

## Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri

Dr. Charles A. Gauci

KHS MD FRCA FIPP FPMRCA FSA.Scot.

Lt. Colonel RAMC (Retd)

Vice President, St. Margaret's Band Club, Ta' Sannat, Gozo

Meandering through the streets of Ta' Sannat one inevitably comes across the monument dedicated to the memory of Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri (**fig. 1**) situated in Bishop Davide Cocco Palmieri Street.



**Fig. 1**  
Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri

This monument (**fig. 2**), created by sculptor Alfred Camilleri, was commissioned by the local council



**Fig. 2**  
Monument to Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri in the village of Ta' Sannat, Gozo

It was unveiled by His Excellency President Guido de Marco on 23<sup>rd</sup>. February 2003 and blessed by the Archpriest Tarcisio Camilleri in a ceremony for which music was provided by the St. Margaret

Band Club of Ta' Sannat together with an orchestra, all under the direction of St. Margaret's Band Club's then musical director, Josef Debrincat.

At that memorable event some of Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri's many musical works were played. (figs. 3a, 3b, 3c)



**Figs 3a, 3b & 3c-**The unveiling of the Caruana Spiteri monument, 2003

I must admit that, as a relative newcomer to the village, I had never heard of the Maestro before but it was obvious that he must have been a very important person in Ta' Sannat, so I did some research to try and find out as much as I could about him.

I found out that the Maestro made a very large contribution to the village of Ta' Sannat both as an educator (he was the head teacher of the local primary school, between 1921-1932) and as a musician.

During his years as head teacher, he produced a number of musical compositions as well as teaching a number of musical instruments to local children.

He certainly achieved a great deal during his very short life.

This is his story

### **Early Life**

Caruana Spiteri was born in the village of Luqa, Malta on 4<sup>th</sup>. May 1896, the son of Giuseppe Caruana and of Carmela Spiteri. He was baptised the next day by Rev. Flavio Grima, then archpriest of the parish of the village of Luqa.

He was the fourth child in a family of five, two girls and three boys.

The father was a builder. It was a family of modest means.

The children were brought up in a disciplined environment and the young Vincenzo was an intelligent lad who completed his primary and secondary education, coming first in all his exams; he then sat the examination to become a teacher, again coming first.

He continued his studies and sat yet a further examination for the post of head teacher, passing this test with flying colours and coming first yet again.

Indeed, so impressive were his results that the authorities decided to appoint him without his having to undertake a preliminary course in England as was customary in those days,

He was duly appointed a head teacher and sent, in October 1921, to exercise this role in the village of Ta'Sannat where he settled and lived until his sudden untimely death in 1932 at the early age of 35 years from consumption.

Vincenzo's musical legacy has naturally created a very strong bond between the villages of Luqa, where he was born and Ta' Sannat, where he died.

### **Music**

Music was Vincenzo's abiding passion.

He received his early musical education in his native village of Luqa, where, together with his brothers he attended music classes at the *San Andrea* (St. Andrew's) Band Club.

One brother Gio. Batta played the clarinet, while another, Andrea played the flute.

Vincenzo played the piano, violin, treble base and occasionally, the clarinet. His breathing problems limited what he could do with the clarinet.

He started his studies in harmony and counterpoint under the direction of Maestro Giuseppe Abdilla and studied violin and piano with Maestro Antonio Pace.

He sat a number of music examinations and was eventually appointed *maestro di capella* in several churches in both Malta and Gozo.

He composed some haunting melodies.

After he arrived in Gozo, to take up his position as pedagogue, Vincenzo started playing in various churches, including the one at Ta' Sannat.

He also gave a helping hand to the two 'city bands' of *La Stella* and *Leone* in Victoria.

He sometimes actually directed and conducted concerts held by the *Leone* band.

**Fig. 4**, from the *Leone* archives, shows payments to the Maestro made by that band for services rendered in October 1931; in June of that year, the Society presented him with a clock

1931		Esito	
Ottobre 1 <sup>o</sup>		Riparto	£ 298 11 10
M <sup>re</sup> Caruana - onorario di 3 concerti e di			
3	Programmi - S. Maria, Helberg, Cocca		25 -
2	Concerti e Processi di S. Michele		10 -
	Spese viaggio - Sannat-Vittoria e r.v.		12 -
	Copia di una nuova marcia per la Processione		6 -
	Carte di musica ed altro		2 -

31	Spese pagate da P. Harmonit (vedi libro)	337
Giugno	Orologio (regalo al M <sup>re</sup> Caruana)	7 -
	Materiali per Bomba	49

**Fig. 4**-payments by *Leone* to Maestro

He was a first violin and from time to time also directed the orchestra set up by his great friend Maestro Giuseppe Gardini Vella. (**Fig. 5**)



**Fig. 5**

Maestro Giardini Vella's Orchestra (1930).  
(*Caruana Spiteri* is the gentleman holding a violin. second on the right in the back row)

Travelling between Malta and Gozo in those days was no easy matter, so the new head teacher, opted to live permanently in Ta' Sannat, Gozo.

He first lived at no. 194 Main Street, (now known as *Papatya*) (**fig 6**) where he rented two rooms above a shop there; there are memories in the village of his piano music floating gently out of the window opening onto the balcony.

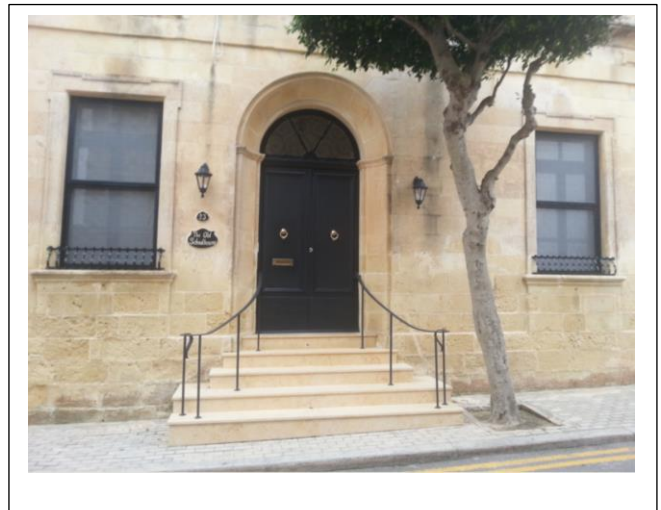


**Fig. 6**-Caruana Spiteri's first home in Ta' Sannat at 194, Main Street

He then moved to 21 Main Street (now known as *Dar is-Surmast*) (**Fig. 7**), where he lived virtually next door to the primary school (**Fig 8**). His house was separated from the school by the then police station.



**Fig. 7**



**Fig. 8**

There is a memorial plaque affixed to the wall of *Dar is-Surmast* commemorating the fact that Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri once lived there (**Fig. 9**)

Despite living for almost twelve years in Ta' Sannat, the Maestro never lost his love for Luqa, the Maltese village of his birth; he regularly visited his family there, especially during the summer months.

**Fig. 9**- Memorial Plaque



As regular as clockwork, whatever the weather, every 29<sup>th</sup> November, the eve of the feast of St. Andrew's, the patron saint of the village of Luqa, he would go to that village to take part in the *festa*. This feast is now celebrated during the summer months.

He also never forgot the band of his native village of Luqa, the band of St. Andrew, where he had learnt his music and had also played as a bandsman.

In September 1919, he bequeathed a *març* to St. Andrew's band club, entitled "*Malta Gwerriera*" (Malta the warrior). This popular *març* is still played by that band to this day.

He composed a set of funeral marches dedicated to the fallen of the 7th. June 1919 uprising against the British, authorities (*Sette Giugno*), which he gifted to the band club in March 1920.

In 1924, he gifted, the band of St. Andrew, a *Stabat Mater* for instruments and children's choir.

This piece is still played in Good Friday services.

The Rector of the Gozo seminary, Mgr Gius Debrincat asked Vincenzo to teach song and piano to his seminarians.

In 1929, Vincenzo composed a long poem for carnival time, entitled "*Una colazione indigesta*" (an indigestible breakfast).

### Ta'Sannat's gain

Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri lived in Ta' Sannat for just under twelve years while he was head teacher of the village primary school.

One of his child pupils was Guze' Aquilina who in later life became Professor of Maltese and Oriental languages at the University of Malta, an eminent author and one of the doyens of the Maltese language. The young Guze' hailed from Munxar, next door to Ta' Sannat and children from this village still receive their primary education in Ta' Sannat.

By all the Maestro was a disciplinarian, but very helpful, going out of his way to help people in general and his students and fellow teachers in particular. As already seen, he was highly intelligent; he took a mathematics text book, worked out all the problems in it and collated all the work in the form of a reference work for his fellow teachers and for his students students. (fig. 10a & 10b)

Figs 10a

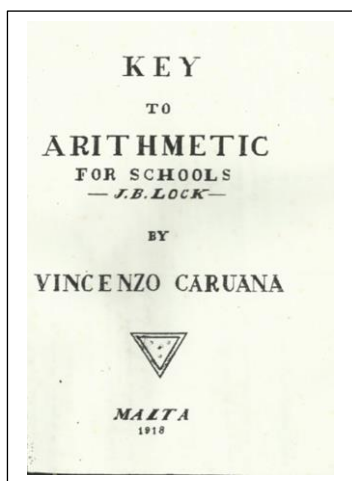
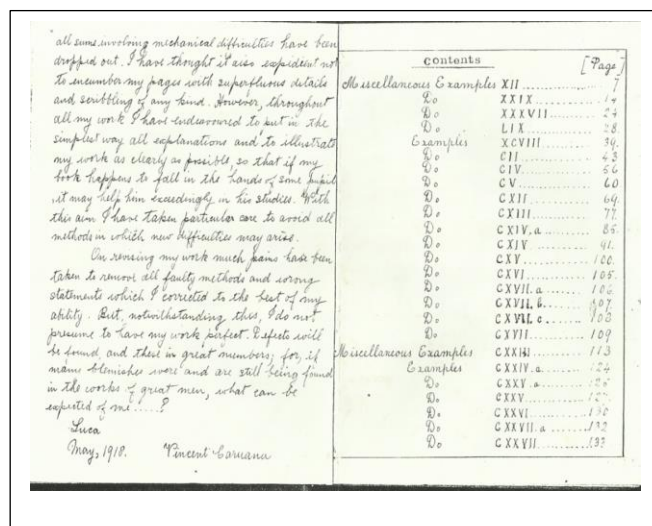


Fig. 10b



He was fluent in English, Italian and French.

The Maestro's last 'official' signature, in a school roll call dated 31/03/32, is preserved, for all to see, at the public library in Victoria, Gozo. (Fig. 11).

At that time there were 124 boys and girls (infants excepted) in that school.

REGISTER of Daily Attendance at the *San Rapp* School of *Sannat*  
From the 1st. to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1932.

Checked by *L. Biscuit*

Fig. 11

The best bit of music which the Maestro composed for the parish of Ta' Sannat is almost certainly, an antiphon, "*Veni Sponsa Christi*", (*Come Christ's betrothed*) which he finished on 4<sup>th</sup>. July 1926 and which was premiered during the first *festa* of St. Margaret V.M. held by the new Archpriest, Rev. Giuseppe Cassar. (Fig 12).

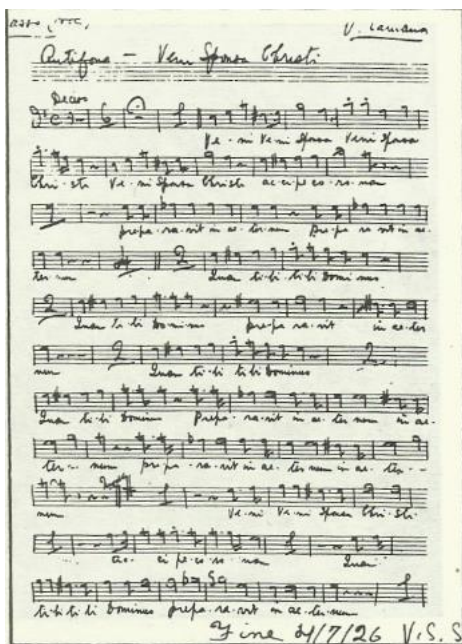
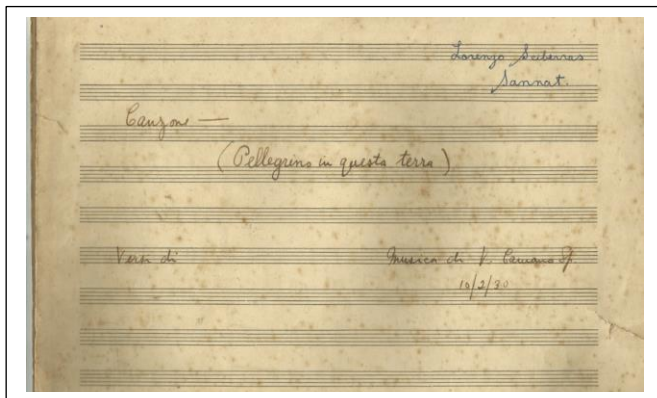


Fig. 12-Veni Sponsa Christi

Vincenzo composed a very large number of works exclusively dedicated to the parish of Ta' Sannat and which are duly conserved in the parish archives. An example, signed by the Maestro and donated to the archives by Mgr. L. Scibberas is shown in **fig. 13** (below)



He regularly played the organ at Sunday High Mass, funerals and at various liturgical celebrations and services; he instructed a young girls' choir to sing the *Innu lil Santa Margerita* for the village festa. He taught music to a number of young men, some of whom went on to play in Gozitan bands.

The village of Ta' Sannat certainly gained a great deal by the presence of this man of many parts in their midst.

From 1927 onwards, with the encouragement of the village Archpriest, Rev. Giuseppe Cassar, the Maestro composed and took control of all the musical activities connected with the feast of St. Margaret; this work is meticulously recorded in the parish archives.

His music is still regularly played during the feast in celebration of St. Margaret VM, patron saint of the village of Ta' Sannat. His memory therefore, lives on in the music he has left and not least in the unique tone of the village church bells.

The then Archpriest, Don Giuseppe Cassar decided to order a new set of bells for the parish church. To this end, at the beginning of 1932, he started to negotiate their purchase from the firm of Baricozzi in Milan. He turned to the Maestro for advice as to what tones the bells should have.

It was the Maestro who decided that the bells should be toned in the key of *La Maggiore* (also known as *La Grave*) i.e. A-Major. This decision was readily agreed upon by Maestro Giardini Vella who was musical director of *La stella* Band Club and who was also consulted on the matter.

The bells which arrived in the village of Ta' Sannat in November 1932, are generally regarded as the most perfectly toned bells in the island of Gozo. The Maestro, unfortunately never had the pleasure of seeing the bells in place as he died in April 1932.

On Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup>. April 1932, while he was having a coffee with his friend Giardini Vella at a local coffee shop in Victoria, he suddenly felt very unwell and was taken to Victoria hospital, where he died the next day at the young age of 35 years. A remarkable career was thus cut tragically short.



It is very sad that his untimely death meant that he did not live long enough to hear his beloved bells. His death certificate (**fig. 14**) is shown below.

Anno Domini Millelesimo nonagesimo trigesimo secundo (1932)  
 die decima septima (17) Aprilis  
 Hora 9-30 a. m. Vincentius Larmano, Caletis filius Josephi  
 et Johannis Carmelae Spiteri obitus coniectatus inae sanctorum  
 triginta sex (36) mato repentino correptus Extremam Unctio-  
 nem sub conditione recepit in Dno obiit, cuius Cadaver die  
 sequenti humatum est in Caemeterio paroch. in sepulcro  
 sig: 11° 10.  
 Anno Domini Millelesimo nonagesimo trigesimo secundo (1932)  
 die decima nona (19) Aprilis  
 Hora 11-30 a. m. Udochardus Uhorat, fil. Thomas et Felicitas Uhorat  
 emigratorum cuius mensis aet. caelum evolarit, cuius  
 corpus die sequenti humatum est in hac S. Ecc. Par. in se-  
 pulchro signato 11° 6

Fig. 14-death certificate

The funeral cortege left Victoria hospital on 19<sup>th</sup>. April and the Maestro was laid to rest in the cemetery on the parvis of the parish church at Ta'Sannat.

A Ta' Sannat resident, fellow teacher and great friend of the Maestro kept a register between 1901 and 1948 where he recorded all the burials held at the parish of Ta' Sannat. (**fig. 15**)

46.  
 - 1932 -  
 16 Apr 9.15 AM. Mori improvizamente a bella vittoria  
 22 Sig: Vincenzo Ceruana Spiteri Ag/Maestro  
 della Scuola Elem di C. Sannat. Aveva  
 37 anni. Nato a C. Luca. Fu sepolto  
 nel cimitero attiguo alla Chiesa Paroch  
 di C. Sannat. Ebbe funerale molto  
 imponente e solenne: nel quale  
 presero parte i ragazzi e le ragazze  
 coi loro insegnanti della scuola  
 di C. Sannat; tutti gli insegnanti di  
 Gozo. La Banda La Stella ed una  
 rappresentazione della Società Fil  
 Sicut' Andrea di C. Luca. Messa da  
 musica gratis dal Sig: G. Garino  
 Nella

Fig. 15

This contemporary source give witness to the fact that the funeral was both an imposing and solemn occasion, attended by the boys and girls of Ta' Sannat primary school and by their teachers as well as by teachers from other schools in Gozo. The band of *La Stella* took part playing funeral marches. There were also representatives of the *Leone* and St. Andrew's Bands. The music for the high funeral Mass, *presente cadavere* was conducted *gratis* by Maestro Giuseppe Giardini Vella, a great friend of the deceased. (figs 16 & 17)



**Fig. 16**-funeral cortege



**Fig. 17**-*santa tal mewt*

During the festivities to mark the tricentenary of Sannat becoming a parish in 1688, a concert was held in Ta' Sannat on 30/04/1988, when the St. Julian's choir sang his major work "*The European conflagration*" in the parish church. (Fig. 18)



**Fig. 18**

The centenary of the Maestro's birth was celebrated in the parish of Ta' Sannat by a concert held at the parish church on Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup>. July 1996 under the auspices of the Cultural Council of the Ministry of Gozo and the local council of Ta' Sannat in the distinguished presence of His Excellency Dr. Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, President of the Republic of Malta.

The musical director for the event was Rev. Canon Martin Portelli and the entire musical repertoire for the evening consisted of Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri's compositions. The tenor for the event was Andrew Sapiano while the Basso was Noel Galea. (Fig. 19a,b,c).

IL-PARROĊĊA TA' SANTA MARGERITA V.M.  
TA' SANNAT  
bi-kollaborazzjoni tal-  
KUNSILL TAL-KULTURA  
(MINISTERU GHAL GHAWDEX)  
u  
IL-KUNSILL LOKALI TA' SANNAT  
tfakkar il-  
100 SENA MIT-TWELID TA'  
MRO VINCENZO CARUANA SPITERI  
kompożitur u Kap ta' l-Iskola Primarja - Sannat  
  
It-Tlieta, 23 ta' Lulju, 1996  
fis-8.00 p.m.  
fil-Knisja Arcipretali u Matriċi - Sannat  
taht il-patroċinju ta'  
L-E.T. DR. UGO MIFSUD BONNICI,  
President ta' Malta  
  
Direzzjoni Mużikali - Kan Martin Portelli

Fig. 19a

<i>Programm</i>	
<b>Introduzzjoni</b>	<b>Salm</b>
<b>Veni Sponsa</b>	<i>Laudate Pueri - a tre voci</i>
<i>Responsorju - No. 1</i>	~ ~
~ ~	<b>Verbum Caro</b>
<b>Haec Est</b>	<i>Responsorju Pastoralis - No. 8</i>
<i>Responsorju - No. 7</i>	~ ~
~ ~	<b>Diffusa Est Gratia</b>
<b>Specie Tua</b>	<i>Responsorju - No. 4</i>
<i>Responsorju - No. 3</i>	~ ~
~ ~	<b>Tantum Ergo</b>
<b>Media Nocte</b>	<i>Tenur u Baxx</i>
<i>Responsorju - No. 8</i>	~ ~
~ ~	<b>Veni Sponsa Christi</b>
<b>Poezija</b>	<i>Antifona a Santa Margherita</i>
<i>Patri Remigio Galea O.F.M. Kap.</i>	~ ~
~ ~	<b>INNU NAZZJONALI</b>
<b>Diskors</b>	
<i>Kan Nikola Vella Apap</i>	
<i>Il-Mużika kollha f'dan il-Programm hija kompożizzjoni ta' Mro. Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri</i>	
Direzzjoni Mużikali: Kan. Martin Portelli. Solisti: Tenur Andrew Sapiano. Baxx: Noel Galea	

Fig. 19b



Fig. 19c

Given the importance of this great man, it is only right and fitting that one of the new and more imposing streets in Ta' Sannat is named after him and that the village also has a monument to commemorate his time there (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20- Invitation to monument unveiling, 2003

## APPENDIX

**List of Musical Works by Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Scicluna, bequeathed as a musical legacy to the parish of Ta'Sannat, Gozo** (from musical Programme organised in honour of the centenary of the birth of Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Azzopardi, held at Ta' Sannat, 23/07/1996)

<b>Tantum Ergo per Basso</b>	14/11/14
<b>Overture; The European Conflagration</b>	24/7/15
<b>Tantum Ergo</b>	1915
<b>Ave Mans StellalBeata Mater (voce ed organo)</b>	13/6/20
<b>Introito</b>	17/6/20
<b>Vespro Semplice della B.M.V.</b>	June 1920
<b>Salve Regina pel Tenore</b>	15/7/20
<b>Lau date Dominum</b>	4/8/20
<b>Litanie della SS Vergine et Beata Mater</b>	5/8/20
<b>Inno a S. Margerita (Jesu Corona) Veni Sponsa</b>	18/7/20

<b>Sacerdos et Pontifex</b>	19/4/25
<b>Veni Sponsa Christi</b>	4/7/26
<b>Antifona (Voce Puerile) Minuistj eum Paulo, S.Luigi</b>	16/2/27
<b>Responsori per Matutinto (Canto ed Organo)</b>	5/5/27
<b>Credid/Laetatus Sum</b>	16/5/27
<b>In Convertendo (a due Voci) (Beati Omnes)</b>	17/5/27
<b>Ave Mans Stella (Inno pel Triduo)</b>	7/6/27
<b>Domine Probasti Me (a due Voci)</b>	11/7/27
<b>In Convertendo Dorninus</b>	16/7/27
<b>Deus in Adjutorum (in Re Magg.) (Solo Tenore e Coro)</b>	22/9/27
<b>Alma Redemptoris</b>	27/11/27
<b>Te .Joesph Celebrent (Inno Semplice)</b>	12/4/28
<b>Graduale No. I (Viderunt Ornnes)</b>	20/4/28
<b>Responsori Pastoralis</b>	8/12/29
<b>Deus In Adjutorium</b>	24/5/30
<b>Laudate Pueri (Con Voci Bianche)</b>	16/6/30
<b>Exultet Urbis Gaudiis (Voci Bianche)</b>	17/6/31
<b>Tantum Ergo Corale</b>	
<b>O Salutaris Hostia</b>	
<b>Litanie della B.M.V.</b>	

## SOURCES

1. Rev. Mgr. Lawrence Scibberas-personal communication; I am indebted to the Mgr. for so generously giving me access to his extensive archive on the Maestro. (figs.5, 9, 10a, 10b, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19a, 19b, 19c, 20)
2. *Is-Surmast Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri* by Rev. Mgr. Lawrence, *Leħen Is-Sewwa*, 17/04/1982 page. 6
3. Programme of concert held in honour of the centenary of the birth of Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri, held at Ta' Sannat, 23/07/1996
4. Banda San Andrea of Luqa-*website*
5. *Sannat fi Grajjiet Ġħawdex* by Rev. Fr. J. Bezzina, 1989 (Figs 12, 18)

6. *Sunday Times of Malta*, 02/03/2003
7. *Registro dei morti di Casal sannat* –(1901-1948)- Wenzu Muscat
8. *Maestro Vincenzo Caruana Spiteri, Hajtu u Hidmietu 1896-1932* by Dr. M. Vella Ph.D MA Psych (private publication) , October 1996 (figs 4, 14)
9. Logbook Sannat Primary School (Public Library Gozo)
10. Archives, St. Margaret's Band Club, Ta' Sannat (figs 1, 3a & 3b)
11. Public Library, Victoria, Gozo (Fig. 11)