

ROYAL NAVAL HOSPITAL

SELF-LED

HISTORY TOUR

Welcome! I am Amelia-Mae Josephine Watson but around here they just call me **'Nurse Watson'**. This, here, is my domain, where I spend most of my days, whether by day or by night. You see, I live just round the corner in the Matron's Quarters and I also work here, assigned to the Zymotic Block.

Although I am British, I was brought to Malta as a young girl and my father instilled in me a passion for history, so please, do allow me to be your guide today to explore these grounds together. Follow me...



GOVERNMENT OF
MALTA

MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION,
SPORT, YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION



PERSONALITIES & CURIOSITIES



Florence Nightingale

When Malta was referred to as 'the nurse of the Mediterranean', Florence Nightingale, an English lady who founded modern nursing through training and managing nurses caring for the wounded soldiers during the Crimean War, sailed through the Grand Harbour. While her peers enjoyed sightseeing in Valletta, Nightingale was allegedly seasick, confined onboard her vessel, throughout its berthing in Malta.



Napoleon Bonaparte

According to local gossip, it is believed that the French general Napoleon Bonaparte resided in Villa Bigli during his few days visit to Malta in June of 1798.



Sir Alexander Ball

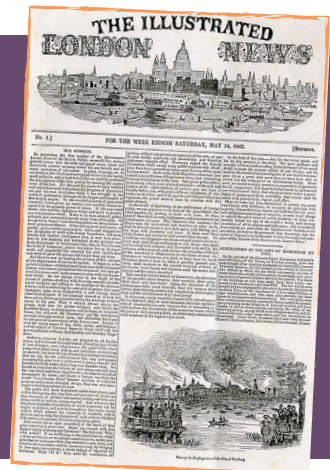
It was Sir Alexander Ball who distorted the official surname of ‘Bichi’, through one of his documents, after which, it was pronounced as ‘Bighi’.

Fra Mario Bichi

Fra Mario Bichi also lived in Messina Palace in Valletta in the early 1700s, nowadays known as the German-Maltese Circle.

Prince Alfred

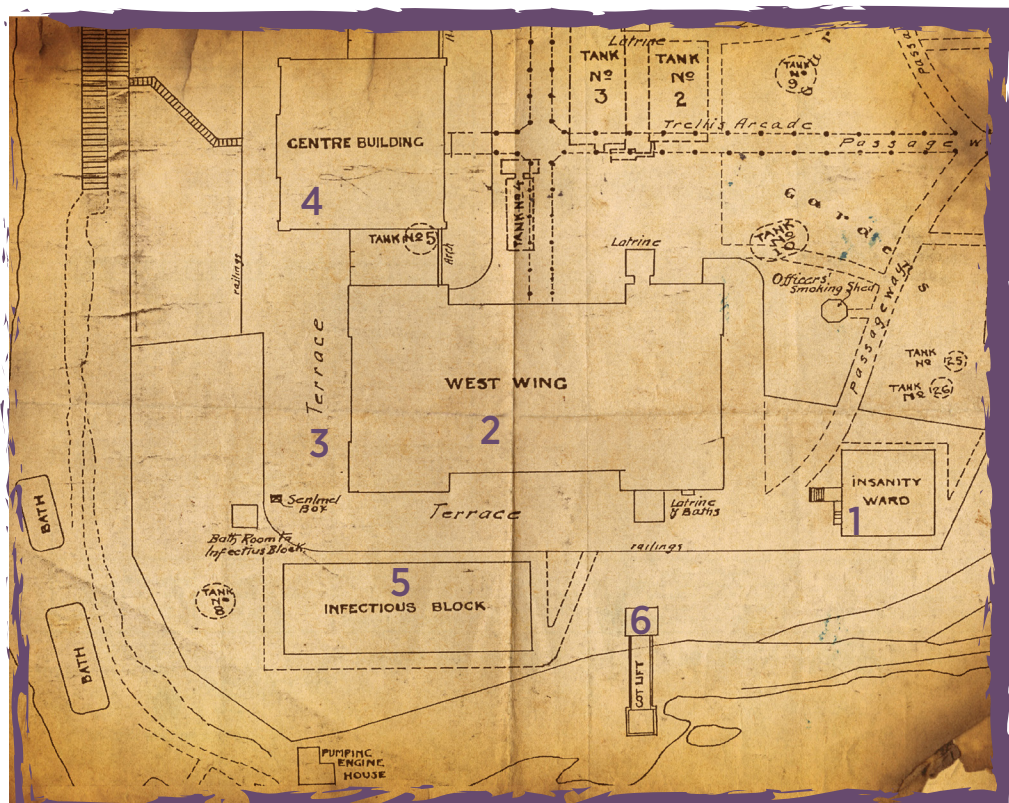
Prince Alfred, Queen Victoria’s son, fell ill with Typhoid Fever in 1863 whilst serving as an officer in the Royal Navy. He was looked after for around a month in this hospital until he recovered. This account was published in an article in *The Illustrated London News* of April 11th 1863, recounting in detail how the prince was quartered as well as the layout of the hospital.



OLD MAP

WEST WING

BIGHI HOSPITAL CONTRIBUTED TO THE NURSING AND MEDICAL CARE OF CASUALTIES WHENEVER HOSTILITIES OCCURRED IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, MAKING MALTA "THE NURSE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN". DURING THE CRIMEAN WAR, IT NURSED CASUALTIES WHILE UNDER THE DIRECTORSHIP OF DR. JOHN LIDDELL. DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR, IT ACCOMMODATED A PROFUSE NUMBER OF CASUALTIES FROM THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN, ALSO KNOWN AS THE BATTLE OF GALLIPOLI.



Did you know?

In 1829 four Egyptian limestone stelae, predating the Phoenician period in Malta, were found on site by British archaeologists.

Phoenician remains bearing inscriptions were also found and they are now displayed at the British Museum.

1

The Insanity Ward

The mentally-challenged patients suffering trauma from their war nightmares were placed in this section of the hospital which was isolated from the other blocks. There are several morbid stories related to this ward, including the murder of a nurse who was strangled by a patient.



Did you know?

This is a photo of the doors inside the insanity ward. Even though it's not accessible to the public, the yellow-painted wooden doors are still intact today.



2

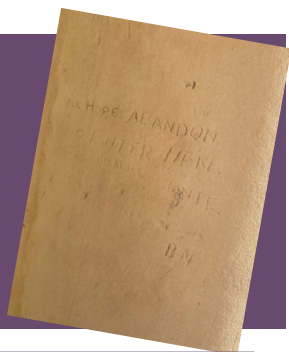


The Surgical Ward

This block, which houses the inner exhibits of the science centre, was formerly the General Hospital Block, also known as the Surgical Ward. Several fireplaces can still be found throughout the halls, which reflects the British culture ensuring warmth during the Winter months, while the edges on the ground are curved, to avoid any dust gathering, maintaining top sanitary conditions at all time. This building was completed by 1901.

Did you know?

On the upper storey, over the terrace that served as an 'al fresco' extension ward at times, there are several inscribed graffiti from the period. See if you can spot a quote from Dante's *Inferno*.



Shrapnel Damage

During WW2 Malta was severely hit by the enemy through aerial attacks, forever leaving their marks on the limestone all round the Harbour Area which withstood the most raids, suffering disastrous and permanent damage. A number of its buildings were damaged or destroyed, including the X-ray theatre, the East and West Wings, the Villa and the Cot Lift from the Bighi Jetty to the Hospital.

3



4

The Villa

This 17th century building was designed by the prominent contemporary architect Lorenzo Gafa of Vittoriosa. The building, originally called *Palazzo Salvatore*, was initiated around 1675 as a private Summer residence for the Italian Knight and Prior of Capua Fra Giovanni Bichi, who happened to be the nephew of Pope Alexander VII. The plague, which dominated the islands in 1676 took his life before he could enjoy the fruits of his labour. It is believed he was buried in the nearby chapel of Our Saviour, which he built himself also on designs of Gafa'. The chapel is located at the tip of the San Salvatore Peninsula, and was built in 1651, a couple of decades before the villa. His nephew Fra Mario Bichi, also a Knight of St. John, was the first to enjoy the residence's splendid views and surrounding gardens over Salvatore Hill, while having added a staircase to facilitate access to guests coming directly from their ship onto his residence. After his demise, the villa was acquired by Bailiff Fra Giovanni Sigismondo Count of Schaesberg, until 1718, after which it was occupied by another Bichi, the nephew of Mario, also a Knight by the name of Fra Giovanni Bichi, faithful to his ancestor. By the time of his death in 1740, the estate had become known as *Villa Bichi*.



5

The Zymotic Block The activity centre on two floors was the Infectious Diseases Unit, built in 1903. The architecture on the East and West wings is typically Doric, with columns on the façade and high ceilings.

6

The Cot Lift

This lift was the second mechanically-operated lift to be installed in Malta, following that of the Upper Barracca Gardens. Inside the Cot Lift, which was used by staff and patients to access the hospital from the seaside level, one can find artefacts that date back to the RNH's operational days, as well as interesting information related to the technology applied in those days, such as the first use of surgical anaesthetic in Malta.



Did you know?

If you look down from here you can see igloo-like structures which were used for thalasso-therapy to treat the patients with sea water.



FROM A HOSPITAL

TO A SCIENCE CENTRE

Following a major transformation supported by an EU-funded project to promote and invest in science and technology, in 2016, this once derelict site opened its doors once again, inviting visitors from all over the world to experience an interactive approach to Science with over 200 hands-on exhibits. Set on a high promontory, Esplora and its surrounding gardens provide an idyllic event location with extensive views of the Grand Harbour.

The original villa built by **Fra Giovanni Bichi** now serves as premises for the Malta Council for Science and Technology specialising in **Research, Space Education Programmes, Covid-19 R&D Funds, Innovation Strategy, R&I Platforms and much more**. MCST acts for, and on behalf of, the Foundation for Science and Technology (public body established by the central government in 1988 with the mandate of advising government on science and technology policy).



www.esplora.org.mt

ESPLORA | Interactive Science Centre
Villa Bighi, Kalkara KKR 1320 - Malta

The Planetarium Building was thought to be hit by a bomb during the Second World War. Recent studies have shown that the building was still intact during the war. It collapsed during the time the building was abandoned.



Esplora Interactive Science Centre was part-financed by ERDF
Esplora was declared to be an Emblematic Project by the EU Commission

