

The langue of England on Vittoriosa

Sir, I would like to tell you about something that suddenly made me sit up as I read the article “The Langue of England in Vittoriosa” by Lorenzo Zahra in the Easter 2004 issue of *Treasures of Malta*. It’s a family matter that sadly reflects the attitudes of its time.

The passage I refer to is on page 47 and reads as follows: *“In 1903 the bastion comprising the Post of England was almost completely demolished, ironically, by the British authorities. The rubble was used for works on the breakwater arm at the mouth of the Grand Harbour which was under construction at the time and when completed in 1906 was inaugurated by King Edward VII. In the process the ancient underground Galley Slave Prison was obliterated when the site was excavated and converted into a tennis court! It is now part of a development project.”*

Well, I am pretty certain that the Philistine who pillaged this historical site and converted it into a tennis court was my grandfather, Sir Henry Pilkington. The dates match, and I’ve always understood that his engineering feats around the world included a breakwater in the Valletta harbour; but the family seems to have taken little interest in keeping records, letters, etc. (my mother only remembered the crates of Malta oranges he used to have sent home). And when in Malta myself I never got round to investigating the archives.

I feel the author of the article has been extremely restrained to end with just one exclamation mark. I am curious about the “development project” he mentions as under way now, but certainly it will be far more worthy of the site — times thankfully having changed so very much for the better.

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