

Memorandum for Cabinet prepared by the
Minister of Commonwealth and Foreign Affairs

St. John Cavalier

This massive fortification, together with its twin counterpart, St. James Cavalier (presently occupied by NAAFI) dominates the approaches to Valletta on the left hand side of Kingsgate viewed from Floriana. It is of solid construction and apart from a fairly extensive vaulted hall and one large room at street level has little useful accommodation within its walls. A steep and twisting ramp, similar to the one giving admission to Fort St. Angelo leads to the top of the Cavalier whence there is a commanding and impressive view. At this top level a number of rooms were constructed by the British Military authorities and used as an anti-aircraft control post during the last war. These rooms are built in the centre of the open area and, although hardly in keeping with the architecture of the bastions, do not offend the graceful lines of the fortifications since they are only partly visible from below. The narrow ramp is presently cluttered by numerous barbed-wire barricades stored by the Police for emergencies, and the ground floor room is used as a store for election equipment. The general state of the Cavalier is one of disrepair and neglect, and it is clearly desirable to put the whole complex to some use which will ensure its restoration and repair as befits its importance as an outstanding and impressive part of Valletta's fortifications.

2. There are three suggestions under consideration to make use of St. John Cavalier.

- (a) an application by the Yellow Garage to convert the Cavalier into a garage and multi-storey parking place
- (b) the conversion of the Cavalier into a War Museum as envisaged on page 80 of the Development Plan for 1964/69
- (d) the lease of the Cavalier to the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John for use as an Embassy.

The premises of the Yellow Garage in Ordnance Street are scheduled for demolition and, though Government is under no obligation to offer alternative premises, it usually tries to help the tenant in such cases. The application to convert the Cavalier into a Garage would not be putting it to full use, and the idea of multi-storey parking could only be achieved by very considerable demolition of the interior of the Cavalier. The unique panoramic view from the top would be wasted.

The conversion of the Cavalier into a War Museum has already been accepted by Government and is included in the Five Year Development Plan 1964-69 as Item 3 on page 80.

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The sum of £2740 is available for the purpose and this project is to be put into effect as soon as the Cavalier can be evacuated of stored equipment. A War Museum will be an interesting attraction to visitors and will be a fitting tribute to the historic role played by Malta during the last two World War; It is for consideration, however, whether the Museum could not be equally well sighted elsewhere in Valletta. There have been suggestions that the War Museums should be housed at the Barrakka Church, the Main Guard or at Fort St. Elmo.

When the Sovereign Order of St. John appointed its first Ambassador to Malta, Government was asked to assist in finding premises for an Embassy in Valletta. During the recent visit of two representatives of the Grand Master the site was visited by the Vice Chancellor (Fra Enrico di Montalto) and the Government has been informed that the Order is interested in building an Embassy in the Cavalier at its own expense. Its name and its historical association with the Order makes the Cavalier eminently suitable for the purpose and furthermore it is adjacent to the area specially earmarked for the construction of other Embassies. The intention of the Order is to furnish access to the top platform - where the Ambassador's Chancery would be built - by installing a lift using one of the existing shafts in the Cavalier. The rooms on the top platform would be adapted and added to meet requirements and to blend in with surroundings. The Ambassador was officially informed that once the Cavalier was regarded as suitable by the Order, the Government would consider making an offer to the Order after the Government had examined other projects which had already been suggested for the site.

Ministers are invited to decide which of the three alternatives set out in paragraph 2 above is to be agreed upon.

If the Cavalier is to be offered to the Order for conversion into an Embassy further decisions are required as to the terms of lease. For reasons connected with earlier aspirations of the Order to sovereignty over a small portion of the Island, it would be advisable to give the Cavalier on lease. A period of 99 years is suggested. In view of the expressed intention of the Order to introduce various social and health projects into Malta at its expense, and as the Order will have to spend large sums on restoring and maintaining the area it would be reasonable to grant the lease at a nominal rent rather than at an economic figure. An annual rent of £1 is suggested with the addition of a small symbolic gift annually. This would recall the historic obligation of the Order to present a falcon to the Viceroy of Sicily as a guarantee that the Order would never make War on his Kingdom and also the historic right of a Maltese family, to draw water from the well for the site of the Magisterial Palace in Valletta. Any additions or alterations to the structure of the Cavalier would have to be rigidly controlled by Government but the Order is fully conscious of the importance of preserving the lines and the original construction of the feature.

The Commissioner for Lands has been consulted on the preparation of this memorandum.

1st October, 1966.

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