

## De Vilhena Lion given new lease of life

As part of its restoration programme to secure landmarks for the nation, Din l-Art Helwa will be restoring four important statues in Valletta. The statues to be restored are the De Vilhena Lion in East Street corner with Archbishop Street, the Statue of St James on St Christopher Street, corner with Merchants Street, the statue of Queen Victoria on Piazza Regina, and the Statue of St Roque, situated on the corner between St Ursula Street and St Christopher Street. The restoration of the first statue to undergo restoration is being undertaken with the support of the Central Bank of Malta.

When Valletta was being planned by the Order of the Knights of St John, one of the regulations regarding building was that corners had to be embellished by statues or niches. Many of these are today in a precarious state.



The De Vilhena Lion, so named due to the coat of arms of the Grand Master de Vilhena upon which the lion stands, is a prominent monument celebrating the reign of this Grand

Master. It stands prominently in full majesty on a high stone pedestal between the two streets, guarding a shield upon which is emblazoned the coat of arms of De Vilhena. The lion is also the heraldic emblem of this Grand Master who reigned in Malta between 1722 and 1736. De Vilhena enhanced the island's military defences by building Fort Manoel to protect the exposed flank of the city in Marsamxetto Harbour and he also built the Manoel Theatre, another architectural gem.

The lion statue which commands a magnificent view point over the Grand Harbour has suffered corrosion due to exposure and environmental pollution. The restoration work will be carried out by conservators Ingrid Ross, James Licari and Frank Chetcuti, the latter two experts being conservators at Heritage Malta. Din l-Art Helwa says securing the statues in Valletta is an ambitious task and one that needs to be undertaken on an ongoing basis. The heritage organisation is confident it will find sponsors amongst the local community who will ensure this work progresses and is grateful to the Central Bank of Malta for kick-starting this initiative.

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