

Government promises all necessary studies on underground passages



Photo - DOI, Omar Camilleri

The Resources Ministry is committed to hold all necessary studies to evaluate the importance of the discovery of passages under St George's Square in Valletta.

Minister George Pullicino said during a visit this afternoon that the discovery was made by workers as part of studies linked to the pedestrianisation of the square and the building of a one-storey underground car park.

He said that the government had publicly declared it wanted to ensure that whatever was underneath the square was evaluated before excavation works were embarked upon.

This had to be done even because site plans and archived information gave no indication of what there could be.

Mr Pullicino said that the studies being held included non-invasive testing which consisted of radar screening.

The study also included slightly invasive testing which involved the coring of five four-inch diameter holes.

Invasive testing, which involved the digging of trenches around five metres wide, three metres wide and two metres deep, were also held.

All studies are being held under the supervision of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority and the Superintendance of Cultural Heritage.

The minister referred to a meeting with the non government environmental organisation Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar last Saturday during which it was pointed out that a passage which was about 50 feet long could lead from Archbishop Street to the centre of the square.

He said it was immediately decided to remove the blockage at the end of the passage and hold the necessary studies which led to the discovery of the passages on Tuesday. These were now being investigated in greater detail.

The government was to ensure that these studies were done well and if it was found that this was a discovery of major historical heritage, it would abandon the car park project and focus on the embellishment of the square, aimed at improving Valletta's environment and complementing the facade of the Palace.

Comments

francis falzon (1 day, 23 hours ago)

I totally agree with Joseph R Aquilina comments. It's been an open secret that there is another city underground , not just passages, built by the Knights for security reasons .Now is the time to clean it up and opened to visitors. It will be a major tourist attraction especially on a rainy day. In the 60's and thereafter there was no interest in Malta's Heritage , The Government gave Forts to raise pigs, to store fireworks powder and to train police dogs ! Every town and village has its heritage and each and everyone is important ,no matter where it is. Local Councils should make more pressure to apply for funds to rehabilitate their niches.

I Abela (2 days ago)

Ok....so maybe somebody would be kind enough to explain this to me. I own a pig sty, which was built around 90 years ago, and then converted to a small terraced house after the war. The wall is crumbling, humidity is close to 100% inside. Since it was a pig sty there are no architectural features worth preserving inside. And yet, I can't demolish this house to build a new one instead, just because it is in the village core. So one might ask since I can't demolish my OWN, PERSONAL, PRIVATE PROPERTY, NO PUBLIC ACCESS, COMPLETELY PAID-FOR, property, then how can someone even contemplate the idea of destroying part of a PUBLIC property, OF IMMENSE ARCHITECTURAL VALUE, of SUCH NATIONAL IMPORTANCE, just to build a car park !!! Where is the logic here ??

Nicholas Simmons (2 days, 1 hour ago)

@Maria Zammit Please don't run away with the idea that Sir Walter Scott was referring to the Maltese when he reputedly said of Valletta,"A City built by Gentlemen for Gentlemen".

Marcel Dingli (2 days, 1 hour ago)

@ Maria Zammit. How do you expect some people to make more money ??

Joseph R Aquilina (2 days, 2 hours ago)

That is good news indeed from Minister Pullicino, who could perhaps start with an EU funded ground radar plotting study. I remember from my first days in the civil service in the late 60's that Department of Public Works had a rich Drawings archive, which had several detailed plans of underground Valletta. A newly born nationalistic feeling at the time also resulted in the Public Works Department, working in liaison with well known researchers from the Public Library Department, (who had several volumes on the subject from the time of the Knights) and co-ordinating with then public utility services, Water Works Department, Electricity, Drainage and Sanitation, etc who all liaised with the Planning Area Permits Board (or one of its precursors) to build up a knowledge bank of underground Valletta. I remember one day, sometime in 1968, in my capacity as Secretary of the Traffic Control Board being taken by a Drainage and Sanitation foreman on an underground tour of Valletta, as part of a study re the introduction of underground parking in Valletta. Sadly the Civil Service, broken up into independent Authorities, has lost its collective memory. But hopefully these documents can still be found safely archived somewhere.

maria Zammit (2 days, 2 hours ago)

Car park project? Another one? No. No. Valletta is supposed to be our Capital city built by gentlemen for gentlemen not for cars! Let's study Valletta beneath the road surface and open it for public viewing!
