

The ANZAC experience in Malta



The *ANZAC experience in Malta* is a set of four self-guided tours to the principal sites associated with the personnel of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) during, mainly, the First World War.

These tours will show you where wounded Anzacs were hospitalised, convalesced, were entertained, and the locations where those who lost their personal battles are buried.

Tours may be followed in one of two ways: circularly, ending where they begin, or in a linear fashion. The walking man (♣) and car (🚗) pictograms denote travel directions on foot or by car, whilst the reading man (📖) indicates information about the locale and provides historical insights. A map is recommended for car tours, otherwise one is not necessary.

The tours also highlight points of interest on the islands – places where recovering servicemen and off duty personnel may have visited, and so can you.

Tour 2 - Healing

Sliema, St Julian's and Pembroke

Mode: Linear, on foot and car
Start: Flying bridge, The Point, Sliema

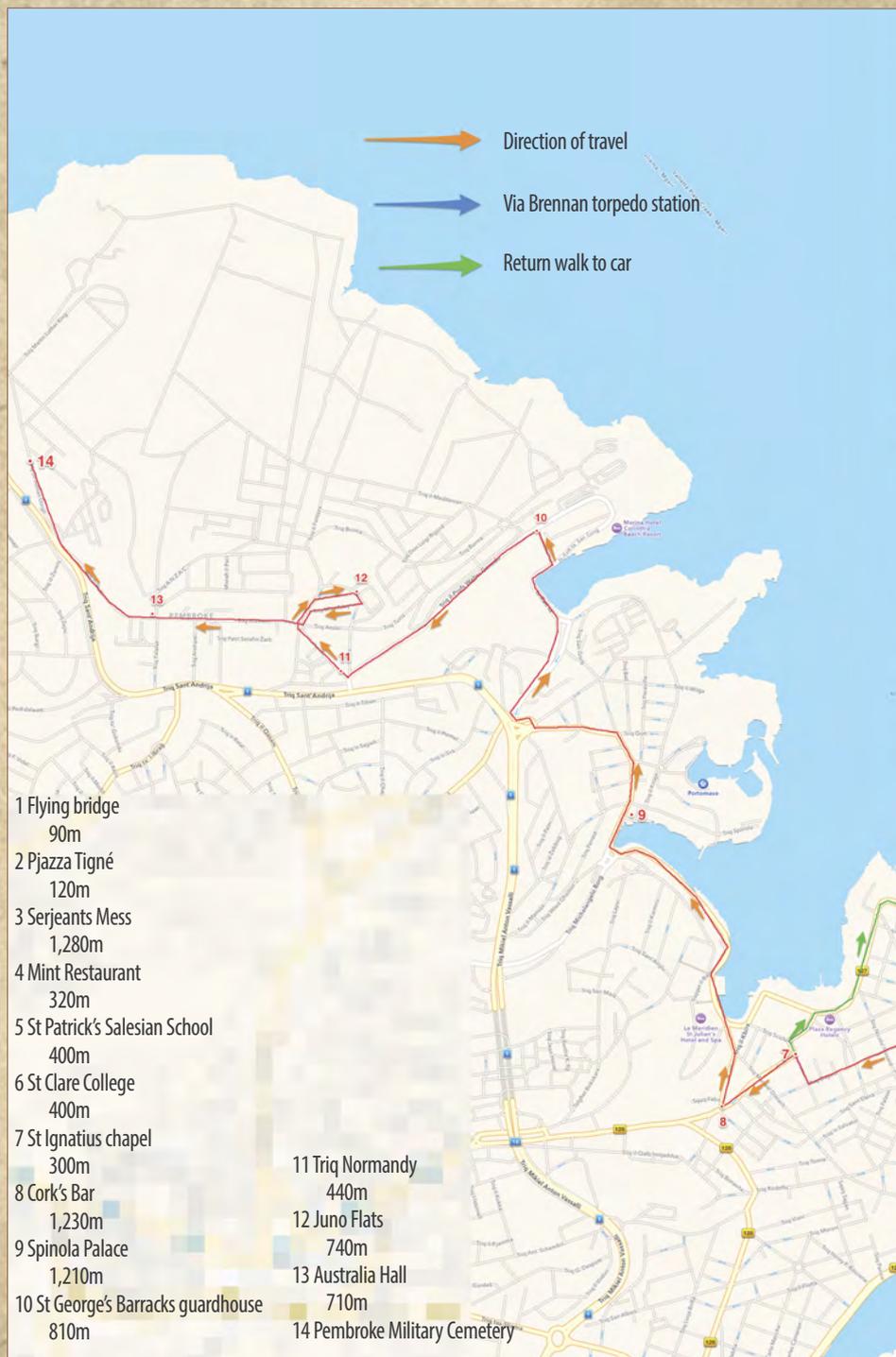
Distance: 8kms

Duration: approx 2hrs on foot for the first section of the tour plus another 1.5hrs by car for St Julian's and Pembroke

The starting point is the flying bridge at *The Point* in Sliema, overlooking Marsamxett Harbour.



The starting point for the tour is the flying bridge overlooking Marsamxett Harbour





A hospital ship (far left) moored in Marsamxett Harbour. There were 494 visits by hospital ships between 1915 and 1919 - an average of three a week

If you have a car, yet plan to walk the first part of the tour you'll find parking facilities nearby.

⚠️ Nowadays it is rare for large vessels to enter this harbour, but until the mid-1950s it was a regular occurrence. P&O had its own pier in Pieta that was used by hospital ships during the First World War. Vessels were also moored to buoys in mid-harbour, as Arthur Behren recalls in his memoirs *Make Me a Soldier: a Platoon Commander in Gallipoli*¹.

"A boat came up to order the (hospital ship) *Canada* to proceed to Quarantine Harbour, where her arrival created great interest because she was among the first of the ships from the Dardanelles. Scores of bathers swam around us, and the road, which skirted the narrow harbour, was packed with sight-seers. Maltese boatmen secured the *Canada* to a large buoy moored in the middle of the harbour, but before they were clear the hawser snapped and knocked them into the water.

"The stretcher cases went off first, lifted over the side and lowered into lighters by trim and energetic London Territorials. The walking cases followed, and a tug pulled us ashore... Cars and ambulances soon whisked us away along the twisting road to the far side of the harbour, then up a long hill."

Behren, who was suffering from dysentery, was taken to the Blue Sisters Hospital located on Savoy Hill in Sliema. Opened in 1910 by the Little Company of Mary - a religious order of nuns also known as the Blue Sisters because of the colour of their veils - the 120-bed hospital was reserved for officers. The 'Blues' closed in 1979.

The Quarantine Harbour Behren refers to was located in Lazaretto Creek, on the other side of Manoel Island and out of sight from the flying bridge you're on. An isolated hospital had been in use for quarantine purposes since the time of the knights, and the British continued the practice throughout WWI.

Most soldiers who were either sick or had superficial wounds were brought to Tigné, or taken to other barracks further afield in St Julian's and modern-day



The *Clan MacGillivray* was a 6,447gt cargo ship built in Britain in 1911. In WWI she was used as a troopship and ambulance transport.

The *Clan MacGillivray* was the first hospital transport to arrive in Malta with wounded and sick servicemen from Gallipoli on 4 May 1915.

Exactly a year later, on 3 May 1916, she left Sydney with the 13th Battalion, 18th Reinforcements bound for Alexandria, Egypt.

In 1948 she was renamed *Maclock* and the following year she was broken up at Bruges, Belgium.

Pembroke.

In his history of military hospitals in Malta, Dr George Bruce² describes Tigné Barracks as "delightfully situated on the promontory forming the northern boundary of the Marsamxett Harbour".

Because it had been built in 1901 "the barrack rooms were of modern construction and well adapted for hospital purposes"³.

On 1 May 1915 orders were issued for the barracks to be vacated and to be prepared for minor cases, "the site being an open, healthy one, well suited for rapid convalescence"³.

Less than a week later, on 6 May, Tigné received 370 cases from Gallipoli. By 14 June it had been fully converted into a surgical hospital with 676 beds,

Three categories of ships were used to evacuate the sick and wounded from the Dardanelles: hospital ships, hospital carriers and ambulance transports known as black ships.

Most hospital ships were passenger liners converted and fitted for the transport of the sick and injured. The staff included doctors, surgeons and a complement of nurses. These vessels were painted white, had a green band and one or more large red crosses on each side and were protected by the Geneva Convention.

Hospital carriers were transports specially kitted out for carrying wounded, but did not have the protection of the Geneva Convention¹⁰.

An ambulance transport was a vessel used on the outward voyage to transport troops and was "fitted for the homeward voyage either partly or wholly to carry sick and wounded. It had no distinguishing marks and could claim no protection under international conventions"⁴.



Tigné Barracks was "delightfully situated...and well adapted for hospital purposes (above). At its peak, the hospital had 1,412 beds, mostly under canvas (left)

(see the sidebar on the following page). Walk down the footpath,

under the command of Surgeon Major Robert Randon – a Maltese doctor⁴. The barracks consisted of four blocks of three stories. Each floor had four rooms that became 12-bedded wards, and two small rooms for use by the nurses and orderlies. The officers' mess was converted into a 40-bed officers' hospital.

By November the number of beds had been increased to 736, then reduced to 600 in March 1916. In July 1916, however, the number of beds was again increased to 1,412, mostly under canvas.

The hospital was kept open until 6 January 1919 and Tigné Barracks was demolished in 2002 to be replaced by a shopping mall and upscale apartment blocks.

⤴ You now have a choice, but this option adds an extra 690 metres to the route.

You may either stroll around the perimeter of the peninsula, along the wooden footpath just below the flying bridge and, perhaps, take a look at what's left of the Brennan torpedo station – a weapon invented by Australian Louis Brennan in 1877 – located down the steep flight of stairs next to the metal fence

passing Fort Tigné on your right and through the 'canyon' of apartment blocks to *Pjazza Tigné*.

Alternatively, about turn on the flying bridge and walk towards *Pjazza Tigné* – the open space facing the mall.

Parts of the square still contain some architectural elements of the barracks, including a series of arches that run along the façade of the shopping mall.

Turn left and walk down the



The Serjeants Mess where a "smoking concert" was held on 15 May 1915

pedestrianized street flanked by arches. Head for the third arched doorway with columns on both sides and the inscription *Serjeants Mess* above.



Nurses and orderlies posing by their ambulances at Tigné Hospital. The first motorized ambulances arrived in Malta on 26 May 1915

Patented by Irish-born Australian inventor Louis Brennan in 1877, the torpedo that bears his name may be regarded as the world's first practical guided missile.

A shore-based operator guided it from a 12metre high tower, wearing a special pair of binoculars on which were mounted controls that could be used to steer and electrically control the torpedo's speed.

The Brennan torpedo travelled three metres below the water's surface at a speed of 27 knots and had a range of 1,800 metres. A light on the mast was activated for night-time use, but could only be seen from the rear.

In 1891 the Brennan torpedo became a standard harbour defence throughout the British Empire and was in use for 15 years. Stations were established in Britain, Ireland, Hong Kong and Malta - at forts Ricasoli and Tigné (above). Brennans were phased out in 1906.



Terence Mirabelli

⚠ It was here that in the evening of Saturday, 15 May 1915 “the convalescent sergeants of the Expeditionary Force accommodated at Tigné” gave a “smoking concert...under the patronage of HE the Governor”. The programme included songs and toasts “in grateful recognition of the services rendered by the medical profession...”⁵.

⚠ / 🚗 You now have yet another choice! You can either proceed on foot for the Sliema part of this tour - it's a 2.5kms trek - and then return for your car, or drive the entire route. If you opt to drive, the directions provided are car friendly - the route is essentially a straight line, with just a couple of turns.

Continue down the pedestrianized street until it merges with *Triq Tigné*, at the intersection with *Triq Sant' Antnin* you'll see (on your right) the last building still standing from Tigné Barracks - this was the officers' mess that became an officers' hospital. Continue down *Triq Tigné* and take the right fork at the junction with *Triq it-Torri*, making for the sea front.

⚠ The original premises where the Sliema Chalet Hotel now stands housed the Sliema branch of the Malta Union Club. On Thursday 20 May 1915 a tearoom was inaugurated here for injured servicemen.

The club's committee had given the Ladies Committee of the St John Ambulance Association

and British Red Cross “a portion of the premises...to offer harmless refreshment and hospitality to the wounded”⁶.

The tearoom was open daily, except at weekends, from 4pm to 7pm and sold tea and coffee “at a nominal charge”. It proved so popular that by June “between 120 and 130 were present daily”⁴, more on Tuesdays and Fridays when the Kavalier Lancellotti quartet performed. During the 29 months of its existence an estimated 50,000 men were served.

⚠ / 🚗 Walk, or drive, past the Preluna Hotel and Spa until you reach the Mint Restaurant; continue straight up *Triq Windsor* (keeping the building site to your right), At the fifth intersection, with *Triq San Gwann Bosco*, turn left and you'll see a gate (35° 54'58”N, 14° 30'4”E).

⚠ This is the side entrance to St Patrick's Salesian School, run by the Catholic religious order of Salesians of Don Bosco since 1903. In 1915

bands entertained the wounded as they were served tea and light refreshments in what is now a car park.

The school came into its own in

1917 when 750 wounded and convalescent Irish soldiers were entertained on St Patrick's Day, 17 March.

⚠ / 🚗 Proceed up *Triq San Gwann Bosco*, past *Triq Guze Howard*, to *Triq Sir Adrian Dingli* and turn left; about 100 metres along turn right into *Triq Mons G Depiro*.

⚠ The neoclassic building at the junction of *Triq Depiro* and *Triq Melita* is St Clare College, a state-run primary school (35° 54'49”N, 14° 29'57”E). Built between 1905 and 1910, it was the first government school in Sliema.

For a short time it had been used as barracks. However, the troops left on 22 August 1915 and by 1 September sufficient work had been done to allow it to open as St John's Hospital.

“Everything about the building was favourable for conversion into a really first class hospital from the start”, writes Dr Bruce².

“The excellent sanitary arrangements already existing required little change; electric light was provided; a kitchen was fitted up with gas cookers in the basement, which also served to provide dining room, stores and dispensary; an operating theatre, X-ray room and range of baths were also fitted. The 50 schoolrooms, built on



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The Malta Union Club, where some 50,000 servicemen were offered “harmless refreshment and hospitality”

two floors around a quadrangle, made excellent wards for 400 patients, and when later the fine verandahs were also used, sufficient accommodation was



Sliema's first government school (above) was converted into St John's Hospital. The ventilation and lighting made the wards bright and cheerful, and contributed to a happy atmosphere (left)

the English Jesuits in 1878;

found for 510 cases.

“Here again one was equally surprised by the economy of space accomplished; yet every department of the hospital was comfortably, adequately and conveniently housed. In addition, the excellent ventilation and lighting throughout made the wards always bright and cheerful, and must have contributed much to the happy atmosphere always so apparent at St John’s”, Dr Bruce concludes.

Although eminently suitable for surgical work, St John’s Hospital was used mainly for medical cases, owing to the large number of the latter arriving in Malta. It closed in October 1917.

Most surgical cases were referred to St Ignatius Hospital, less than a kilometre away.

♣ / 🚗 Continue walking, or driving, down *Triq Mons G Depiro*; at the intersection with *Trejqa Ta Sant’ Injazju* turn right and stop at the stop sign.

♣ In 1915 the building facing you was St Ignatius Hospital (35° 54’48”N, 14° 29’45”E).

The chapel stands adjacent to the former Malta Protestant College that was taken over by

the latter, in turn, managed the school until 1910. (The Jesuits’ college was moved to bigger premises in Birkirkara, where it still is.)

After years of neglect the Royal Engineers were tasked to renovate the building in April 1915. It “required to be re-drained, cleaned throughout, and provided with sanitary annexes, gas cookers and electric light. An operating theatre and X-ray room were soon fitted up, and what eventually proved a thoroughly complete and compact surgi-

Surgery (above) and recovery (right) at St Ignatius Hospital

cal hospital was provided”, writes Dr Bruce².

St Ignatius had 155 beds and the first batch of 84 wounded was received on 2 July. It was used as a surgical facility until 1917, when it was reconstituted as a mental hospital. It finally closed in January 1919 and was converted into private homes.

♣ To the right of the chapel you’ll see *Sullivans Ltd*; go there and walk down the hill towards the sea front.

This might be a good time for refreshments – at the bottom of the hill (*Triq il-Kulleġġ l-Antik*) are a pub and a selection of coffee shops offering ‘harmless refreshments’.

♣ Across the bay you’ll see a large, cream coloured, colon-naded villa, now a casino but in May 1915 this elegant house became a convalescent home administered by the British Red Cross Society for 20 officers. The Marchesa Scicluna, who also contributed £100 a month for a year for its upkeep, lent Villa Dragonara to the military authorities. It reverted to its original use in August 1917.





Courtesy Bay Retro

The Marchesa Scicluna lent Villa Dragonara to the military authorities to use as a convalescent home for officers, and also contributed £100 a month for its upkeep

⚡ For the rest of this tour you'll need a car. Stroll back to your parked car – the promenade is a pleasant walk.

Once back in your vehicle you will have to retrace your steps, along the sea front, passing Balluta Bay, to St Julian's and up the hill of *Triq San Gorg*.

At the western end of Balluta Bay you'll see, on your left, the *City of London Bar*. Opened in 1914 by Karmnu Borg, it soon became the favoured watering hole of soldiers from the City of London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers), who were stationed in nearby Pembroke. They would travel to Balluta Bay by *karozzini* after a day's training.

The bar soon became known as the *City of London* - a name that has remained unchanged for more than 100 years - and Karmnu's grandson, Julian, now manages it.

In August 2014 it celebrated its 100th anniversary with a big street party.

🚗 If you are driving you have no option but to turn left into *Triq il-Kullegg l-Antik*. When you reach *Cork's Bar*, turn right and go down *it-Telga San Giljan*; at the sea front, go left – keeping the sea to your right – pass the Love monument and drive up *Triq San Gorg*.

🕒 The large building at your one o'clock, displaying a sculpted clock face under a

crown is Spinola Palace. Once the property of the knight of the Order of St John Fra Giovanni Battista Spinola de Villaroel it was adapted into a 30-bed military hospital in 1860, and named Forrest Hospital after the British garrison's principal medical officer.

During the Great War it was expanded to 186 beds, "mainly by tentage", and it treated soldiers with contagious diseases and those suffering from venereal diseases, rife in all armies.

Because of the nature of the maladies treated here, hospital discipline was strict. "One day", writes the Rev Albert MacKinnon⁷, "an Australian patient, to whom a rule was like a red rag, determined to go out without permission, but naturally he was stopped by the guard at the gate. He was not to be baulked, and he said so; but the guard only smiled.

"However, he laughs best who laughs last. The Colonial got 20

Spinola Palace became Forrest Hospital in 1860. Soldiers with contagious diseases were treated here



Richard Ellis Archive Malta

others of his fellow-countrymen to 'bunch' as they call it and to make a rush through the open gate. It was only a lark and they wheeled round and came back, but not the whole 20; one had slipped away unobserved, the instigator of the plot!"

Forrest Hospital was closed in 1922.

Describing national types, the Rev Albert MacKinnon writes in *Malta The Nurse of the Mediterranean*:

"Very prominent is the Australian. He is a big fellow, and has a free and easy manner and masterful stride. There is something invitingly frank and breezy about him, and there is little self-consciousness.

"I say, Padre," said one of them yesterday, in a voice that the whole room might hear if it liked, "I want your opinion on the immortality of the soul".

The question was very characteristic. These men speak quite freely of the deeper truths of religion in a way that astonishes the Scot. Of course, they are also perfectly frank about subjects of the very opposite kind.

The New Zealander is a blending of the Scot and Australian. He is quieter in his talk and his Colonial accent is not quite so pronounced".

🚗 Carry on up *Triq San Gorg* that becomes *Triq Sant' Andrija* as you turn left at the top of the hill – you have no alternative, there's a no entry sign facing you.

At the second roundabout, take the fourth exit into *Triq San Wistin* – at your three o'clock – and turn right at the palm tree,

The Portomaso Tower and the adjoining Hilton Malta stand on the site of the former Spinola Hospital. Although there are no records of Anzacs being treated here, this hospital played a major role after the Salonika campaign, which began on 5 October 1915. (No ANZAC units took part in the Salonika campaign, but Maltese Labour battalions and muleteers did.)

“In October (1915), the need of an additional hospital made the authorities choose a site at Spinola, on St Julian’s Bay, where formerly a fort had stood”, writes Dr George Bruce in his history of military hospitals².

“For a week or two it had been used as a base detail camp, but as a hospital extensive alterations had to be made. The fort consisted of four empty gun emplacements, three magazines, one married quarter and a few small buildings. Around the fort was a moat; between the moat and the sea was a very rough and irregular rocky glacis. It was decided to use the glacis for pitching hospital marquees, a most arduous task, as all the sites had to be built up, in some places as high as seven or eight feet.

“The fort itself was adapted for administration and stores; for example, the kitchen was provided in a wide passage in the centre of the fort; the underground magazines became linen, pack, and clothing stores; a dining hall, also an ablution and bathroom were made in the two large gun emplacements.

“Much ingenuity was employed in the utilisation of every existing building. The final result was the provision of an efficient general hospital capable of receiving by the end of December 1,022 patients.

“As a matter of fact Spinola was not required to take in sick and wounded until the end of January 1916, and then only up to the number of 169; its period of greatest use was not to come till some considerable time later”.



Courtesy Malta Aviation Museum

driving downhill towards St George’s Bay. There, take the left fork (as a matter of interest, the bay’s 3.5 tonnes of sand was imported from Jordan).

♣ Facing you is *Andrew’s Bar*, Malta’s oldest, opened in 1909 as the *Army Bazaar* by Andrew Chircop as a supplier of drinks, tobacco and haberdashery - no doubt recovering Anzacs sampled the amber nectar on offer.

🚗 Turn left at the no entry sign, and proceed uphill. The second building on your left was the guardhouse of St George’s Barracks. The only other remaining building is on your right, now the Institute of Tourism Studies (35° 55’38”N, 14° 29’13”E).

♣ Most of the barrack blocks at St George’s were located behind the tourism institute, now modern apartment buildings and a

car park. However, in 1915 these were vacated and equipped as a hospital.

On 4 May, the day the first contingent of Gallipoli wounded arrived in Malta, 237 were brought here. By July the hospital’s ‘beddage’ had been increased to 840 and then to 1,000 by September.

St George’s “was needed for acute cases, and convalescents



Richard Ellis Archive Malta

The *Army Bazaar*, to the left of the *karozzin*, is Malta’s oldest bar whilst the buildings on the heights behind it are St George’s Barracks. Converted into a hospital in 1915, more than 230 wounded from Gallipoli were brought here on 4 May 1915

could now be accommodated elsewhere”, writes Dr Bruce.

“St George’s Hospital occupied a large area, since the majority of the wards were small, holding at that time 10 patients each; consequently the staff, considerably under numbers at first, had to work under great difficulties. As at most of the other hospitals the sick soon predominated over the wounded...The excellent site above St George’s Bay and the abundant opportunity of roaming about the sea shore made this hospital exceedingly healthy, and pleasant for convalescence,” explains Dr Bruce².

In July 1916 it was further expanded, chiefly by tentage, to a maximum of 1,412 beds in September of that year. St George’s Hospital was closed at the end of October 1917.

🚗 At the guardhouse turn left into *Triq Il-Prof Walter Ganado* and proceed to the junction, take the second right into *Triq Normandy*. You are now in the former St Andrew’s Barracks, heart of the British military establishment throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries.

At the roundabout take the third exit into *Triq Cassino* and some 100 metres along you’ll see a sign for *Juno Flats* – go there. This will get you to *Triq Juno* and *Juno Flats* (35° 55’30”N, 14° 28’56”E).



Juno House was an officers mess turned hospital-cum-convalescent home

🏰 Built at the turn of the last century, this was a large mess and quarters used by unmarried officers, warrant officers and officers in transit. Soon after the Gallipoli campaign got underway, *Juno House* was converted into a hospital-cum-convalescent home for 60-officer patients⁸.

In the early 1980s another floor was added and the block was converted into 24 flats. 🚗 Drive down *Triq Mandalay* and turn left into *Triq Cassino*, at the roundabout take the third exit to *Triq Alamein* and proceed to the intersection with *Triq A.N.Z.A.C* (35° 55’32”N, 14° 28’31”E). Along the way are the barracks that became St Andrew’s Hospital, now schools and a British university’s international campus.



Australia Hall today, with the projection room over the foyer

🏰 The dilapidated, roofless building is Australia Hall.

In the autumn of 1915 the military authorities felt that some place of amusement and refreshment was urgently required to keep the thousands of convalescing servicemen “occupied and out of mischief”.

In November the Australian Red Cross contributed £2,000 towards the building of what became known as Australia Hall. It could seat up to 2,000 and was inaugurated in January 1916 (see the sidebar on the following page).

Australia Hall was located on a central site close to several hos-

pitals – now all gone.

St Andrew’s Barracks were vacated and handed over to the Royal Army Medical Corps on 6 May 1915. Within a week 845 beds had been prepared, and 300 patients admitted on 12 May. “By the end of the month 1,172 beds were ready. Further expansion up to 1,258 beds was made by adding tentage, and maintained until March 1916”, Maj Gen Sir W G MacPherson reports in his *Medical Services General History*⁵. The hospital was closed on 21 January 1919.

By late May of 1915, as more hospital beds were required to tend to the ever-growing number of sick and wounded arriving from Gallipoli, tented camps were established to house the sick and convalescent.

The first of these was St

David’s Hospital, situated on rocky ground sloping down to the sea behind Australia Hall. “The site had already been used for a camp, but extensive work had to be carried out by the Royal Engineers” writes Dr Bruce, “such as the fixing and concreting of tent pegs for the large hospital marquees, the construction of the main roads, paths, and gardens; the surface drainage of the camp, the building of the kitchens, ablution places, baths, and stores. After a period of very hard work, the ground being exceedingly uneven and rocky, the hospital was ready to receive nearly 500

patients towards the end of July; in August it was fully equipped for 1,000 beds. The cases received were at first mild surgical and convalescents; but like all other hospitals St David's was soon busy with the ever increasing stream of dysentery and enteric".

The second tented camp was St Patrick's Hospital; unfortunately, its precise whereabouts has been lost although it is known to have been "on terraced farmland in the centre of the island". Operational from August 1915 until July 1917 St Patrick's and St David's were said to be "the most artistically laid out camps"⁷.

St Paul's Camp Hospital, like St David's, overlooked the Pembroke rifle ranges and was close to St Andrew's. The first buildings erected were 34 pre-fabricated huts shipped from Britain with a total of 240 beds. These huts, however, were found to be unsuitable for Malta's summer heat "having no verandahs and no proper roof ventilation"⁸.



Courtesy Denis Darmann

The huts at St Paul's Hospital were considered unsuitable for Malta's summer heat, "having no verandahs and no proper roof ventilation"

Nevertheless, the first convoy of 153 patients arrived on 25 September. By November the 'beddage' had been increased to 792. St Paul's was largely used for dysentery and enteric cases.

With the catchall name of All Saints' Convalescent Camp, this was the last stop on the road to "fit for duty" before returning to the front, in this case the Dardanelles.

On 8 June Lieut Col Frederick Burton Mabin of New Zealand was tasked with preparing a tented camp for 1,000 convalescents. Four days later 420 recovering servicemen from Tigné Hospital were admitted. On 19 June the number had risen to 600 and by the 29th more than 1,000 men were at All Saints'.

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Richard Ellis Archive Malta

Australia Hall before the projection room was built. The tented St Andrew's Hospital can be seen in the background

Recovering young men in high spirits and full of *joie de vivre* would have been potentially disruptive, or so it was felt. By the late summer of 1915 the military authorities decided that some place of amusement and refreshment was urgently required to keep the thousands of convalescing servicemen "occupied and out of mischief".

When the decision was finally taken to build a dedicated centre, in November 1915, the Australian Red Cross contributed £2,000 towards its construction.

The hall, built in just two months by the Royal Engineers, was simple, functional and exemplified British colonial mili-

tary architecture. Seating up to 2,000, Australia Hall was inaugurated on 22 January 1916.

"His Excellency the Governor General and Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Lord Methuen, GCB, KCVO, CMG, presided in person on Saturday evening at the opening of the Australian Hall, Pembroke Camp, adjacent to St Andrew's Hospital...the proceedings being marked by impressiveness, enthusiasm and general enjoyment", reports the *Daily Malta Chronicle* of 23 January 1916⁹.

"The function", the *Chronicle* continues, "was largely attended, those present including the leading representatives of the naval and military forces and the civil government as well as residents in the island. The total company amounted to about 1,600 and was made up of as many Australians as were able to attend supplemented by the staffs of doctors and nurses from the neighbouring hospitals and convalescent camps. By six o'clock, the appointed time of commencement, the vast hall was filled..."

"The curtain rose, and immediately His Excellency ascended the stage, receiving an ovation.

"In expressing the pleasure afforded him in being present that evening, he said that the hall had been built with part of the money 'which has been most liberally given to us by Australia'. Referring to the purpose and usefulness of the hall, he emphasized with vigour and clearness of voice, that the hall would mark, for many years to come, the gallant deeds that our Colonial troops had performed for the Empire on the Gallipoli peninsula.

He did not for a moment, continued His Excellency, mean to

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This commemorative plaque (above) along with Australia's national arms are the only adornments on Australia Hall. (Right) keeping the troops "out of mischief" in 1916

say that we all possess in the Mother Country the splendid physique which we have seen exhibited amongst us by the Australians and New Zealanders...

"Now comrades", he said in declaring the hall open, 'I want to test the solidity of this roof and I can do so in no better manner than by asking you to join with me in giving three cheers for HM the King!'. The deafening response which followed having to some extent abated, His Excellency called for 'one cheer more for HM Queen Mary!'

"His Excellency thereupon resumed his seat and while the applause was still ringing, the British Red Cross Concert Party took up position on the stage, and sang *God Save the King* in which the whole assemblage joined with manifest heartiness...The programme was thereupon proceeded with in a variety of songs and sketches.

"The several items were greatly appreciated as signified by loud applause and persistent demands for repetition, *God Save the King* terminating the auspicious event of the opening of the Australia Hall in Malta", concludes the *Daily Malta Chronicle's* report.

Australia Hall - managed by the British Red Cross and the Young Men's Christian Association in conjunction with the military authorities - was an instant success. "On many nights in the week the large hall is filled to overflowing with an audience of convalescents who listen with great appreciation to the entertainment of song and recitation provided for them", writes the Rev Albert MacKinnon⁷.

Later a library and reading room were added and in 1921 a projection room was built over the front foyer, so that the hall could also be used as a cinema. These were Malta's first cinema projectors.

Seating up to 500, Australia Hall became known as the Globe Cinema where "military personnel who came in civvies" could watch uncensored films.

During the Second World War the hall was used by the En-



The rear of Australia Hall soon after its inauguration and (right) servicemen enjoying the garden that was developed a while later



tertainments National Service Association (ENSA) to provide entertainment for British and allied military personnel.

"Even in the 1960s...Australia Hall was a buzzing venue", reports Peter Monaghan in *Moving Image Archive News*. Writing about a local resident, Peter Bezzina, who came "from a family of publicans, he worked at the cinema's bar, as a 16 year old. Enforcement was lax at the time, but when a new commander took over at the barracks, Bezzina recalls, "he took one look at me and said 'What's that child doing in here?'" and banished him and two of his cousins from the venue. Losing their job was one thing, but missing out on the movies was another, so they found a remedy: "In the summer it was very hot in there because there were not enough fans, so they left the side doors open, and we would sneak in for movie nights."

When the British military closed St Andrew's Barracks in 1978 the Maltese government took over the land and buildings. Australia Hall was leased out and used as a discotheque for a while and then abandoned.

In 1996 the Malta Environment and Planning Authority scheduled Australia Hall as a Grade 2 building of historic and architectural value. Two years later, in December 1998, its ceiling collapsed in a fire but its four exterior walls remained standing. Since then it has been open to the elements and to vandals.

In September 2014 the government sold Australia Hall to a local entrepreneur. At the time of writing, no plans for this historic building have been announced.





All Saints' Convalescent Camp, commanded by a New Zealander, was the last stop for convalescent soldiers before returning to the front

“In the early days of All Saints the difficulties to overcome were manifold”, Dr Bruce explains. “The levelling of the ground, much of the surface drainage and the actual erection of the camp were accomplished by the convalescents themselves. The Royal Engineers helped with the erection of two kitchens, ablution and drying rooms, and the necessary sanitary work. The difficulties increased soon afterwards with the almost complete failure of the water supply, pending the construction of a 5,000-gallon tank by the Engineers.

“Water had to be laboriously carted from St George’s Barracks, and the water ration was limited to one gallon per head

for almost a month. Happily no ill results were ascertainable from the shortage, and the sea bathing, in which all who were fit could indulge, helped to save the situation. A regular routine was quickly established; only a skeleton staff was maintained, and practically all the camp work was undertaken by the convalescents themselves.

“Parades for bathing, Swedish drill, and route marches were established, and soon a stream of men fit in every way began to flow away from All Saints and return to their units at the front”.

Lieut Col Mabin, meanwhile, was camp commandant for three years, until its closure in 1917 - he was in charge of six camps at various times. After

the war he returned to New Zealand and devoted himself to writing about big game fishing. 🚗 Driving up *Triq Suffolk*, passing St Catherine’s High School, continue along *Triq Sir Adrian Dingli* to the Pembroke Military Cemetery (35° 55’46”N, 14° 28’14”E).

⚰ This was originally a small burial place for the internment of soldiers who died while stationed at the barracks here in the early 1900s. Of the 322 buried here, three are Australian servicemen - two from the Gallipoli campaign and one from the Second World War. No New Zealanders are buried here.

Whilst Valletta has retained most of the buildings used as hospitals a century ago, Sliema and Pembroke have not. Tigné Barracks is now a memory preserved in old photographs.

In Pembroke, where once there were three barracks - St George’s, St Andrew’s and, after WWI, St Patrick’s - plus another three convalescent camps, little if anything remains.

The stone-built barrack blocks have been converted to flats and schools whilst the tented camps, because of their temporary nature, disappeared nearly 100 years ago and their locations, like that of St Patrick’s Hospital, has been forgotten.

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