on a budget and successfully, but also that there is a healthy environment, and that, you know, films are responsible and take their responsibility seriously, where heritage is concerned, where abiding with the rules being, being employment regulations. You know, there's a lot of regulations which films need to abide with, and the Film Commission is there monitoring and ensuring that the necessary authorities in each respective field is involved to ensure that, you know, everything is working, you know, clockwork.

Stephen: Earlier you touched on how the Malta Film Commission's primary concern is more foreign productions and, and facilitating, you know, their productions. But hypothetically, if there was a big local production that needed to use these facilities, would that, would that still be...

Jean Pierre: Absolutely, absolutely. And there have been many productions which shot both at Fort Ricasoli and the Film Studios, yes, by all means.

Stephen: So, there is, what I'm asking is what is the level of support for the local film industry?

Jean Pierre: It's the same as for the foreign film industry. So, the strongest offering which we have is the cash rebate. And the cash rebate is available for productions spending money in Malta. For the film to benefit from the cash rebate, they need to have a budget of more than 100,000 euros. And the films which have been shot in recent times, *Luzzu* benefited from the cash rebate, *Carmen* benefited from the cash rebate.

Stephen: Was the Malta Film Commission involved in those productions?

Jean Pierre: The Malta Film Commission is never involved as a partner, the Film Commission supports through the various schemes. So *Luzzu* and *Carmen* both benefited from...

Stephen: Financial support?

Jean Pierre: Yes, financial support. So, through the film fund, because at the time, the film fund was with the Film Commission, so through the film fund those films benefit both from the film fund and from the cash rebate. Now that the film fund is no longer with the Film Commission, films can, can benefit from the cash rebate from us and the film fund from the Arts Council. But, as I was saying, you know, *Simshar* filmed at the Film Studios...

Stephen: I imagine in the water tank?

Jean Pierre: At the water tank, yes. *Luzzu* didn't but *Luzzu* didn't have any special effects shots, so *Luzzu* shot out at sea. They didn't use the Film Studio, the...

Stephen: Really? I just assumed they would have used the water tanks.

Jean Pierre: No, because you use the water tanks if you need special effects.

Stephen: But they had storm scenes if I remember correctly.

Jean Pierre: Not in *Luzzu*. No *Luzzu*, *Luzzu*, *Luzzu*, they had, you had this fisherman, you know, in Marsaxlokk, mostly.

Stephen: Yeah, I watched it, but it's been a while.

Jean Pierre: *Simshar* has a storm. *Simshar* has a storm.

Stephen: Ah, I'm mixing, *Simshar* is the one...

Jean Pierre: They did film in the tank. They filmed it in the tank.

Stephen: I was, I was thinking about *Simshar* not *Luzzu*. Yeah, *Luzzu* they didn't have, there's no storm scenes.

Jean Pierre: And if I may add, if I may add, the cash rebate is even more advantageous for Maltese films, because a foreign film, you know, we've got Ridley Scott filming in Malta, the maximum they can get is 40% cash rebate. That is 40% back on the cost spent in Malta. A Maltese film, because Maltese films are still in their infancy, they qualify as difficult audio-visual productions, which means that the maximum they can get is 50%. So, imagine shooting a film and getting 50% back. So, I think it's a very good offering for a Maltese film production. Obviously, the question is, can they raise a budget of 100,000? Yes, but we've had productions which did, and they have benefited from from our schemes.

Stephen: Yeah so you mentioned like *Carmen* and...

Jean Pierre: Yes, *Carmen* and *Luzzu* are...

Stephen: There's recently another one by...

Jean Pierre: *Shelter*, I believe?

Stephen: Same director as... Abigail Mallia?

Jean Pierre: Yes, Abigail Malia's production and know that they benefited from Screen Malta from, from the film fund.

Stephen: I forget the name of the movie.

Jean Pierre: *Castillo*.

Stephen: *Castillo*, I knew it was with a C.

Jean Pierre: Have you seen it?

Stephen: No, no.

Jean Pierre: It's beautiful.

Stephen: I do want to watch it.

Jean Pierre: I would recommend anyone to watch it. I think it's a very good film.

Stephen: I don't think it's in cinema anymore, though.

Jean Pierre: No, now it's, they're campaigning for the Oscar Foreign Film. So, you know, fingers crossed they get selected. You know, in the short list, let's continue.

Stephen: Alright how, how does the MFC balance Fort Ricasoli's historical preservation with its use as a filming location?

Jean Pierre: Okay, yes, yes, yes...

Stephen: Yeah, are there specific measures in place to protect its structure during productions?

Jean Pierre: Okay so, over the past few years, the current film commissioner has prioritized the restoration, the gradual restoration, of Fort Ricasoli. The Film Commission doesn't have multimillion budget that Fort Ricasoli would require, for you know, a full blown restoration. That would be hundreds of millions of euros. So, what we have started is, together with various government entities, including the restoration unit heritage bodies in Malta, we have a committee, and we have started gradual restoration, targeted restoration, prioritizing which locations required the most urgent interventions. And we have started restoring various areas. So, for there are four areas within the Fort Ricasoli complex which have been restored. These are the counterguard, the, the walls right next to the current entrance and, well, there's four areas. I wouldn't know the exact title of each area. We saw them together, so we'll identify the names of those areas specifically in an email, which we'll share afterwards. But there are four areas which have been restored so far, and there's the intention to continue restoring segments within the fort. What is important for us is that every single conservation effort or restoration effort is sensitive to the nature of its current use, which is film. Why am I saying this? If you go to Fort St Elmo,

upper Fort St Elmo, which was previously the police academy, it is now the war museum under Heritage Malta, that place has been recently restored. It has been beautifully restored, but in the restoration process, changing it from the police academy into what is now the war museum, the embellishment which took place is an embellishment which is beautiful and goes in line with the structures, but it's not, all to say, film ready. So, if you go nowadays to the war museum, there's metal parts, there's glass, which has been used to decorate some areas. So, a film, an epic film, or a period film, you know, like a film set in Middle Ages or in Roman times, they cannot just go into Fort St Elmo and shoot. They need to go there spend loads of money to dismantle modern accretions, dress up the set, then dress up the location, as you know what they need it for. And then, once the filming is done, they dismantled the set and reconstitute, you know, the original elements, the modern elements. So, when we are restoring Fort Ricasoli we're ensuring, or we're making it a point, that it remains film friendly or film ready, so that if a film comes, they don't need to dismantle anything. They just can dress up the sights and film. And you know, it is a shame that we've had many restorations all around the Maltese islands, or many developments around the Maltese islands which have reduced the number of locations which can be used for film. And this is very relevant for us. For example, with Vittoriosa waterfront, Birgu waterfront in the 90s, that was an amazing seaside quay. We had *Cutthroat Island* shoot there. You know this...

Stephen: *Count of Monte Cristo*.

Jean Pierre: *Count of Monte Cristo* shot there. With the marina and with the modern restaurants, unfortunately, you can't use that anymore. It can be used for other films. For example, if we had a Jason Bourne chase sequence, or if we had James Bond chase sequence, I think that's, you know, that's part of the of the quay is a beautiful, you know, for a chase sequence with motorbikes or something like that, but it's no longer useful for a period film. So, yes, back to your question Fort Ricasoli, it is in dire need for a full restoration and you know, the process has started, and we are slowly restoring the most important parts, you know, to safeguard the most important areas in Fort Ricasoli. But in our restoration, we're ensuring that, you know, the conservation process and the restoration process is in full respect to the original structures, to the historical use of the building but also, we're ensuring that there's no modern accretions added just as so that the site remains film friendly.

Stephen: Did the...

Jean Pierre: If I may add, every single film production, every single film production shooting in Malta, I already said, we facilitate and mediate between government entities and film production. One department which I didn't mention, I mentioned the tax people, I mentioned visa, I mentioned Job Plus.

I didn't mention Heritage and the, the Planning Authority and Superintendents of Cultural Heritage, every single production which requires the construction of sets Malta, any single construction is governed by applying for permits. So, every single construction, even for a film set, there needs to be a planning application.

Stephen: The superintendence.

Jean Pierre: So, when the planning application, obviously it's for temporary structures, but still, it's a planning application which needs to go through the application process. So, it's not the first time that any any set built in heritage areas, there needs to be monitors and monitoring. So, every single film building inside Fort Ricasoli, first of all, the plans needs to be submitted to the Planning Authority. There needs to be a method statement on how the building, the set building will not temper or will not... So, every single thing which is built needs to be reversible. Every single building needs, there needs to be a method statement showing how it will be built. You know, what materials will be used, how those if there's needs to be any support, how the support is going to be done. If there's going to be something which is touching the actual fabric of the fort, there needs to be a method statement identifying and showing how that, you know, contact between the modern structure, the modern settlement and stonework of the fort, there needs to be clear policies and guidance, and the monitors from the Planning Authority visit the set and do spot checks to ensure that those method statements and those building procedures are adhered to. So, the Film Commission ensures, through its policies, both of Fort Ricasoli, but also of all the other sites around Malta and Gozo that films need to abide with current laws. So, if there's laws which relate to heritage, to building, to environment, ERA is involved. So, if a film is shooting in a Natura 2000 site like...

Stephen: Majjistral.

Jean Pierre: Majjistral, Miġra l-Ferħa, ERA needs to be involved. For *Napoleon*, for example, where they shot at...

Stephen: Ghajn Tuffieħa?

Jean Pierre: Ghajn Tuffieħa, they had clear conditions on what could be done and what couldn't be done. What sort of vehicles could be allowed on the, the area. Every single maneuver, every single set build, every single set move needs to be, you know, there has to be policies set out before the filming starts, before the before the set construction even starts. I've seen film production memos guiding all

the film crew that, you know they're shooting in a sensitive nature 2000 site. They're shooting in a sensitive ecological site that crew needs to keep to specific pathways that they cannot tramp it on, the flora, or so the Film Commission does enforce that film productions abide by all the regulations set out by ERA, Planning Authority, heritage enforcement.

Stephen: Are there enforcement officers on site during the production?

Jean Pierre: Enforcement, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Every single production have these monitors. I have to add that we are in a very advanced stage, we're in a very mature stage in the industry where this monitoring is concerned, partly because of the fiasco that was the *Game of Thrones* shoot in 2008 or 9, when there was this...

Stephen: It was probably 10 or 11. Or 10 probably. Because I remember when they were here when I was a kid.

Jean Pierre: I think it was 2008 or 9. That was when this series was shot. 10 or 11 was when it started being aired.

Stephen: I don't remember. I remember being 10 years old, maybe, at the time, but yeah, that's an interesting point. At that time maybe there wasn't the same amount of enforcements?

Jean Pierre: No, listen, there was still enforcement. There were still regulations but...

Stephen: I suppose there must have been because they, there was the whole fiasco in the first place.

Jean Pierre: The fiasco was that a Maltese contractor didn't abide by the book to the conditions set out. The conditions set out that in Dwejra there needs to be floor sheeting to act as an insulator between the material they were bringing over, to make the ground look rugged and, you know, the soil and material, and to make the removal easy. And the local contractor, instead of using sheeting, you know, plastic sheeting. They used mesh, which was, you know, it allowed the material to seep through, so that it was a fiasco, because it could have been easily avoided. So, after that happened, no, all the local authorities ramped up their efforts, monitoring increased, spot checks increased, conditions increased. Soon after, well, not soon after, *Game of Thrones* but other films have shot in in sensitive places. For example, *By the Sea* shot in Miġra l-Ferġa in Gozo, they built a hotel set on the slopes, on the fields. If you go there today, you wouldn't be able to recognize the place you know, recognize the spot, because it was totally

reversible. Nothing remains. No damage was done, and that is thanks to the conditions which they followed, to the spot checks and the enforcement officers who went there once, twice, three times a week. You know, they were doing spot checks all the time to ensure that the film production and the Maltese working on the film abiding were abiding, you know, with the with the...

Stephen: I imagine in the case of Ricasoli, this would be even a more constant presence, because it's easier or more easily monitored and they would probably outline which buildings are structurally not sound...

Jean Pierre: But then that is a different thing. That is a different thing. So, what we're talking about here is conservation of heritage, or conservation of the environment. So...

Stephen: ERA...

Jean Pierre: So, that is the Superintendence of public of Cultural Heritage. That would be ERA that would be Planning Authority...

Stephen: Different departments coming together.

Jean Pierre: Yes. Or separately, but where we're talking about conservation of the Maltese environment and Maltese heritage, it's those entities. What you're talking about now is health and safety. So yes, within Fort Ricasoli, because there are some buildings which...

Stephen: And the sink hole that you mentioned.

Jean Pierre: Yes, there's a sinkhole, and there's some buildings which are not as safe. Then in that case, there is, you know, health and safety experts, which are also engaged on every single production, every single production shooting in Fort Ricasoli, would engage a health and safety, a health and safety officer. Well, let me rephrase that, not every single production shooting in Fort Ricasoli, every single production shooting anywhere in Malta needs to engage health and safety officers, because every single site and every single film scene have risks attached. So, you can be shooting a scene in a street where there's risks attached, traffic, pedestrians, I don't know if there's special effects, if there's explosions, if there's fire, if there's rain effects, if there's wires which you can trip over. So every single location, every single scene, has risk attached. Like with Fort Ricasoli. In Fort Ricasoli some of the risks are inherent to the structure, the building structure. So yes, every single production for every single shoot day in

Malta, they need to have health and safety reports drafted, signed for. There needs to be health and safety considerations and mitigations. In case of Fort Ricasoli, some areas need to be cordoned off. Some areas need to be out of bounds. In some areas, there needs to be signage, there needs to be health and safety officers monitoring. So, you know, health and safety is a totally different aspect from conservation of heritage.

Stephen: You mentioned, because what I find interesting about the restoration, on our tour when we were going around the fort today, you showed some of the restoration works that were done, and you were mentioning how they're using new stones. So, it's very obvious that there's the old stone versus the new stone. My question, though, is more related to, does this affect the appeal? Would this not affect appeal to film producers in the sense of it doesn't look original anymore. For a film set, it'll be obvious it's a modern construction.

Jean Pierre: For a film production, you know, it's old stone and new stone, these...

Stephen: It will be obvious. I mean, you can see where it's been restored by the contrast.

Jean Pierre: But on the tour as well, you could see how easy it is for film productions to create fake walls which look like they're ancient walls. So, a good construction department in Malta can easily build a facade. And we've had various sets which even built inside Fort Ricasoli, or inside the rooms in Fort Ricasoli, where a fake wall is built within a room so that, you know, a different texture is applied. We didn't go in all of such rooms. Maybe I should have showed you one of the rooms in which, you know, like it's a false, it's a false facade. I think that is how it's best described. So, when, for example, in on some productions, they wish to create some effect on the walls, rather than touching the actual walls, they would build a false facade. And in those cases where the restoration has taken place, I don't see it as a hindrance. It's not like we have, you know, added modern accretions. It's stone with stone, but if they're bothered, they can easily apply, you know, false facades to those...

Stephen: At the end of the day, I think the preservation is what matters more in that sense. Okay, let's move on to the next question. Here we have, I think... what are the, I mean, I think we've answered some of this a little bit, but what are the main logistical and technical challenges you face when managing a 17th century fort as a functional filming back lot? I think we've already touched on that a little bit.

Jean Pierre: No, the Film Commission is very much interested in seeing the preservation of Fort Ricasoli, as I said, it's working with local stakeholders and entities to ensure that, you know, there is a plan, there

is a vision for the further restoration and conservation of the site. There's proposals for even widening the use beyond just production, but also having some facilities within Fort Ricasoli, helping to revitalize the fort, obviously, as a film commission, where our vested interest is in the Fort Ricasoli retaining its primary use as film related. So, all our proposals relate to film schools, film workshops, film attractions, possibly a film exhibition. You know, it's all on proposed at proposing stage. But you know Fort Ricasoli is a unique site. And you know this entire peninsula here, you know the Rinella area, there's Fort Ricasoli, there's the counter guard, there's the Film Studios. You know, Malta's film infrastructure is all located here. So, I think it is, it is very important that, you know, as a film area, film city, you know, a film hub. You know, there is a homogeneous, a harmonious film vision for this area. But obviously you know myself as a film officer within the Film Commission, that is all I can say. I know that there's proposals, and as a film education and the film heritage, I know that this proposal includes elements of school tourism and elements of film education, but for a full blown proposal in the full blown exposition of what our vision for the fort is, then, I would suggest you also interview the Film Commissioner because the Film Commissioner as the person entrusted by the government to set out the strategy for the film industry in Malta, I'm sure he would be able to elaborate much more than that.

Stephen: Alright, I'm going to skip ahead just to one question, because it's sort of related, while we're on topic, about the sea, some of the sea facing walls. When we were on the tour today, we saw the sea destruct, what the sea has, which part of the walls that the sea has destructed along the entrance area, along the entrance area. So, how is the, how is the MFC addressing this issue in terms of setting up large scale productions but there's, there's these vulnerable areas?

Jean Pierre: As I said, the Film Commission is very much vested in ensuring the conservation of the site. So there's been this committee set up, which I think I mentioned earlier in the interview, involving key stakeholders in heritage conservation, in restoration, and we started restoring those parts which were, which required the restoration the most. The sea facing, the open sea facing areas obviously suffer most deterioration because of the eroding qualities of the sea. Obviously, a full-fledged restoration is always on the cards. The cost would be exorbitant. Possibly there would be need, they would need the, as was done for Valletta, as was done for Mdina and all the fortifications, there might be the need to apply for EU funds for support in restoring those those walls. As a film commission, as I said, you know, the priority for us is that the site is restored. You know, we are the proud custodians of this important heritage asset of the Maltese islands. So, we are definitely, as I said, ensuring that productions do not cause further damage. Where possible we are restoring and where possible, we are also engaging in these talks with all necessary stakeholders to, you know, where possible, restore, where possible, apply for funds, where possible ensure that the site is preserved and conserved and retains

its use as the film industry, but also, where possible, made available to the public. We only had a few open days so far. We had the open day in January 2024, which was *Gladiator* centric, but you know, the general public could come and see the fort and what it offers to the film industry. There was another open day back in 2004 or 5 when *Troy* was being shot. So, that was another open day which was film related. I, as the cultural development manager, I regularly host visits, education visits, either with school children or with niche groups. I've had, you know, pensioners, I've had rehabilitating drug users, I've had educational tourists. So, I have been taking small groups and showing them the site as the site of a film location. I'm no history expert, so I do mention briefly that the Fort Ricasoli is, was built by the Knights, that the British had their barracks there that the site was, you know, the site for a famous mutiny, the Froberg Regiment mutiny. But that is where my history stops, and then my film knowledge goes in. So, I do speak about conservation efforts, and I do speak about our sensitivity towards heritage and the environment and about protecting what we have and ensuring that productions do not cause additional damage. So, the site is, in a way, open for niche groups, but I don't see that the fort will ever be opened for mass tourism, as are other sites.

Stephen: So, you mentioned the event, the event, the open day for *Gladiator II*, which is an event that attracted significant attention, so we had a lot of people coming from the public. So, how do these events fit into the MFC's strategy for promoting Malta as a filming destination while engaging with the local community?

Jean Pierre: An open day is an excellent vehicle at outreach. You'd be surprised at how many people do not know what film industry entails. For a person on the street, you go and ask him, "what do you need to make a film?" And they'd say you need actors, you need a director, a camera person. They, you know, most people cannot really understand or appreciate how big the film industry is, or how many different trades and skills the film industry needs to operate. So, I think that open day, the one in January where people could come in, they could see the film sets still standing. The film sets were still dressed. There were stunt people doing stunts. There was an exhibition of various crew positions. There were prosthetic artists, there were makeup artists, there were armorers. We haven't yet spoken about armorers. There were special effects being done at the Film Studios. So, the Film Commission is very keen on doing outreach work. Outreach work for the Maltese public to appreciate how an important key player the film industry is for the local economy. It's outreach for future generations of filmmakers, of future generations of film crew. My responsibility, as you know, in film education is just about that. When I get students here, 12 year olds, 13 year olds, who are choosing their subjects, my key message is, if you become a hair and makeup artist, if you become a seamstress, if you become a carpenter, if you come a plasterer a painter, if you become a photographer, if you become a videographer, if you can

become a photographer, an editor, if you become an actor, if you become a chef, if you become a doctor, a driver, there is opportunities to work in the film industry. If you are a creative or if you are a skilled person, if you have, if you studied accounts, you can work in the film industry. So, my work in schools is to outreach. You know, is an outreach effort by the Film Commission in order for children to aspire to, you know, professionalize in whatever field they're interested in, but then they can work in film. You can be a regular makeup artist, but then you can specialize to work on film productions and rather than doing beauty makeup, you can do prosthetics and scars and bruises and burners. You can become a carpenter, but then you can build sets. You can become an accountant. Well, accounts is always accounts, but it's inspiring young people that they can also work in this exciting industry. So open days, education, outreach, initiatives, exhibitions, attending lectures at university, MCAST, all the institutions. I as education officer and also responsible for screen tourism, I also delivered lectures at ITS related to screen tourism. I've been responsible for delivering the CPD courses for trained tourist guides. Tourist guides, licensed tourist guides every two years they need to do continuous professional development courses, and I've delivered such courses. So, there's a lot of work the Film Commission is doing to raise awareness about, you know, how important the film industry is, about potential career opportunities within within the film industry, and also, you know the potential for screen tourism. Screen tourism is becoming more and more familiar with local audiences. People are researching, where was *Gladiator* shot? Where was *Jurassic World* shot, where was *Game of Thrones* shot. So again, the Film Commission is working with the Malta Tourism Authority to also develop screen tourism products. So yes, the open day is just one of many initiatives at outreach for the Film Commission, you know, to expose what the film industry is all about. And you know, the opportunities within the film industry.

Stephen: Would there, I mean, it's not, might not be a question you can fully answer yourself, but is, are there any plans for any of this to become possibly permanent exhibits for screen tourism? So, let's say tourists come, they want to see the Film Studios, there's a section that they can, they can be toured around?

Jean Pierre: Again, so as I said, this specific question I cannot answer because I am not privy to the vision of the Film Commissioner, and what the long term vision for this place is, both for film for, sorry, both for the Film Studios and Fort Ricasoli. Within my remit, I can say that the Film Commission, sorry that the Malta Film Studios and Fort Ricasoli, I have coordinated niche visits. So, for educational purposes, we've had, for specialized tourist groups we've had one offs, but not on a regular basis. So, I, I...

Stephen: Okay, so maybe I can ask you, in your opinion, if you don't mind, like, do you think it should remain a niche tourist site in terms of limiting when tourists are coming, or do you think it could expand into a larger touristic site where groups can come and see a small section?

Jean Pierre: The problem with such reasoning is that you cannot have a regular tourist site which closes whenever there's a film being shot. And that is our case. Fort Ricasoli was out of bounds for close to a year when *Gladiator II* was being shot. So, you know, you cannot develop a tourist attraction when the site is, the site's primary use is film production. When filming is not taking place, I myself have had now a number of tours within Fort Ricasoli. Now, as you witnessed, both the Film Studios and Fort Ricasoli cannot in any way be labeled as tourist attractions. Both of, both Fort Ricasoli and Film Studios are an industrial space where films are shot. Fort Ricasoli does have the heritage element to it, because it is a heritage building, but its current use is purely industrial. So, you know, there's health and, health and safety concerns. There's facilities which are lacking. So, if we were to regularly host visits, there needs to be infrastructural changes done to the place. So, in that case, yes, I cannot answer that question unless, you know, it is the Film Commissioner who can answer such a question.

Stephen: So, I mean, I'll make a statement you can correct, correct it. Okay, from my understanding, it would be better to have this more as a quality tourism niche, where tourists can visit in between productions, rather than as a, a comparison, would be Universal Studios in Florida where it's a permanent museum, daily visits, quantity tourism.

Jean Pierre: Exactly, okay, I, I agree with that statement, adding Malta needs to develop screen tourism attractions. Currently, the only screen tourism attraction which exists is Popeye Village. Apart from Popeye Village, there's a couple of film related books which were published in 2015 one of them I co-edited, and it was funded by my NGO...

Stephen: It has a black cover I think.

Jean Pierre: That is *World Film Locations: Malta*. And unfortunately, even my book, they're outdated because they were published in 2015 so *World Film Locations: Malta* and *Malta On The Silver Screen* by Angela Peel, they were published in 2015 so they're, you know, nine years outdated. And in these nine years we have attracted so many big productions. I believe *Assassin's Creed* wasn't in there...

Stephen: They've probably been the busiest years.

Jean Pierre: *Jurassic World, Napoleon, Gladiator II*. You know, there urgently needs to be a revamp of those two production, publications. Apart from that, you know, the only other screen tourism offering is the actual locations. But the tourists would need to research, they need to go onto the internet and find the locations, you know, bit by bit. So that is why the Malta Film Commission with the Malta Tourism Authority is now working on developing screen tourism products, like movie maps, like...

Stephen: I believe you were working on an app.

Jean Pierre: Eventually there will be an app. Yes, that is the aim. I must add that in the political electoral manifesto of the Malta Labour Party, which is obviously currently in government, in the manifesto of the last election in 2022 there was one proposal which proposed that the Malta Tourism Authority with the Film Commission, would set up a film trail. So yes, there is this electoral promise which means that by 2027, when the next election will take place, we are working towards that goal, that objective of setting up a film trail. But with the Malta Tourism Authority we're also speaking about a wider array of screen tourism products, not just a film trail, but also having movie maps, having more information panels set up. Currently, there's four information panels, one in the Upper Barrakka Gardens, one near Fort St Elmo, one on East Street and one near Valletta waterfront. But we wish to widen that film trail and have other signs erected in other key film zones, like Mdina, like the Għajn Tuffieħa area, like the Dwejra park in Gozo but, you know, work is ongoing on those as well. But back to the question. The question was, remind me, remind me.

Stephen: I think it was about the open day.

Jean Pierre: Yes, yes, the Film Commission is totally on board in doing outreach activities. Fort Ricasoli and Film Studios, you know, the primary use is that of film production. So, yes, I think it would be best that, you know, priority is filming. When there's a niche group, which is, you know, suitable for a visit, and there's no filming taking place, you know, we might, we might entertain that, that opportunity to have such a visit. But again, as you saw Fort Ricasoli is not embellished as a tourist location. We are restoring even the parts which have been restored, are restored, but are still in a raw state. We're not, you know, creating nice finishes, you know, to attract the eye, to make the site more aesthetic. We are leaving the site as close as possible to a film ready site. So, even if we were to hold visits, you know, there would be a disclaimer, a huge disclaimer, before embarking on a site visit of Fort Ricasoli or Film Studios, that these are industrial spaces. We regularly receive phone calls from individuals you know at hotels from concierges; "do you host visit, visits at the Film Studios?" And no, we don't. So, for a visitor, you know, an independent visitor, what we tell them is, you know, this is not a film attraction. This is an industrial space where films are shot. It's only in those cases where, for example, a tourist has a film background,

or it could be a potential filmmaker, that we entertain visits. But the visit is on a technical level. We speak about, you know, the facilities, about the infrastructure, about how the special effects machines work, not about, you know, the site as a historical space.

Stephen: We spoke a bit, a little bit about this on our tour as well. So, from a filmmaking perspective, what exactly about Fort Ricasoli is particularly attractive? Is it, what makes it an attractive location for productions and, like how does its historical architecture enhance its appeal?

Jean Pierre: No as I said, look up the quote for Ridley Scott, where he mentioned about this amazing back lot, which added value to his sets in *Gladiator* one. The fort's backdrop, you know, the actual vaults, the actual fabric of the space is, you know, it adds value to every single set. So, every single set which was built inside the fort, you know, the fabric of the original fort, built by the Knights or the British, is there as a backdrop, as a natural backdrop which augments the scale of the set. Secondly, it's a gated property, so as we said, it adds to the security. Thirdly, it's the biggest parade ground allowing for the construction of big sets. Now you might tell me, but there have been other big sets built in other areas. You know, most notably, there's Popeye Village. *Agora* had a huge set built in, in Marsaxlokk.

Stephen: Tas-Silġ.

Jean Pierre: Hmm?

Stephen: Tas-Silġ

Jean Pierre: In Tas-Silġ, exactly. We had *By the Sea*, which had that massive set built in Mġarr in-Xini. And recently we had another film, a French film called *Camelot*, which also shot and built a set in Mġiebañ Bay. But otherwise, Fort Ricasoli is the one unique site which is level ground, level ground, which allows for the building of massive sets. So, you know, Fort Ricasoli offers all that.

Stephen: What, so can you tell me a little bit about what happens to the sets after, post, post production, after the production is finished I mean?

Jean Pierre: Sure. Fort Ricasoli being a unique space, you know, we cannot have sets stay there, you know, indefinitely. So, every single set, unfortunately, needs to be demolished. We have tried to secure small pockets of sets or smaller, smaller construction, smaller builds for posterity because, you know, they're screen, their screen tourism element. But unfortunately, as I also mentioned earlier in our tour,

no set is built to last. So even when we choose to keep sets, that comes at a hefty cost, because in order to, you know, to maintain those sets from falling into bits, you know, we were talking about the sea and how the sea erodes the stonework, imagine what the sea does to plaster and wood and metal. So, the sets deteriorates at a much faster rate than the, you know, the fortifications. And yes, whenever we choose to keep some sets, you know, that comes at a huge cost, because none of the sets are built to last. All the other sets are demolished or dismantled. And the Film Commission emphasizes that all the demolishing and all the construction of the sets is done in line with guidelines set out by ERA, so wherever possible, you know sets, set pieces, there needs to be waste separation, you know, wooden parts and metal parts and other construction waste, they need to be separated. So that you know the film, deconstruction, the set, the construction, the set strike, that is the technical word which films use, the strike of the set is, you know, of the least, of the least...

Stephen: Wasteful maybe?

Jean Pierre: Oh, my, some words.... so that there is the least footprint, you know, where carbon footprint is concerned, and there's the least impact in the ecosystem, not the ecosystem, the environmental...

Stephen: I'm trying to help you...

Jean Pierre: You've drained me, I've been with this guy for almost four hours now!

Stephen: We're almost at the end, I promise.

Jean Pierre: So, yes, the Film Commission does...

Stephen: They separate the waste and they reuse wherever possible.

Jean Pierre: Wherever possible, wherever possible. You know, things, parts which can be reutilized are stored, parts which cannot be utilized, you know, they are separated and...

Stephen: Sent to WasteServ you mentioned.

Jean Pierre: Yes.

Stephen: Because this reminds me, you reminded me of a question I had earlier I forgot to ask. In terms of the restoration, you mentioned, they're doing it in stages, one step at a time, in various areas around the fort, we saw four areas. What, is there a priority? Is there a list of priority to which areas are being...

Jean Pierre: I'm not familiar with the list of priorities, and I'm not aware which part will be restored next. But as I said, there's a committee which is they've...

Stephen: I imagine they've picked, they've set out, they've picked out certain locations which are top priority, need restoration immediately, and they're going in terms of where it needs it.

Jean Pierre: Yes, yes, yes.

Stephen: Okay, all right. Final question, if you can answer it, maybe not, what are the long term plans for Fort Ricasoli as a filming location? Do you foresee any changes in how it is used to ensure both sustainability and public accessibility?

Jean Pierre: Okay? No, most of that question can be only answered by the Film Commissioner, who has, you know, whose vision is key to the use of Fort Ricasoli. What I can say is that for the Film Commission, per se and at large, when the film industry is concerned, our priority, it will always be a priority for us to safeguard the heritage. You know, we feel privileged to be the custodians of this unique site, so the least we can do is to ensure that no more damage is done. We are also serving as a catalyst for the restoration of the site with, as I said earlier, with the priority being film industry. So, we are restoring and conserving but allowing the site to be as film friendly as possible. So not restoring it excessively to make it attractive for a tourist but not attractive for film industry. So, everything is being done in full sensitivity to the requirements of the film industry. And I'm sure that the Film Commissioner will also say this will also attest that for us, the preservation of the site is important as regards to access to the public, as far as things stand at the current moment, access to the public is possible on a case by case basis, mostly for education and cultural purposes, not for mass tourism. But the Film Commissioner will be able to elaborate if there is any other plans for the future on that.

Stephen: So maybe I can, I can wrap it up with a bit of a summary of what you said, and you can correct my summary for anything, if you want to add anything. So essentially, the Malta Film Commission, you're in charge of administering, you're the custodian for Fort Ricasoli, and you're, you are interested in its preservation. You've already begun restorations of certain sites. There's a priority to which sites need to be restored. It's an industrial space, meaning it's, it's not, its primary use is not for our tourists and as

a heritage site to be visited. Its primary use is for production, of the production of films, TV, to build sets, and in terms of touristic appeal or touristic use, let's say, right now, the focus is on niche quality tourism on a case by case basis, where you can bring groups, you've done open days, where that's to more in, more to educate the public, in terms of the existing film industry, how it works, the potential for employment, and bringing people who can work here, educating the, the upcoming generation. So, and in terms of future appeal that's up in the air, in future use for tourism, that's up in the air a little bit right now.

Jean Pierre: No, that's the only part I would correct. It's future use. We would like to say it's above my pay grade. So, I'm responsible for film education and screen heritage and screen tourism and as things stand at the moment, I think you succinctly and successfully summarized all that we've said in a few sentences. As things stand, yes, we're open for education and cultural tours on a one-off basis. So, on, it's on a case by case basis, what the plans for Fort Ricasoli are in the future? I am aware that the Film Commissioner is lobbying for the, you know, keeping the use of Fort Ricasoli for film related activities. And also, you know, in view of its full restoration and full rehabilitation for additional uses. Additional uses will also always be related to film. I didn't touch upon these things. You know, if there's film classes, film workshops, if there's film school, or, you know, conference rooms for film education or small exhibitions. So yes, every single time we have discussed the future use of Fort Ricasoli, its use will always be related to film, but with the primary use being film production. But there surely are ways and means of having a balance between film production and other activities related to film, which can go hand in hand. Opening Fort Ricasoli for mass tourism, I think it's not on the table because that would totally hinder film production and the other activities. But I strongly recommend that if you wish to understand better what the vision for, for Fort Ricasoli in the future is you send some questions to the Film Commissioner.

Stephen: Especially, because, especially we haven't really mentioned any of its historical aspects. So even tourism related to history would be interesting to know a bit more about. Because you're saying ...

Jean Pierre: If I, if I may add, if I may add, I've shown Fort Ricasoli to select groups of historical aficionados who were keen on seeing the fort from a historical viewpoint. I've shown the various vaults to architects or students doing the architectural course because of the building methods used by the Knights in very so in various vaults, we've collaborated with conservation students and conservation departments at university about the, you know, in the various areas of the fort. I recall an expert on concrete and the restoration of concrete of British period concrete which is present in the fort, in the gun towers, in the gun towers. And again, the word escapes me, gun posts. I don't know if it's gun posts, but

anyway, so we, you know, on a case by case basis, for cultural and education and research purposes, we have opened the doors.

Stephen: It would be interesting to blend the two, is what I'm saying. You know, blending its uses, obviously it's use as a backlot for film is part of its DNA. Now it's part of its identity. Yes, in the sense that it's been used that way for, I guess, exactly a quarter of a century now.

Jean Pierre: That's true, even more, even more.

Stephen: Or even longer. So yeah, but obviously you can't ignore the historical side to it. So, I imagine if, if you're going to be focusing on any sort of screen tourism, the screen tourism still needs to blend its historical nature.

Jean Pierre: What I like about screen tourism is that a tourist who might not be particularly keen on... [mobile rings]...I cannot take that at the moment. So, my point was that I like to think of screen tourism as an opportunity for a tourist who's keener on film to discover Malta and its environment and its heritage and its spaces. Not everyone is a history buff, not everyone is a museum buff or an archeology buff, but if somebody is a film buff, they can discover Mdina because of *Game of Thrones*, and then discover the beautiful heritage that is within Mdina. If somebody came, when, well most tourists go to Valletta, yes, granted, but if there's somebody who is looking for the locations of *Jurassic World*, you know, *Jurassic World* may be the catalyst which encourages that tourists to go off the beaten path, and rather than staying in the central areas, going into the lesser touristy areas in Valletta. So, I like to think of screen tourism as beneficial even to the tourism industry, because currently we're seeing, you know, this discussion of over tourism. We're seeing this discussion of masts of tourists going in the key places in Valletta, our long queues go into for, to St John's Co-Cathedral. Screen tourism, could, you know, take tourists off the beaten track into more remote areas. So, yes...

Stephen: They complement each other. So...

Jean Pierre: They complement each other and film can help film buffs discover Malta's heritage, they can help film buff discover Malta's rural parts.

Stephen: And vice versa. You can say vice versa.

Jean Pierre: And vice versa.

Stephen: History buffs can discover a film...

Jean Pierre: I always say, I, I don't think that as yet we have a production which, on its own, can attract tourists too Malta, maybe *Game of Thrones*. I do think that there were people who were *Game of Thrones* fans who came to Malta just to tick the box on their you know...

Stephen: It would have had to be here, have been here longer, I think. Possibly...

Jean Pierre: Still, still, I know that there were many, many Americans who came to Europe and did this *Game of Thrones* tour. There's a cruise, which I don't think ever materialized, the *Game of Thrones* tours or?

Stephen: Because *Game of Thrones*, I think is maybe a little more synonymous with Northern Ireland at this point, Croatia...

Jean Pierre: Northern Ireland, Croatia, Morocco, Croatia and Iceland.

Stephen: With those, I would say the Northern Ireland and Croatia are probably the hubs.

Jean Pierre: Yes. But a film buff, a film buff...

Stephen: Would come to Malta as well.

Jean Pierre: Will stop in Malta.

Stephen: To stop, it's the first season.

Jean Pierre: You know, there was a *Game of Thrones* tour in Malta, and for the years that it was running, it was very popular. So, what I'm saying here is that I don't think that screen tourism so far has the strength to attract a tourist simply because of a film, maybe *Game of Thrones*, as I said, but I do think that no, Malta's film heritage, and you know the fact that we stood in for *Gladiator* for *Jurassic World*, for *Game of Thrones*, for *Assassin's Creed*. It is, it all adds value to the tourism industry, to the tourist guides, the narrative of Malta as being this beautiful location, wonderful heritage, amazing food, and you know, the site for the stars.

Stephen: Last, last thing, I promise. You mentioned that the Commissioner wants to keep some of the rooms with the sets as are, as they are. Those will be permanent exhibits.

Jean Pierre: Yes, currently, that is, I cannot say that they're permanent. I can say that for the time being, we are preserving them. But as to the long term...

Stephen: For the, for the, for tourism, for tourists to visit and see these, see these sets.

Jean Pierre: Amongst others, yes, but I, I, I'd rather say that currently, there's two sets which are dressed up as they were used in *Gladiator*, *Gladiator II*. But I cannot confirm if that would be the case in a year's time, in two years time, in five years time. So, that is something which the Film Commissioner's vision, you know, you'd have to tap into that.

Stephen: Alright. I think that's everything. It's been a very informative interview. Thank you for your time Jean Pierre and I guess we can wrap it up here. Anything you want to say before we sign off.

Jean Pierre: Feel free to send over any additional questions, also myself and also to the Film Commissioner. You know, we have an open door policy. We're open to support students, be it screen tourism related, film related, be it heritage related, we've always entertained these opportunities because we believe that research, and you know, will allow for more exposure, more outreach, your study will hopefully inform other others who are studying and who will want to further the research into possible uses to Fort Ricasoli, possible synergies which can be struck, possible collaborations. So, I was very happy to support you, and eager to continue supporting you. And I want this transcript, and you know the study, so keep me involved. And also, once you write your report, and if you are mentioning me and this interview, I would love to have a preview of what's been written, just so that we are in line, and I can confirm, and always be written. But you know when you summarized, your spot on for most part of it, for 99%. You know that final part which I didn't...

Stephen: I didn't, I didn't use the correct words at the end. Alright, thank you.

Interview Transcript – Vincent Zammit: Maltese Historian

Stephen: Good evening. Mr. Vincent Zammit. I, my name is Stephen Grech, and I will be conducting an interview for my long essay, which is whose, which topic is focusing on Fort Ricasoli and its role as a cultural heritage site and also as a filming backlot, and I am interviewing you because I want to get a bit of, a bit more knowledge from a historian's perspective regarding the fort itself. So, starting with the first question here, can you elaborate on the historical context in which fort Ricasoli was constructed during the 17th century? What was its strategic importance for the Knights of St John?

Vincent: When the Knights arrived in Malta, the Grand Harbour which they had chosen to be their headquarters, was unprotected. There was only the Fort St Angelo, eventually called Fort St Angelo, the Castrum Maris. And up till the Great Siege, that is the first 35 years of the Order's stay in Malta, they had managed to erect two fortifications. Fort St Elmo and Fort St Michael, and then Fort St Michael was placed within the fortifications of Senglea. In the meantime, even Birgu was given its own fortifications. But when, when one considers that we are talking of the 1560s it seems that that was enough, for the simple reason that the artillery would not have been, would not have had a long range from where Fort Ricasoli is, towards Fort Sant Angelo. But at the same time, it was obvious that for Fort St Elmo, defending the entrance to the harbour, needed another one to win on the other headland. Now, after the Great Siege, there was the building of Valletta. So, therefore, a lot of money was spent on the building of the fortifications of the city, the upgrading of the old fortifications. But then there was an Italian knight from Bologna, if I'm not mistaken Alessandro Orsi who built a small tower at the headland. That headland was being used as Gallow's Point. So therefore it made an impression on anyone coming in that, "hey, listen, you better pay attention, or else you will end up hanging up there." Eventually, eventually, towards the second half of the 17th century, there was the decision by Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner that they needed to defend the Three Cities even better. So, the Three Cities, each and every one of them, had its own line of fortifications. Birgu on its own, Senglea and also Cospicua. But the idea of Cotoner was to have all three of them surrounded by this line of fortification. It seems that there was a suggestion that the Cottonera Lines would actually start from where there is Fort Ricasoli, taking in Bighi, Kalkara of today, the Three Cities, and eventually ending up on Corradino Hill. There are, there are actually maps indicating this suggestion. Now, whether that was a suggestion or whether that was some fanciful idea, by, by, by a cartographer, it's very difficult to know. What is definite is the, surrounding the Cottonera Lines, surrounding the Three Cities, and at the same time Fort Ricasoli, because just not having a very good fort at that location meant that the enemy could land very easily. One needs to consider what, what kind, what other kind of fortifications were located along that coast from where Fort Ricasoli is towards Marsaskala, okay. There was only one tower, a tower that was built

by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt, Madonna della Grazia at Xaghjra of today that does not exist anymore because the British pulled it down to build their own fortification. So therefore, there was no proper defensive post over there. The building of the fort of Fort Ricasoli ended up becoming the largest single fort in Malta, with a very large parade ground, a very good, you know, covering a lot of the of the area. And together with Fort St Elmo, they could easily defended the entrance to the harbour. So, yes, military wise, that would have been the best solution for a better defense of of the harbour.

Stephen: All right. I think that covers it quite well, thank you. Just to move on to the next question, then this one interested me quite a, quite a bit. What are the most notable architectural or design features of Fort Ricasoli that reflect its historical significance? Are there elements unique to its era or purpose? Just to add something to this question, because I read something somewhere where it said that, you know something about an ingenious design and how it perfectly took on the shape of Rinella Point, Gallow's Point. And I don't know exactly what it meant by that being a clever design. Yeah.

Vincent: I mean, it was, it was very large, as I've just said that it was, it is the largest fort that was built in Malta, but at the end of the day it was, it extended too far. So therefore, the, the more fortifications that you're going to have, the more soldiers that you need. So therefore, sometimes there would have been reports saying that, um, doesn't, does it make sense to have another line of fortification in the middle of the parade ground in order to make it even better defended so that, in case you you lose one part of it, you still have an internal wall to defend the rest of the fort. But just suggestions, and this never materialized. Besides that, with regards to particular architectural features, you have the unique doorway, the main gateway to Fort Ricasoli with its Berninesque columns. Okay, they are, they are...

Stephen: Is that, is that, though, the, because it was reconstructed the gate after the Second World War?

Vincent: That's right, and it's not exactly as it used to be. So, okay, so they are a very poor copy. Okay they are a very good poor copy of what there used to be, pre-World War. But that is, that is the only particular, shall we say, architectural feature that makes it different from the others, because barracks, you are always going to find barracks, a church? You are always going to find a church within these large fortifications. So, there was nothing in particular except the size.

Stephen: Okay, just a side question before I move on. I don't know, just in case you might know, because in the, speaking about the church, the St Nicholas Church, I read that there was a Mattia Preti painting

inside of Saint Nicholas and the Grand Master Cottoner. Do you know by any chance, what happened to this painting? Because it's no longer there.

Vincent: To be honest, to be honest, no. I wouldn't be surprised that it would have been removed during the British period. And shall we say, "lost".

Stephen: Maybe stolen, sold.

Vincent: Yes, let's say, let's just say lost or given away, literally or given away.

Stephen: All right, you mentioned Orsi's Tower earlier. So, this is this the fortified structure prior to Ricasoli. So, yeah, prior to building Fort Ricasoli, there was Orsi's tower. What can you say about the significance of the construction of this tower? So just elaborate more on Orsi.

Vincent: It indicated clearly that the military people of the Knights of St John realized the importance to have some kind of defense over there. As otherwise that literally, that, that part was completely undefended, right, completely undefended. So therefore, the building of a tower like that in that particular area was pointing out that, "hey, listen, one of these days you need to build something even bigger." Right, which eventually, roughly about 50 years later, Fort Ricasoli was built. So, for the first 70 years, I mean 70 years, if I'm not mistaken, the date of Orsi Tower was something like 1620.

Stephen: 29 I think is when it was proposed.

Vincent: That's right in the 1620s. Okay so, and another 50 years before the building of the fort took part. So, there are, there are indications that the tower, the actual tower, was retained when the fort was built on the outside of the main fortification, literally at the tip of the peninsula, right? But that is, that is yes, that is debatable. All right, that is debatable how much it served its military purpose, because then, a 50 year difference, artillery would have developed more so therefore the tower would have been practically useless.

Stephen: That's also another little side note, because we always speak about ditches in Malta. There were never any moats. However, Orsi's Tower was filled with sea water so would you...

Vincent: Yes, of course. Because it was built exactly...

Stephen: Yeah, by the shoreline.

Vincent: I mean, I mean in Malta we do not have moats. Generally speaking.

Stephen: Would this be the only example of a moat then?

Vincent: No, no, there is Fort St Angelo. Fort St Angelo is divided, is separated from Birgu by going over the bridge.

Stephen: Would you consider that a moat? Because, technically, that's a canal, almost.

Vincent: A canal, but it doesn't go on to the other side.

Stephen: Oh, it doesn't, okay yeah.

Vincent: Okay, so, so, so, originally it was referred to as a as a moat. I don't know how familiar you are with Birżebbuġa Ferretti Battery.

Stephen: Yes, there's the restaurant, yeah.

Vincent: There is also a little part of it over there, which is actually like a moat.

Stephen: Yeah, there's ducks inside.

Vincent: It's where, it's where they used to keep the boat that served the captain to visit the other fortifications around Fort, around Marsaxlokk Bay.

Stephen: Okay, all right. I think you wrote something about Orsi's Tower. Am I wrong? I don't know if when I was researching it was your name who wrote something.

Vincent: Ah, in Heritage, in the magazine Heritage.

Stephen: Maybe, yeah.

Vincent: In actual fact, in actual fact, I never wrote that, and I did tell them, and in fact, I had to call many years ago and call a colleague of mine who were lecturing at the Junior College and I told him, I told

him, listen, it's not my fault that they put down my name instead of his. He is the same person who wrote the book about Fort Ricasoli, Anton Quintano.

Stephen: Ah okay, Quintano, yes, yes, yes.

Vincent: Anton Quintano.

Stephen: Yeah, all right so, we'll go on to the next question. How did Fort Ricasoli contribute to Malta's defenses over the centuries? Particularly, particularly during the French invasion?

Vincent: Oh, it seems, it seems that it was basically the, one of the few, I don't want to say, the only one, one of the few, that continued to resist the French. And although the Grand Master had capitulated, the soldiers over there, the regiment over there, didn't want to surrender. And a priest was sent to convince them that sort of, hey, listen, I mean, all of Malta now has surrendered, so why should you continue to make it difficult for yourselves? Okay, so yeah, Fort Ricasoli seems to have been one of the few that resisted. I mean, that was its job at the end of the day to resist any invasion, but it depended on the, on who was actually in command on, on the day, and whether he would have been, definitely he was not a spy for Napoleon.

Stephen: Yeah, it did. It repelled three attacks, I believe.

Vincent: That's right, that's right.

Stephen: But I didn't know that, that it, you know, it was just handed over to the French, rather than...

Vincent: Eventually, eventually they had to surrender.

Stephen: Yeah, yeah, makes sense.

Vincent: If the Grand Master surrendered you know I mean, what can you do?

Stephen: Okay, so that was an easy one. Okay, so what? What is the background to the events that led up to the Froberg Regiment Mutiny? What impacts were felt afterwards? So, you know, this is quite a significant I would say, mutiny in Maltese history, obviously during the British era here.

Vincent: The Froberg Regiment was made up of non-English soldiers. So therefore, they were just... No, I was going to use the wrong word "volunteers", mercenaries. They were there for the money. And therefore, there was no loyalty to the flag, let's put it that way. And for some reason or another, they actually took over the fort, and they were, they were threatening that they will start firing at Fort St Elmo and also at Valletta. Which was to be honest, it was stupid of them for the simple reason that Fort Ricasoli is quite low. From, from Fort St Elmo you're looking inside. So therefore, they would have been exposed to any fire from the fort, from Fort St Elmo, which is just across the bay. And eventually, eventually they had to, they had to surrender. And if I'm not mistaken, I think a number of them were executed as well, for their, for their, for their, for their part, for their participation.

Stephen: They killed people, and they held people hostage.

Vincent: Oh yes, oh yes.

Stephen: It was a hostage situation basically.

Vincent: That's right. If I'm not mistaken there is, that is, I would imagine, I don't know whether you have consulted the book by Quintano, Fort Ricasoli.

Stephen: Yeah, I've, I've, I've read, not the whole thing, but I've used it for my literature review so, yes.

Vincent: I wouldn't be surprised if this, this incident, is mentioned also by him.

Stephen: Yes, yes, yes. I just, I just want more from asking you the perspective of, first of all, in the first place, why would the British Army want to recruit a regiment made up of entirely of foreigners, of foreign soldiers or mercenaries? It just seems I don't know, is this something they usually did?

Vincent: Keep in mind that they were fighting the French and the allies of the French, that is of Napoleon, all right. So therefore, they needed to have so many soldiers, so many regiments, armies all over Europe. So therefore, probably they would have, I would imagine, that they would have considered Malta is not really on the front line, so yes, we can actually place over there soldiers which we are paying, all right, but not necessarily soldiers that we can make sure that they are loyal to us, okay, so therefore, in Malta, they would be away from the front line, but at the same time, they are offering some kind of defense in case of an attack against Malta. Very strange, I don't know about the history of the British Army in recruiting non-British citizens, which is, yeah, as you're saying, which is quite strange, to

be honest, but fighting and having a lot of injuries, having a lot of, I mean, the mortality rate would have been high in all these wars going on. So therefore, yes, they would need to see how to, you know, fill up the ranks with even other people if they are going to be paid.

Stephen: Because they, that's why they were angry, they were promised to be paid highly by Count Froberg as whatever. Anyways, it's quite a, the whole story is just so crazy and strange to me.

Vincent: Yes, yes, it is. It is.

Stephen: And I guess it's a mistake they would not have made again, recruiting such, this type of regiment, and this is very early on in, in the British history in Malta.

Vincent: Yes, I don't think that we ever had anything like that again.

Stephen: No.

Vincent: I don't think that there was any anything like that. I mean, there were the Scottish regiments and the Welsh regiments as well, but...

Stephen: These are considered British.

Vincent: Basically, basically they are British.

Stephen: Do you know anything about any actual impacts that were felt by the mutiny afterwards, or would it have just been something forgotten? Moved on?

Vincent: Probably, probably it affected the Maltese by saying the British when they want to show you know their hand, they were not going to step back. And how shall I say, punishments had to be given. So I think that was also, also, I wouldn't know, you know, but who knows whether that was also part of the tactics by the British to show the Maltese that they were here to stay and don't try to, to rebel against us. If I'm not mistaken, correct me, it was before Malta was actually given to the British.

Stephen: It was a, still a protectorate, 1807.

Vincent: So therefore, so therefore they were supposed to be, you know, not sure of their stay in Malta. So, yeah, let's make it a point that we are here to stay and if anyone wants to say anything, pay attention. Who knows? Who knows?

Stephen: It's a strange one. It's a really fascinating story to me. So, yeah, I like that one. All right, we'll go, continue on to Second World War. So, what role did Fort Ricasoli play during the Second World War, and how did this period influence its current state of preservation? Since you know, it was damaged.

Vincent: One has got to keep in mind that the main aerial attacks, aerial bombardments by the Axis, were concentrated on the harbour area, because all supplies were coming by sea, whether we're talking of ammunition, aviation fuel, whether we're talking of food, whether we're talking of even airplanes, all right, anything was being sent by ship. So therefore, the Axis would have concentrated their aerial attacks on the harbour area. In actual fact, right, Senglea was practically obliterated. It is believed that more than 75% of Senglea was destroyed. Birgu lost as well, and even Valletta. But you needed to defend the area. So, it wasn't only just the dockyard, where they put up a number of anti-aircraft guns inside in the immediate area of the dockyard, but also on the fortifications like Fort Sant Angelo, Fort St Elmo, and obviously Fort Ricasoli. They needed to make sure that the airplane coming in to attack the dockyard, they would be met with a lot of gun power. Okay, they were also very instrumental during the Battle of the Grand Harbour, when a number of E-boats tried to enter the Harbour, it wasn't just...

Stephen: Is this the Italian attack?

Vincent: The Italian, the Italian E-boat. It wasn't just the Fort St Elmo that, that opened up fire, but even Fort Ricasoli, right, because they were both of them together with Fort St Elmo, Fort Ricasoli was the guardian of the entrance of the harbour. So, it was said what, it played a very, very important role. Quite obviously, it was going to be damaged as well, right? And the damage, it's such a large force, a fort, sorry. It's such a large fort. And why wouldn't they start restoring it immediately, like what they did with Fort St Angelo. The fact is that after the war, although Britain was on the winning side, it had lost. It had lost its prime position as a superpower. Besides that, it was practically bankrupt. It had, it had borrowed millions and billions of money from America, if I'm not mistaken, all that the debt has been paid in full now only a few years ago. All right, so just imagine, just imagine, are they going to spend the money on an old fortification? At the end of the day we're talking of an old fortification. The only importance is that I have rearranged it to have my own modern guns. But they didn't do anything else over there. So therefore, they just few years later, they just abandoned the fort, right? And besides that, there was

damage also by the sea action. So, the site facing, facing the sea, outside the harbour. It's, um, it's falling. It's falling down.

Stephen: There's a sinkhole even, yeah.

Vincent: Yes, yes, you know. So therefore, yeah, it was abandoned. Literally, it was abandoned up there. Yeah, it served its purpose. And yeah now, thank you very much now you can have it.

Stephen: They didn't even bother rebuilding the governor's house that's by the main gate, still in ruins.

Vincent: Exactly, exactly, exactly.

Stephen: So, I think that's, that's pretty representative of how much they cared.

Vincent: Oh, yes, of course, of course, of course. I mean, they only restored Fort St Angelo because that was the headquarters of the Navy. I mean they restored it immediately.

Stephen: Yeah. There was a torpedo station at Ricasoli if I'm not mistaken which, right? Or a torpedo station. I read that.

Vincent: To be honest, I don't know.

Stephen: Okay, okay, I just wanted to know if maybe you knew something. All right. Now the last few questions are more related to yeah, preservation and its current use today. So what, yeah, what role do historians play in advocating for the preservation of Fort Ricasoli? Are there ongoing research or initiatives to document its history in detail? And I'm asking this because it, it just seems like Fort Ricasoli never really brought up as much as you know the other forts today, a lot of them have, host museums. Ricasoli is an industrial workspace. So, yeah.

Vincent: I remember it. I remember it being used as a container depot.

Stephen: It's still used as, that way, a tank cleaning or tank cleaning facilities actually, it's still being used there.

Vincent: Cleaning, it's on the outside sort of.

Stephen: Yeah, the outside, and then into the ditch.

Vincent: That's right. I remember, I remember containers being kept inside the fort in the parade ground.

Stephen: Okay, okay, yeah.

Vincent: So therefore you, you can imagine that, yeah, it's a large fort, there is a large open space, so let's make you good use of it for what? For whatever? I, I heard rumors that the government wanted to give it to Heritage Malta, right, just like what they did with Fort St Elmo and Fort St Angelo and other places. Heritage Malta doesn't want it for the simple reason, because, if this, is, these are rumors that I heard, right? It's not the official information, but I can understand if this happened. I mean, okay, if I would be Heritage Malta, I would say, okay, I can have it. But listen, this probably needs X millions. Are you going to give them to me in order to start restoring, rebuilding, and actually making it, you know, a cultural centre? And if the central government says, no, we don't have that kind of millions, all right, for the restoration of the fort, so therefore I Heritage Malta would tell them thank you very much, you can keep it. Which I do understand. I do understand. I mean, if I would be the head of Heritage Malta, and I would be faced with something like that, that is what I would do. Because, I mean, as you know, probably you have entered inside.

Stephen: Today.

Vincent: Yeah. So, so, so, you know, so you know how I mean, how debilitated it is, the buildings.

Stephen: There, it is definitely but since 2019 there is an ongoing restoration project. However, they've only done minor restorations in certain areas of the fort. So, it seems like it's going at a very slow pace.

Vincent: Yes, definitely.

Stephen: I think, I don't know if this is, I guess this is must be being carried out by the government, because obviously it's the Malta Film Commission today that is technically in charge of the fort.

Vincent: In terms of the fort, yeah. So it could be, it could be some, some, some money being spent by the Malta Film Commission. I mean, at least if they are making good use of it, why not do something for the better preservation of the fort, which is only fair at the end of the day.

Stephen: It seems like yeah, because the two main people writing about Fort Ricasoli are Quintano and Stephen Spiteri, which is the bulk of information you can find on, on the fort. So, are, I mean, is there any other writers interested in writing, researching, and, you know, documenting stories behind it? Or, yeah...

Vincent: Not that I know of, to be honest, not that I know of. I mean, there would have been early on, before both Anton Quintano and Stephe Spiteri, there was Quentin Hughes.

Stephen: What's the name? Oh, Quentin Hughes! Yes, yes.

Vincent: Quentin, Quentin Hughes, okay, but he would have concentrated mainly on the British period, right? But basically, Spiteri and Stephen and Anton, those are, those are, those are the best sort of historians that you have, all the information, practically, that you need.

Stephen: Most of my, 90% of my sources for my literature review, were from them, basically.

Vincent: Yes, of course.

Stephen: The books you can find in the library. Okay, so I've, we mentioned, we've mentioned the Malta Film Commission. So how do you, how do you view the use of Fort Ricasoli as a filming location? Does this modern adaptation align with preserving its historical and cultural value, or does it risk overshadowing its heritage?

Vincent: So, some years back, a couple of years back, there was an open day, or an open weekend to see the film set.

Stephen: *Gladiator II*. Yeah, yeah, it was a year ago, almost to the day, yes.

Vincent: To, to see the film set. Okay, that's good. That's good because one knows that the film set will be pulled down because there would be the need for another film set and so on and so forth. But I am I don't know all the details. I don't know whether there are clauses with the filming companies that part of their expense should be also for a fund to restore the fort. I mean, if I am going to keep on using it as a backdrop for films, all kind of films, at least, at least, let us restore parts of it. And let's face it, I don't know whether you went to the very end of the fort, you have a different view of Valletta from there.

Stephen: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Vincent: So therefore, just imagine having at least part of the fort made accessible, being safe and open to the public, even if they are filming. I mean, they should have, you know, a section from the main entrance, the church, and then there is a passage behind the church, which is behind the actual barracks. And, you know, one can easily walk to the very end and at least have an idea of the size of the fort. Because people, even if I go inside, when there is a film set, I cannot really visualize the fort, because there is a lot of other things to attract my attention, rather than to actually look at the fort, I will be looking at the film set. And people were, went there to set the film set, set not the fort. They don't care about the fort, to be honest. Okay, so is it, is it helping in the better preservation? I don't think so. I don't think so. I think even if they want to keep on using it, because, yeah, why not, as long as they don't do further damage to the actual fort. But at least, let us also try to invest some money in the restoration of the fort bit by bit, otherwise.

Stephen: Which they seem to be doing in the last five years, to be fair.

Vincent: That's good, at least. That's good.

Stephen: I've seen the restoration. There's a part of, I think they were the Knights barracks, which were built in the outer walls. They completely collapsed in a storm 2020, and they've completely reconstructed it. So, that's the largest area that they've restored, and it's quite noticeable, because it's all completely fresh stone, like it's brand new, basically.

Vincent: This is, this is, this is the problem in Malta all over, not just for this case, it's the lack of proper information to the public. Personally, I've never heard that they were restoring Fort St Angelo, Fort Ricasoli. So why shouldn't you, as the entity that you are restoring the, why shouldn't you inform the general public? So therefore, if you don't inform me, what I'm going to say is, as I've said a few moments ago, that they should start restoring it. But in actual fact, they are restoring it, right? So therefore, so therefore the lack of information, the lack of proper PR, you know, with the general public, it's, it's, it's endemic in Malta. It's endemic in Malta. And therefore you have rumors, you have bad information, you know, yeah, you know the situation.

Stephen: Yes, yes, yeah. It seems that's why, it's because I'm, it seems like it's a site that's quite under appreciated, generally for its heritage, at least because, yeah, the attention is all towards its film, which

I'm, I'm very interested in film, so that excites me. But I'm also interested in its, you know, its historical aspect, which is, I mean, it's the whole basis of my paper, you know, at the end of the day.

Vincent: Yes, yes, definitely.

Stephen: All right, should we go to the last question then? What more can be done to, I mean it's related to what we've just spoken about, what more can be done to engage the Maltese public and international audiences with the history of Fort Ricasoli? So international audience, meaning tourists. Are there ways to integrate its historical narrative into Malta's broader cultural and educational initiatives? So, education, meaning down to schools, you know, university and even education related, regarding tourist guides, yeah.

Vincent: Yeah, why not, why not for example, once every so often, not you know, every Monday, every Saturday, not every week you know, every you know, three months, sort of an open day, yeah? With reenactments, historical reenactments, part of the room, part of the buildings, you know, and a video, a PowerPoint presentation, call it whatever you want. With regards to history of the fort and people... I have been involved for now, for a number of years, with, with Fort Manoel. Fort Manoel, they, they organize open days, right whenever there are no functions, sometimes they use, you know, filming, so therefore they are going to take it for over three months, six months, all right? Because, in fact, it has been, I think, eight months since they, um, they had an open an open week, an open not week, an open Sunday, right? An open day on a Sunday. And because usually I go there and I do tours inside the fort, all right? And there will be a historical reenactment of different groups. And therefore, the fort will come alive. You cannot imagine the number of people, hundreds, no, thousands, of people that visited the fort, because it's always closed. So therefore, the same thing can happen in for Fort Ricasoli, all right. It's free of charge. People can come in, enjoy themselves. There would be obviously security in order to make sure that they will keep off the the zones which are dangerous, right and but I am sure that people will flock to visit Fort Ricasoli, without, without the, obviously, without the the film you know, film sets.

Stephen: Is this, this, with these open days at Fort Manoel, are they, are they run by Heritage Malta?

Vincent: No, no, they are run by MIDI. Who is, MIDI, which, which owns Manoel Island, and they were the ones who...

Stephen: MIDI? I don't think I

Vincent: MIDI, M-I-D-I.

Stephen: Okay. What is MIDI?

Vincent: Manoel Island Development whatever. M-I-D-I.

Stephen: Okay, okay, all right.

Vincent: They are, they are also the ones who developed Tigne, Tigne Point.

Stephen: Yeah, Tigne Point. I mean, this is a, I think, you know, it's an interesting idea. Maybe, maybe it could be something, a collaboration with Heritage Malta and the Film Commission, where they work together for these open days at Ricasoli.

Vincent: Some years back, some years back in Fort Ricasoli, there was a documentary, I mean, part of a series of documentaries on History Channel, which was filmed entirely inside Fort Ricasoli. That was about the Great Siege, or whatever, *Warriors, Warriors*, if I'm not mistaken, right. I think you'll find it on, on YouTube.

Stephen: So, it was a History Channel, like the American, I think the American History Channel, that one with the H?

Vincent: That's right, that's right. And, I mean, I, I know, because I was, I was, I was involved, I was interviewed, and so on and so forth. So, yeah, and, you know, something like that, which is going to display certain parts, right? I mean, the documentary was on a particular subject, but just imagine if the fort is made available, so therefore, yeah, we've got the church without the paintings. Even, even the church in Fort Manoel doesn't have the original painting, but it has a picture, a painting, a photo. Nowadays you can do a photo, a big photo, you know, and there will be the history of it, you know. There is the crypt besides them, beneath the church. And so many things can be, can be organized. So many things can be organized, similar to what happens in Fort Manoel.

Stephen: The idea of the you mentioned, the idea of the passageway from the entrance to the tip, facing the Grand Harbour. But the, the only thing I would challenge with that is, I just because, even during the production of films, knowing the you know, production teams, they wouldn't be happy security-wise,

having people walking, even if it's in a covered passageway, they would say it poses a threat. You know, W we have, you know, there's spoilers, not spoilers, but you know, secrets obviously related to their film production.

Vincent: Yes, yes, yes, definitely.

Stephen: I feel like people would take advantage of this passageway and try to sneak and see something.

Vincent: And trusting the Maltese, they would try to do it, definitely. Knowing the Maltese!

Stephen: So, the idea of the open day makes more sense to me whenever there's no filming, you know, three times a year, four times a year, they open it and focus on... I don't see why they can't, it can be a combination of focusing on its history and also its use for filming. They're both interesting topics that I think blend together.

Vincent: Why not? Why not? Why not? Why not? Why not? Which is makes, it makes, I mean, I am sure that it will attract, you know, a wider crowd, those who are interested in the history, those who are interested in the film.

Stephen: Because I do think, at the end of the day, it's the fact that it's used by the Malta Film Commission is, I think, important for the Maltese economy. The, you know, film productions are attracting a new niche in tourism.

Vincent: No doubt, no doubt.

Stephen: And obviously, you know, whenever a production is happening, there's all kinds of money being injected into, you know, businesses and so on, who work with the productions. So, I think, I think it should stay this way, but I would like to see some sort of initiative towards focusing on its cultural side, because it's Malta's largest fort. I would think that's a big deal! It's a landmark for the country!

Vincent: Yes, of course. And its preservation, the necessity to preserve it because otherwise it will continue to fall into the sea. That part, it's...

Stephen: On the side, it's pretty bad. Some areas near the entrance is quite bad. There's quite literally a sinkhole.

Vincent: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Stephen: Yes, is it, this is something I want to know if you know, if you know anything about this, because I was trying to find statistics about fort sizes across Europe, because I've read in places that it's either the largest fort in Europe or it has the largest parading ground in Europe. Do you know anything about this being true? I mean, I know, at least in Malta...

Vincent: I would never go into that, you know, but it is the largest parade ground. It's the largest fort that we have in Malta that's definite, that's definite.

Stephen: It's probably amongst the top, maybe, let's say, 50 in Europe. That's right. There's obviously thousands of forts probably in Europe.

Vincent: Oh yes, oh yes, definitely.

Stephen: Okay, yeah...

Vincent: I mean, it gives it, it gives it, its size for the simple reason that it's, it's, it's elongated. I mean, some other forts would be wide rather than long, and therefore that's why the parade ground is what it is.

Stephen: Yeah, it's very big. So, I've asked you all my questions. Is there anything that you might want to add before we conclude? No?

Vincent: If you, if you, if you think of something else yourself, ask me tomorrow as well.

Stephen: No, I think we've covered some good ground. Yeah, I don't think I have anything else to ask you then, so I'll just I'll wrap up the, we can wrap up the interview. Thank you for giving me your time.

Vincent: Pleasure, pleasure.

Stephen: And yeah, we'll, goodbye!

Vincent: See you tomorrow!

Stephen: Yeah, see you tomorrow actually, yes!

Interview Answers – Kenneth Cauchi: Head of Built Heritage Monitoring for the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage

1. How do the responsibilities of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage differ from those of Heritage Malta, the Lands Authority and the Planning Authority?

The SCH is the State's regulator on cultural heritage and given the mission to ensure the protection and accessibility of cultural heritage. The Cultural Heritage Act establishes the functions of the Superintendence.

Heritage Malta is the operating agency that takes care of the national collection of heritage objects (antiquities, art, etc...) as well as managing the main historic sites that are under state control.

Amongst its responsibilities, the SCH provides official advice to the Planning Authority on all development applications that may have an impact on cultural heritage. It also provides a similar role to Transport Malta on all roadworks that may have an impact on cultural heritage. The SCH monitors all development (i.e. post-permit) that involves restoration of heritage buildings, new interventions/construction that may affect heritage buildings and all excavation works in archaeological sensitive areas.

Lands Authority is the State manager of publicly owned property. The SCH also provides technical support to Lands Authority when requested regarding such property that has a heritage value.

2. How does the Superintendence ensure that Fort Ricasoli is adequately protected during activities related to its use as a film set?

All filming activities at Fort Ricasoli that require new sets or props require a planning permit which is only granted following clearance from the SCH. The SCH monitors the construction and decommissioning of any sets within the fort periodically to make sure that there is no added impact on the place.

3. How does the Superintendence enforce any guidelines that it sets out for film productions?

Primarily through discussion. SCH can fine infringements, stop any works or even in certain cases prosecute at court (although there was never the need in regards to filming).

4. How does the Superintendence document changes or impacts to Fort Ricasoli over time, particularly during or after filming projects?

Mainly look-see surveys and photographic records.

5. Given the fort's age and exposure to environmental factors, what specific measures are being implemented to address its degradation, particularly along its sea-facing walls?

The Superintendence is collaborating with Infrastructure Malta on plans to introduce wave-calming measures to reduce impact on the north-easterly exposed fortification walls which may permit reconstruction in the future.

6. What is the Superintendence's involvement with promoting public accessibility to Fort Ricasoli as a site of historical importance? Does the Superintendence collaborate with the Malta Film Commission or other entities during events such as open days?

The SCH is not directly involved in promoting public accessibility of the fort but it always advocates to render the site public as safely as possible when the opportunity arise.

7. What is the Superintendence's long-term vision for Fort Ricasoli? Are there plans to secure more funding or resources to enhance its preservation and ensure that it remains a significant cultural and historical site in Malta?

The long-term vision is to secure the physical integrity of the site, to eliminate further loss of the heritage fabric, the potential to reconstruct lost elements, to demolish accretions and unsympathetic additions if the right opportunity arise.

Consent Form



Name and Surname of Researcher: Stephen Grech

ID number of researcher: 0430101L

Email address of researcher: Stephen.grech.23@its.edu.mt

Mobile number of researcher: +356 77118609

Course: Higher National Diploma in Tourist Guiding

Tutor name and surname: Tara Darmanin

Tutor office telephone number: +356 99466871

Title of the Long essay/Dissertation: The Backstory to the Backlot: Where History Meets Hollywood at Fort Ricasoli

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Stephen Grech, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my Higher National Diploma, I am carrying out research on the above-mentioned title.

I had already sent you the information letter about my research and you had provided me with a signed information letter. If you have any further questions for clarification, please do not hesitate to ask me.

By signing this consent form, you are giving me your consent to use the data collected through the interview for the analysis of the results. I will send you a list of questions before the interview so you can prepare yourself beforehand. The questions asked will be about The Malta Film Commission and Fort Ricasoli.



The information collected will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. You have the choice to

ask for all references made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study to be withdrawn. In the case of remaining anonymous, your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. Participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer individual questions if you do not want to. Kindly, contact me if you have any queries or require any further clarification.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the researcher the opportunity to carry out the research at my **institution or company**. I hereby grant them permission to use the information provided as data in the above-mentioned research project, knowing that I have the choice to ask for it to be kept confidential and anonymous.

<u>JEAN PIERRE BOPE</u> Participant's Name	<u></u> Participant's Signature	<u>05.12.24</u> Date
<u>Stephen Grech</u> Researcher's Name	<u></u> Researcher's Signature	<u>02/12/2024</u> Date

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Kenneth Audi
Participant's Name


Participant's Signature

27th January 2025.
Date

Stephen Grech
Researcher's Name


Researcher's Signature

27/01/2025
Date

90-minute Long Essay Tour Itinerary

Fort Ricasoli

Introduction – Entrance

Stop 1 – Polverista

Stop 2 – Sink Hole Set

Stop 3 – Gunpost Tower

Stop 4 – Artillery facing Valletta

Stop 5 – British Barracks

Stop 6 – St Nicholas Chapel

Stop 7 – Main Gate

Stop 8 – Film Set Room 9

Stop 9 – Film Set Room 5

Stop 10 – Film Set Rooms 1 + 2

Malta Film Studios

Introduction – Entrance

Stop 1 – Film Set/Special Effects Station

Stop 2 – Shallow Water Tank

Stop 3 – Insert Tank

Stop 4 – *Raise the Titanic* (1980) Miniature

Stop 5 – Deep Water Tank

Stop 6 – Quarry