



# A focus on **the History of the Health Inspectorate in Malta**

The strategic location of the Maltese islands within the Mediterranean has been the reason why different civilizations dominated over our native island along the years. But although the Maltese have been through turbulent and calm times under different empires, the need to safeguard the public health was always a priority to most of the dominators of the Maltese Islands.

## First documented evidence

One of the first documented evidence about the set up of an organisation to safeguard the Public Health in Malta is written in the book by Andrew P. Vella 'Storja ta' Malta' (1993), where there is an indication that in the Aragonese period (circa 1283 - 1438), public health officials or 'kattapani' formed part of the administration of the Maltese Islands. They were responsible for

quality of food and for the prices of meat, dairy products and wine, etc.

The book by Charles Savona Ventura "Outlines of Maltese Medical History", published in 1997 states that in 1458, ships which were suspected to be carrying plague infected passengers were quarantined away from other ships in Marsamxett. There were even severe penalties against persons caught trafficking with ships undergoing quarantine.

## Times of the Knights

Since the early years following the arrival of the Order of the Knights of St. John to rule over Maltese Islands, the need for a regulatory body to enforce sanitary rules was felt. They applied to Malta the Code of Health Laws they had already implemented in Rhodes. A health commission was also set up in order to prevent diseases coming from abroad. An enforcement body, the 'Magistri Sanitatis' was set up in 1538.



The Public Health Department's old logo on which there is an indication of the roots of this Department - 'Magistri Sanitatis', 1538

Also, official interest in street hygiene in Malta dates from the sixteenth century. History shows that in 1586, someone who was caught throwing refuse in the streets of Valletta, Senglea and Birgu would have had to pay a fine.

## British times

In the late 19th century, when the British took over the Maltese islands, the Public Health Department was formed. At those times, the army sanitary officer was appointed a member of the civil sanitary commission, which met periodically to deal with matters affecting sanitary welfare of the Maltese Islands.

The Public Health Department (PHD) of the time, had an active role in the examination of goats which carried the microbe causing the Malta Fever (*Brucella melitensis*). Since the then PHD did not have the resources to inspect all goats, it restricted itself in examining the goats in those localities

where the disease had broke. It was also proposed to exclude goats from Valletta and other towns, however this was not enforced since there were only a few cows and the people depended on goats for their milk.

In the same building which until 1998 housed the head office of the Public Health Department, Palazzo Castellania in Merchant Street, Valletta, Dr. Temi Zammit carried his research on the mode of transmission of Brucellosis. The room which served as a laboratory is still there, however not accessible to the general public.



A memorial plaque found at the entrance of Palazzo Castellania, Valletta

(Photo courtesy of Environmental Health Directorate - 2013)

In August of 1907, the Sanitary Branch of the Public Health Department in Malta was divided into districts. Malta was divided into 3 main districts with a medical officer of health in charge of each district. Each district was subdivided into three sections, headed by a First Class Sanitary Inspector with a number of Second and Third Class Sanitary Inspectors under his charge.



The laboratory where Dr. Temi Zammit carried out his research on Brucellosis in Palazzo Castellania, Valletta.

(Photo courtesy of Environmental Health Directorate-2013)

These persons were distributed among sections according to the needs of the locality. First Class Sanitary Inspectors were trained in England and held a Diploma in Sanitation. The duties of a First Class Sanitary Inspector consisted of inspections of new buildings, drainage works, isolation and disinfection of infected persons and premises, taking of samples of food and drink for analysis, general superintendence of food shops and places where food and drinks were prepared, stables, places of amusement and private schools. On Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June 1912, the 'Daily Malta Chronicle' reported that several persons were brought before the Sanitary Branch of the Public Health Department for

various breaches ranging from 2 persons arraigned for selling wine containing colouring matter to other persons fined £10 each for selling cotton oil without the proper labelling.

### Change in Nomenclature

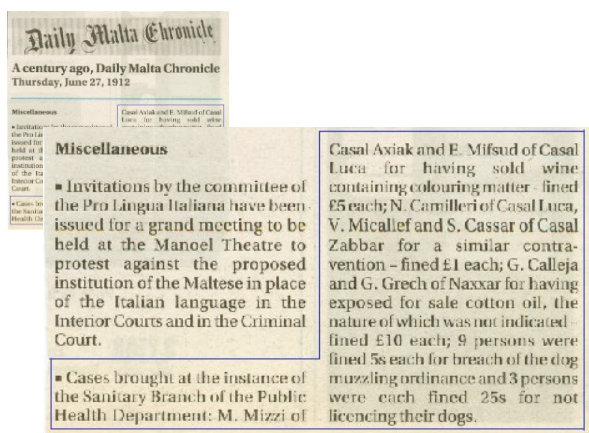
By means of Chapter 153 - Sanitary Inspectors (Change of Designation) Act, of the 12th December 1957, the nomenclature was changed from Sanitary Inspector to Health Inspector. This nomenclature was used until 2003 when it changed again to Environmental Health Officer. The 'Public Health Department' also changed its name to 'Department for Environmental Health' some years ago, to recently again 'Environmental Health Directorate'.

### Sanitary Inspectors mentioned in history

In January 1799, **Matthew Pulis**, a Sanitary Inspector was shot by the French as his 'right of entry' enabled him to transfer information between maltese insurgents inside and outside the walls of Valletta.

The notorious Maltese writer, **Anthony (Ninu) Cremona** was appointed as a Sanitary Inspector in 1904 after attending to a course at the Ashton School of Hygiene at the University of Liverpool.

Years ago the role of a sanitary inspector was taken only by males. Infact the Public Health Department did not see its first female health inspector until 1979.



Cutting from The Times of Malta of the 27th June 2012



A group of Sanitary Inspectors with Dr. Paul Boffa  
Minister of Health and Social Services (1953)  
(Photo courtesy of Dr. John Seychell Navarro)



From left to right: Mr. John Perici Calascione, Mr. Joseph Scicluna,  
Mr. John Attard Kingswell, Mr. Paul Attard, Mr. Joseph Cilia  
(Photo courtesy of Environmental Health Directorate - 2001)

## Heads of the PHD along the time

The head of Public Health Department was for a long period the 'Chief Health Inspector' - a name which subsequently changed to 'Manager Health Inspector'. Through internal research the following Chief / Manager Health Inspectors who served within the PHD was drawn up.

**Mr. Paul Calleja** - Chief Sanitary Inspector (1948-1958)

**Mr. Lawrence Vassallo** (a name mentioned in the 'London Gazette' Supplement of the 1st January, 1944 - <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/36309/supplements/32/page.pdf>)(1958-1960)

**Mr. Anton Grech Scerri** - Chief Health Inspector (1960-1964)

**Mr. John Satariano** - Chief Health Inspector (1964-1970)

**Mr. Albino Cardona** - Chief Health Inspector (1970-1973)

**Mr. Joe Caruana Scicluna** - Chief Health Inspector (1973-1978)

**Mr. Joe Scicluna** - Chief Health Inspector (1978-1980)

**Mr. John Perici Calascione** - Chief Health Inspector (1980-1991)

**Mr. Joe Naudi** - Chief Health Inspector (1991-1991)

**Mr. John F. Grech** - Chief Health Inspector (1991-1992)

**Mr. Paul Attard** - Chief Health Inspector (1992-1994)(nomenclature changed to Manager Health Inspector during this service)

**Mr. Joseph Cilia** - Manager Health Inspector (1994-1999)

**Mr. John Attard Kingswell** - Manager Health Inspector (1999-todate)

As from 1993, the Ministry responsible for Health felt the need to begin appointing a person to act as Director of the PHD. For several years, it was a medical doctor who occupied such a post, but for the last 6 years the post of Director was filled by an Environmental Health Officer.

The Directors of the Public Health Department until 2013 were:

Dr. Andrew Joseph Amato Gauci (1993-1996)  
Dr. Dennis Falzon (acting DPH from 1996-1997)  
Dr. Malcolm P. Micallef (1997-2007)  
Mr. John Attard Kingswell - Director (Environmental Health) (2007 to date).

## Today

Today, there are about 85 Environmental Health Officers working within the Environmental Health Directorate. The grades range from the first posting as Casual Environmental Health Officer to subsequent grades with the highest being the Senior Principal EHO. The Director heads the Environmental Health Directorate whose career began as a Health Inspector. The nomenclature is currently in the process to change further to 'Practitioner'.

Today, the structure of the Health Inspectorate, as opposed to that of some years ago where one could find a Health Inspector in a Health Office in almost every village and town, is nowadays more limited as to the number of offices. In fact as from 2004, the number of health offices was reduced drastically, but the entire population is still reached through 7 main offices and a number of other specialised offices.

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