

Presentation at Symposium  
**European Walled Towns**

30 September 2016

**Developing project concept for historic sites:**

**Lessons learnt from Fort St. Elmo project**

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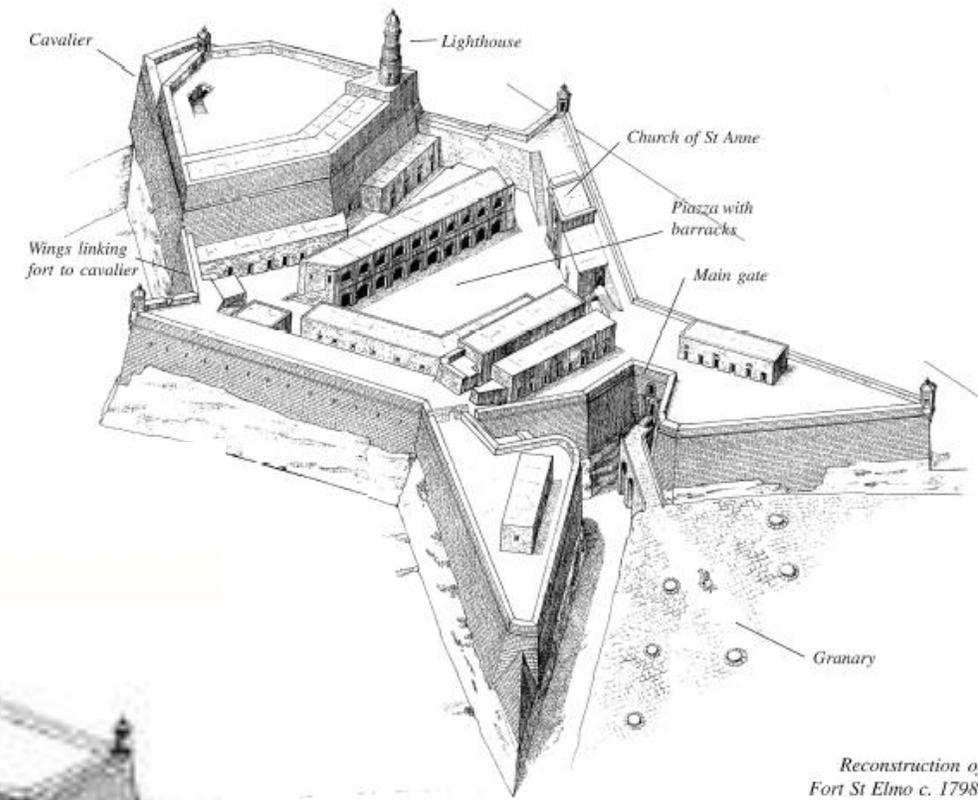
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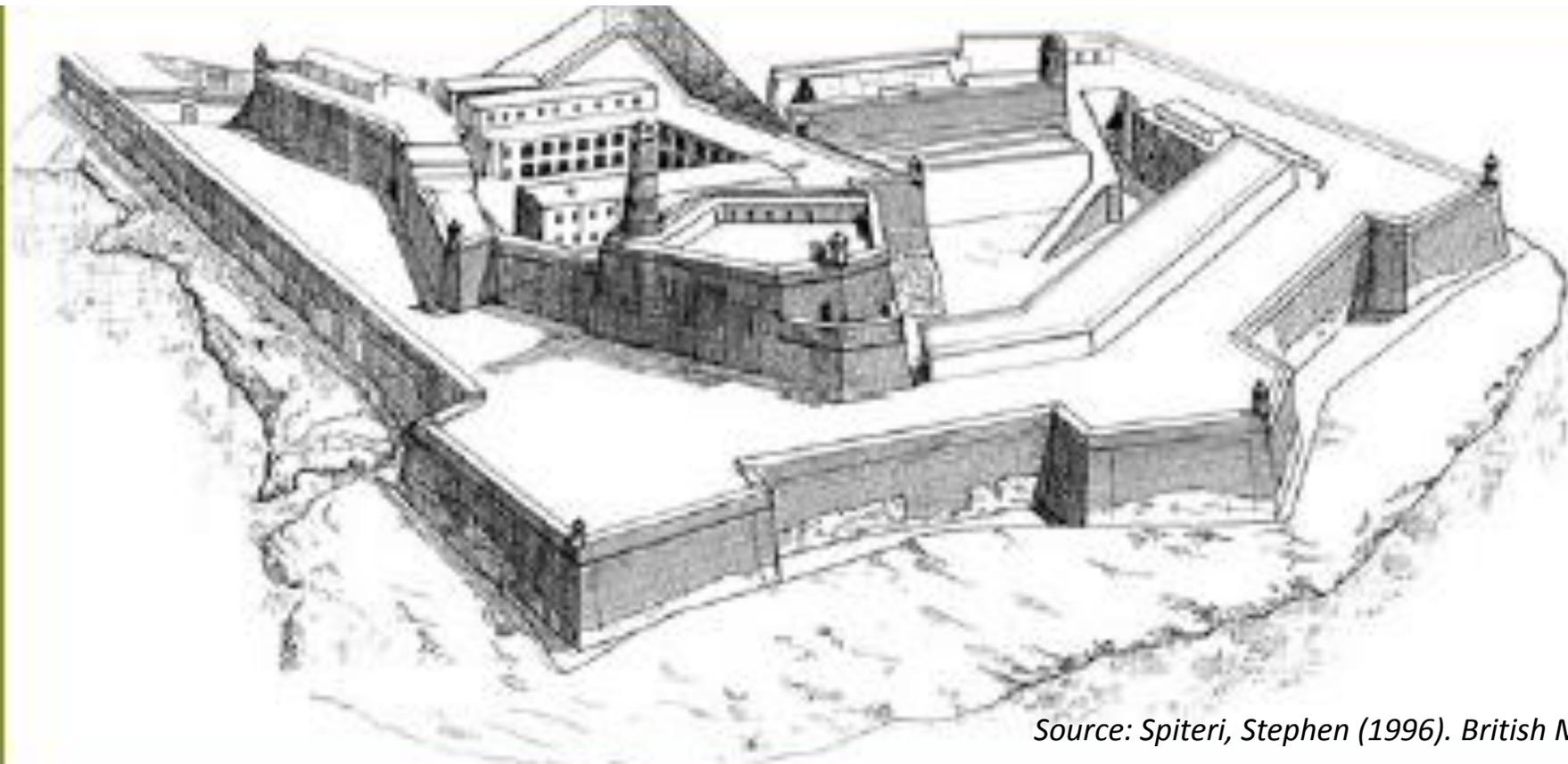


General view of Fort St. Elmo fortification system circa 1800. Note (i) the five-pointed star of the fort and (ii) the bastions which protect the seaward sides of the fort.

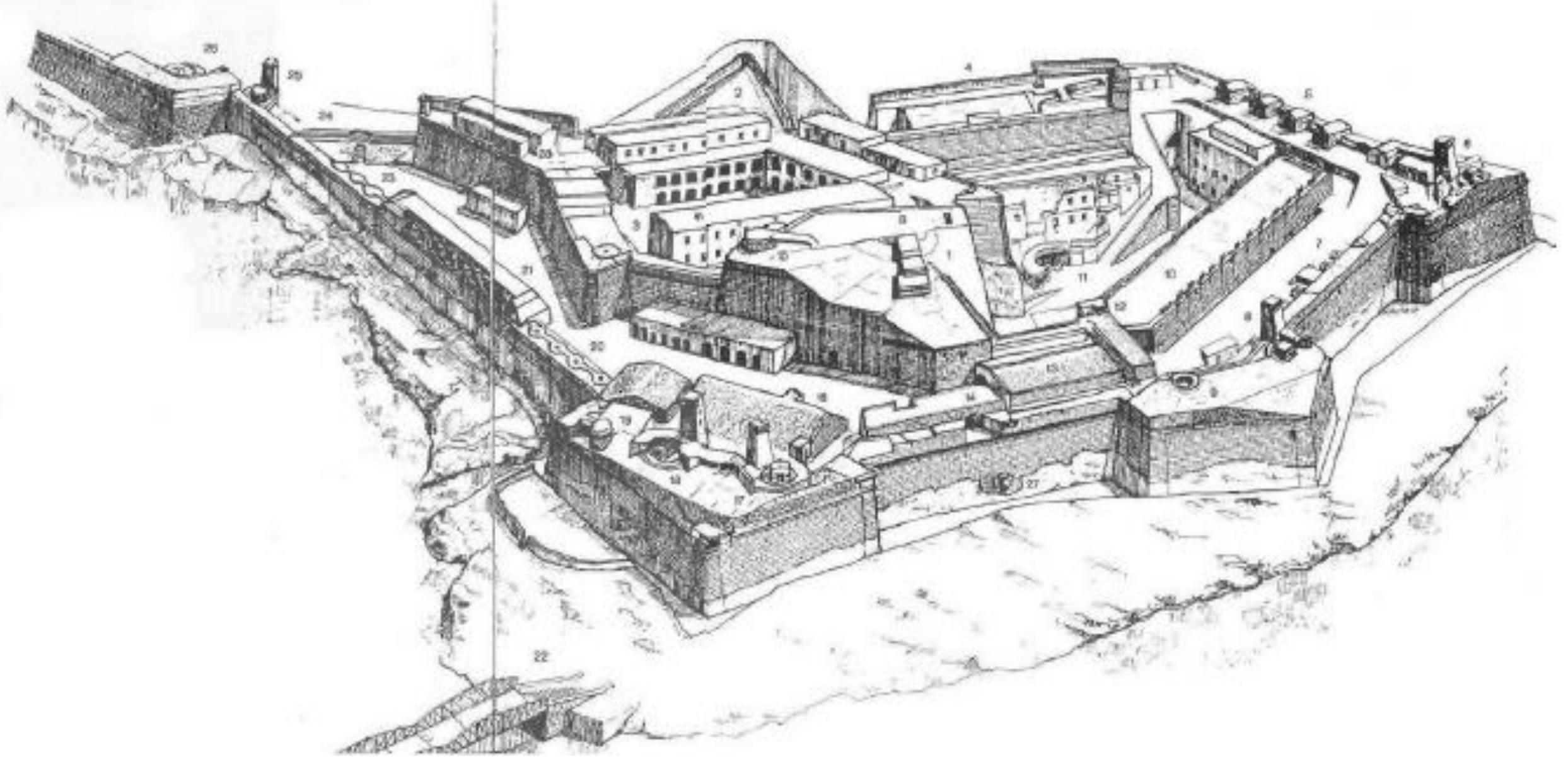


Reconstruction of Fort St Elmo c. 1798.

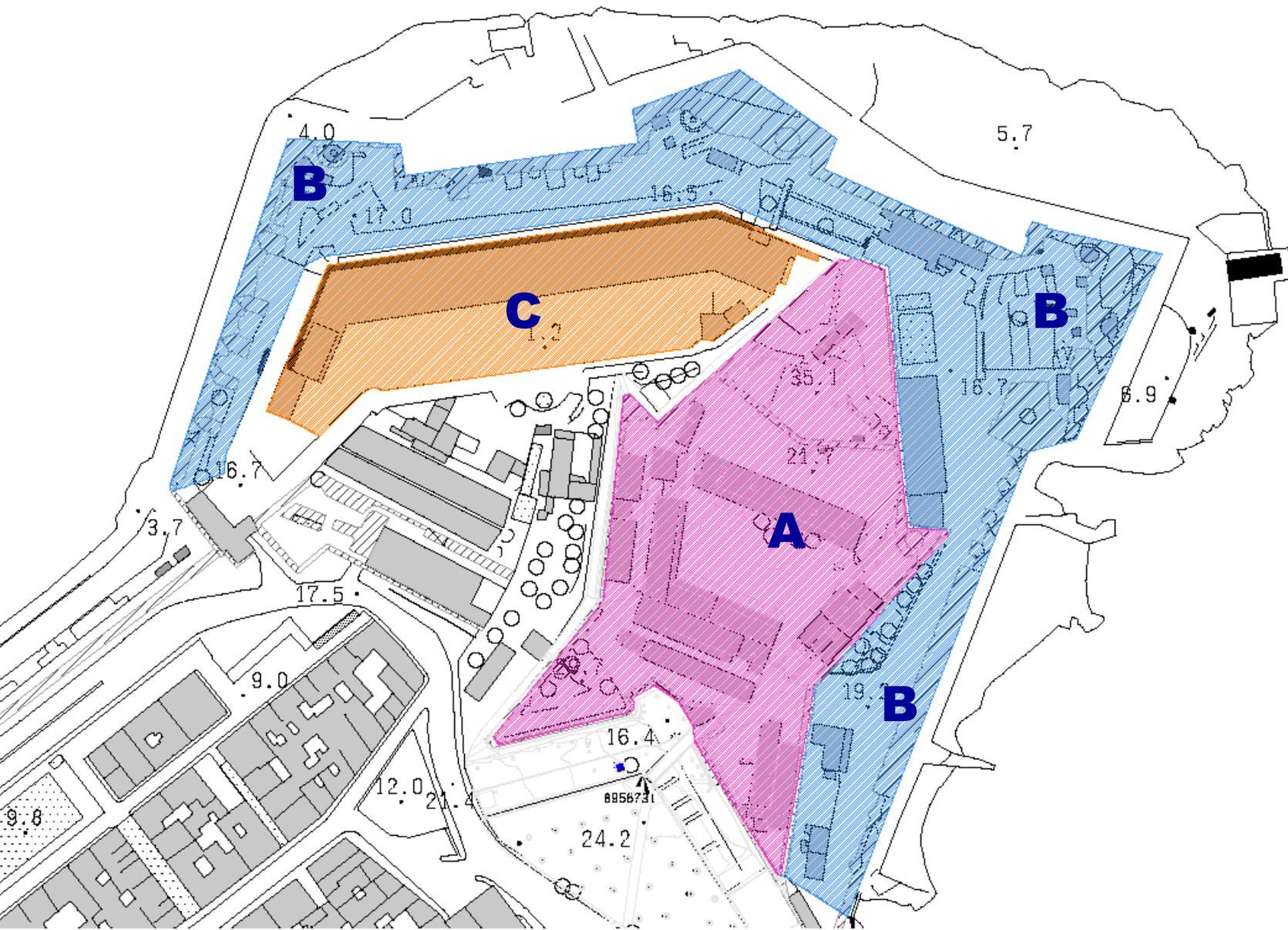
Source: Spiteri, Stephen (2001) Fortresses of the Knights



Source: Spiteri, Stephen (1996). British Military Architecture in Malta.



General view of the Fort St. Elmo fortification system: The site consists of a large number of relatively small buildings within the fort and outside it, as well as numerous open spaces.

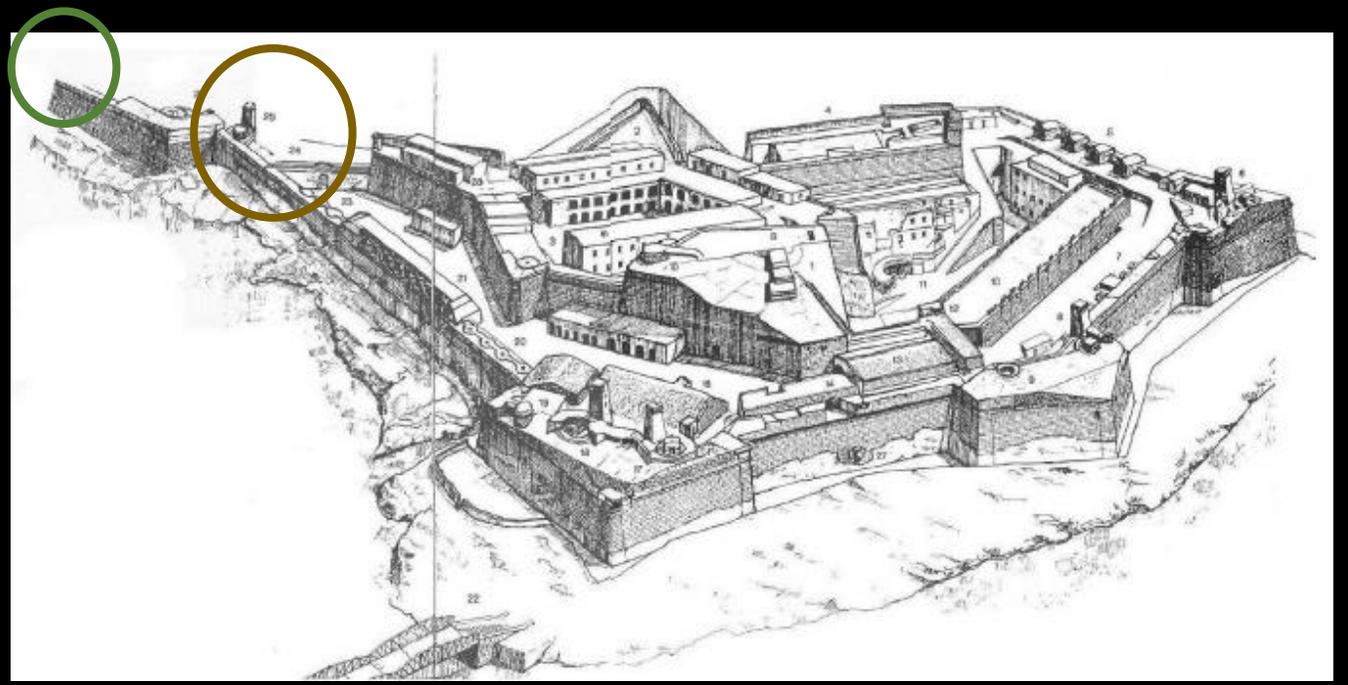


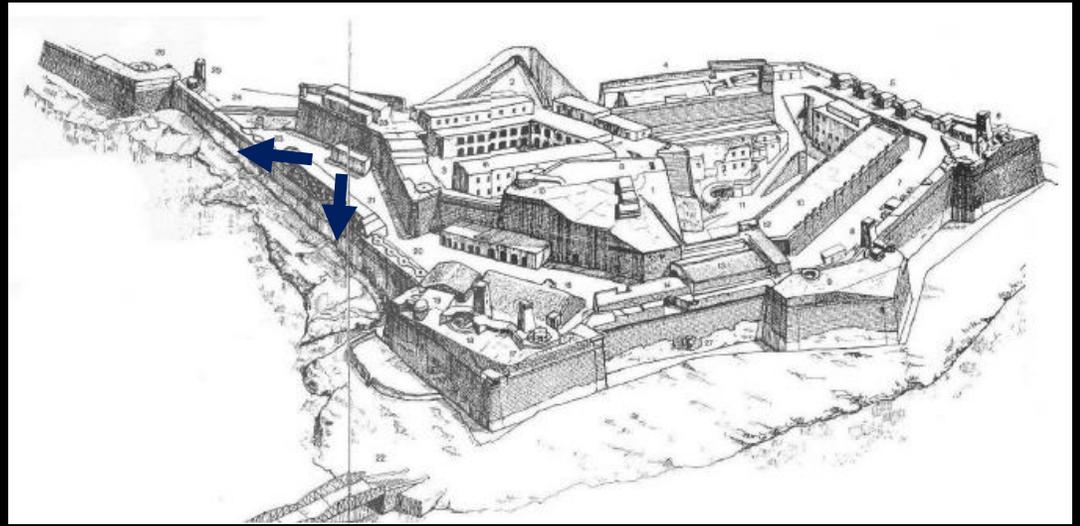
A. Fort St. Elmo

B. Seaward bastions surrounding Fort St. Elmo

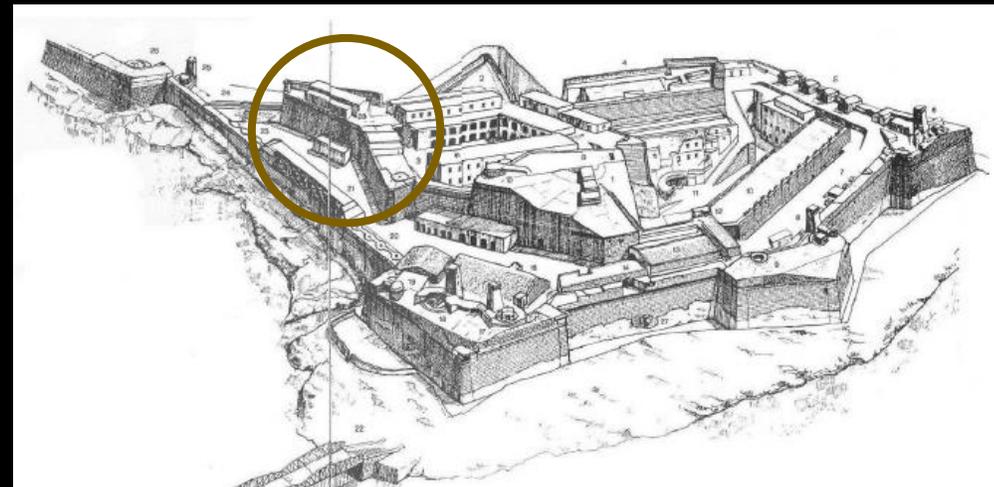
C. Lower St. Elmo

The Fort St. Elmo project consisted of A and B. C was not included.

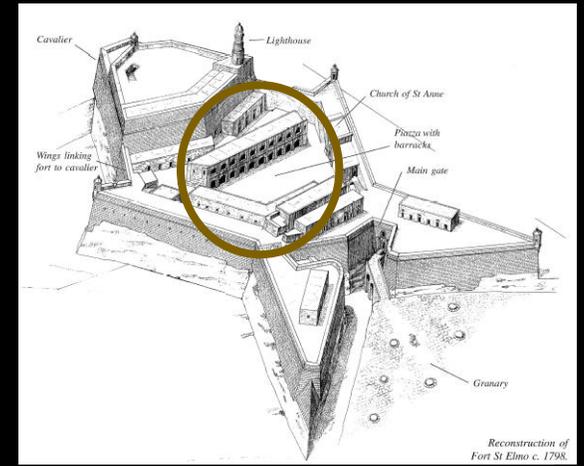
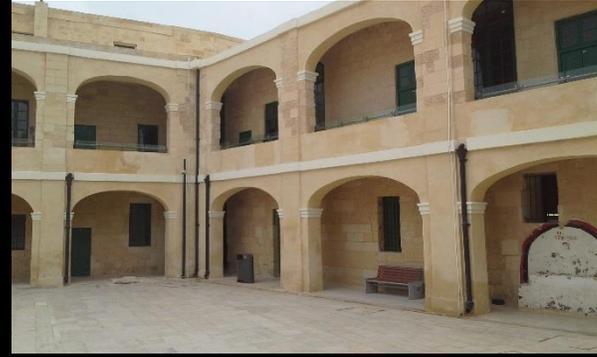




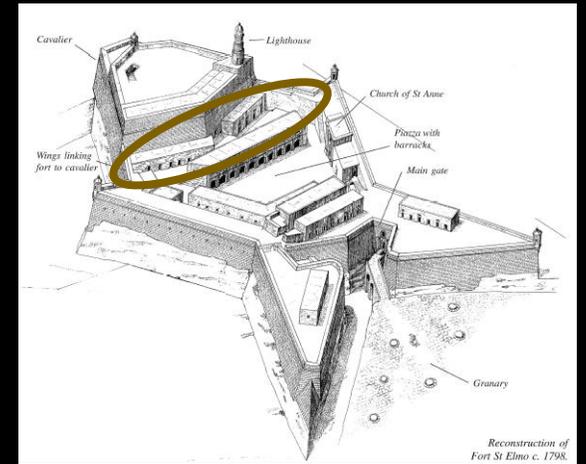
# The forecourt to Porta del Soccorso



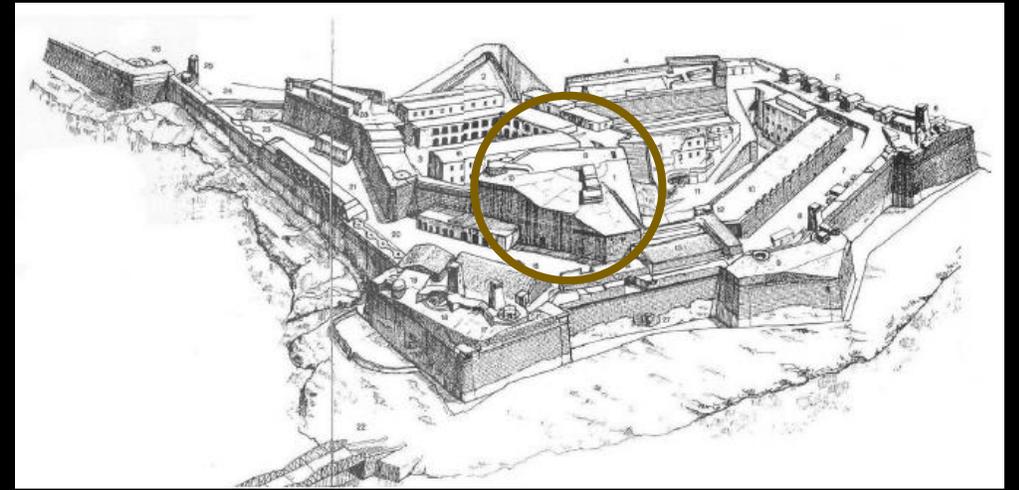
# The central parade ground of Fort St. Elmo



# The space between a barrack block and a cavalier

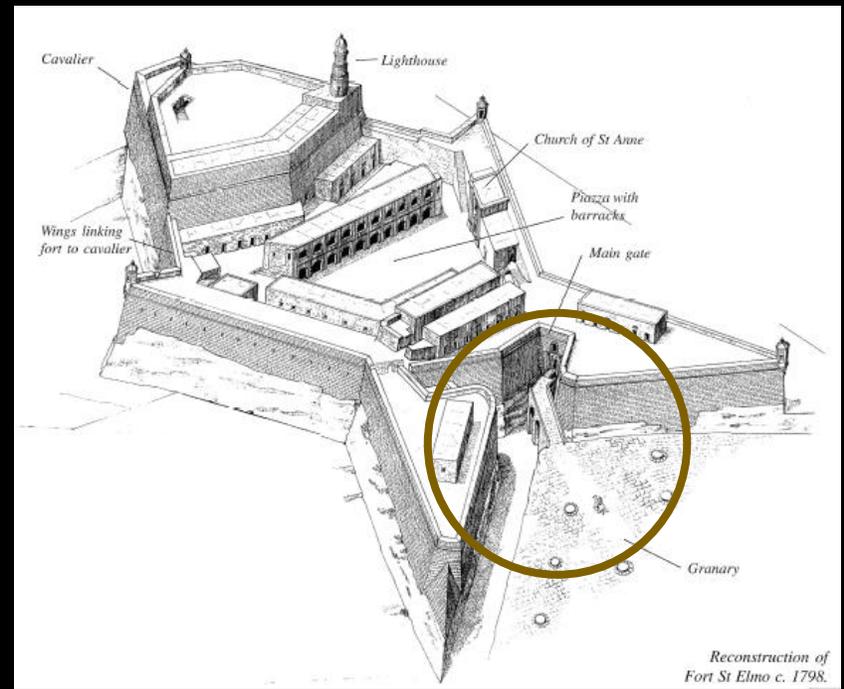


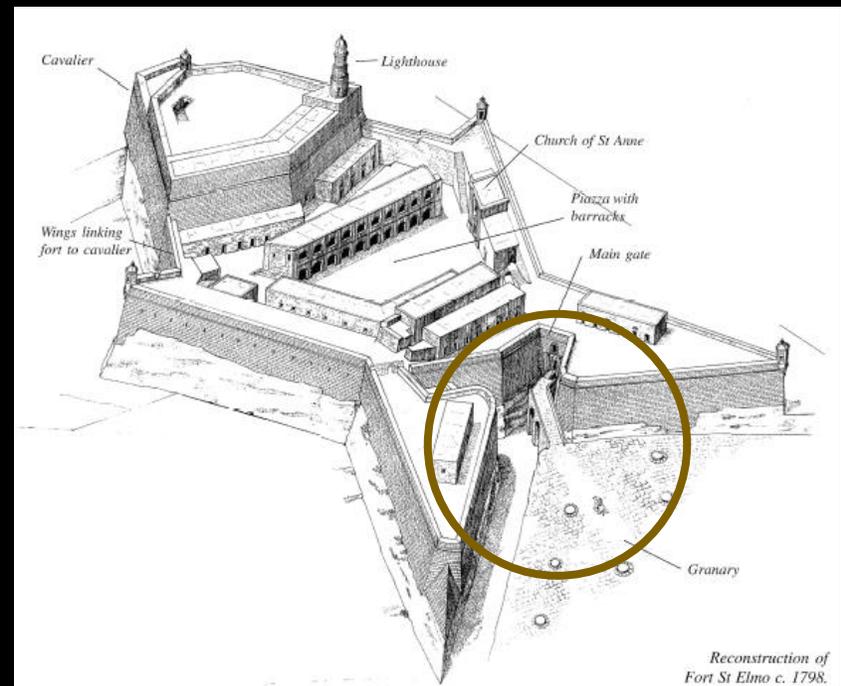
# The roof of the cavalier



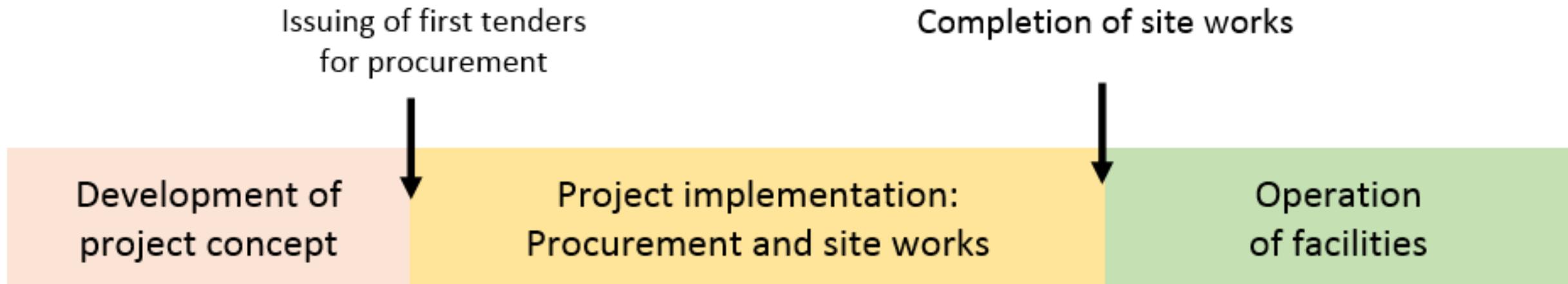
# The view from the roof of the cavalier







## The life of a project .....



## **Developing a project concept:**

Step 1: Understand the site

Step 2: Identify constraints and opportunities

Step 3: Decide on objectives and understand implications

Step 4: Take strategic decisions for the project, taking into account the specifics of the site, the parameters of the project and in line with the chosen objectives

Step 5: Work out and decided on project details, based on the strategic decision

## Step 1: Understanding the site

Fort St. Elmo is at the tip of Valletta, strategically located to guard entrance into both the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett harbour.

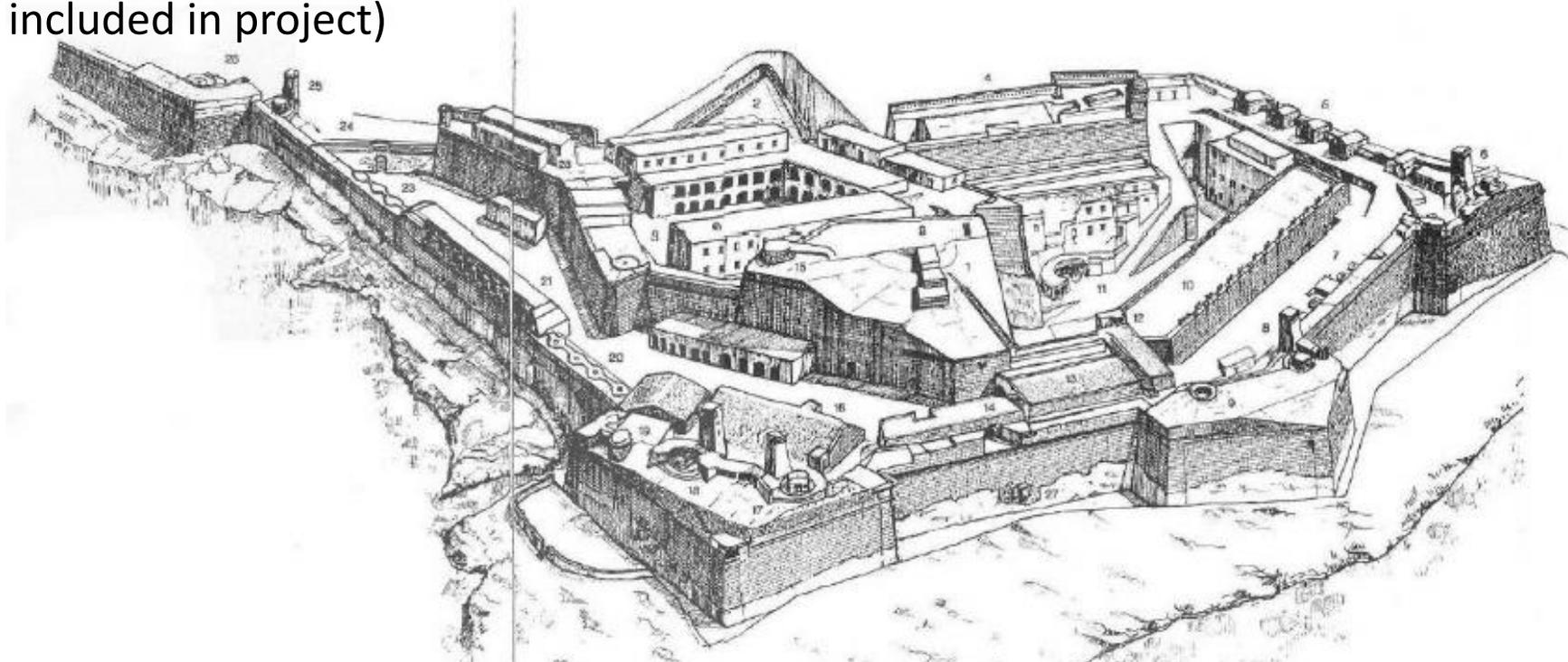
The historic significance of the site is immense. Its history is closely linked with that of Valletta and of Malta. It features in the two most significant events in Malta's history; the Great Siege in 1565 and Siege of Malta from 1940-1943 during World War II.



## Step 1: Understanding the site

What is referred to as Fort St. Elmo is in fact a complex system of fortifications  
St. Elmo fortification system consists of three parts

- Fort St. Elmo itself
- The bastions encircling the Fort
- Lower St. Elmo (not included in project)



## Step 1: Understanding the site

- Exposed to the elements.
- Numerous small buildings with relatively small internal spaces.
- Buildings spread out over a large area, resulting in many open spaces.
- All buildings and structure are in need of restoration, some more than others.



## Step 2: Identifying constraints and opportunities

### Constraints

- Very large site and hence high cost of restoration
- Substantial internal spaces, but fragmented in many buildings
- Inadvisable to alter historic structure or add new buildings, because of planning constraints and costs



## Step 2: Identifying constraints and opportunities

### Opportunities

- exceptional views of both the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbours.
- arguably the most important historic site in Malta
- includes narratives of two exceptional events in Malta's and Europe's history
- within walking distance to Valletta centre (1.2 million tourists yearly)
- open spaces with unique heritage backdrop



### Step 3: Decide on objectives and understand implications

- To restore and bring back to life historic buildings and structures and to do so in a manner which is financially sustainable.
- To convert what was previously a war machine into a machine for tourism, leisure, education and the appreciation of heritage.
- To enhance Malta's attractiveness as a tourism destination and also to reduce seasonality.

## Step 4: Take strategic decisions for the project

Take strategic decisions for the project, taking into account the specifics of the site, the parameters of the project and in line with the chosen objectives.

- to have two primary uses for the site namely a **museum** and a **ramparts walk**.
- The **museum** would be focused in the internal spaces of the buildings with different buildings having different themes.
- The **ramparts walk** would make use of the external spaces. This would stretch along the entire length of the bastions that surround the fort.

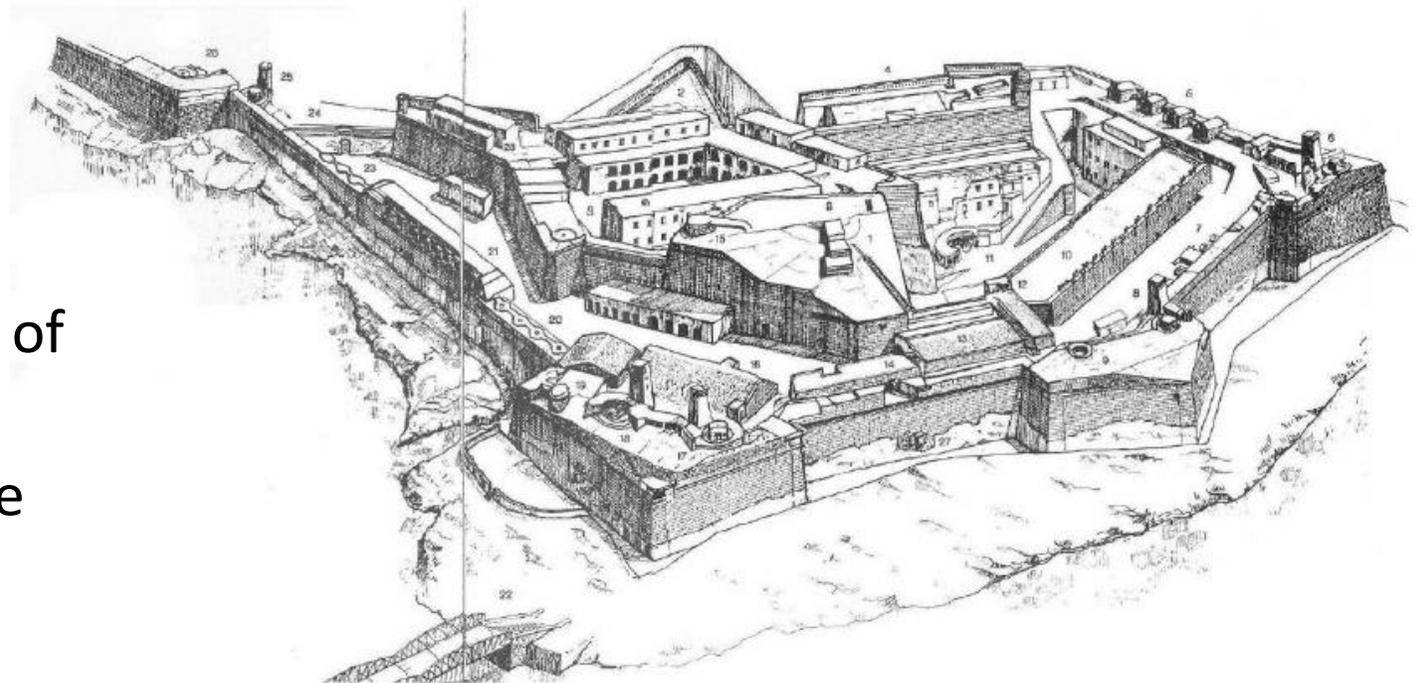


Figure 51. Drawing by Stephen Spiteri showing the entire Fort St. Elmo complex as it appeared during the Second World War. (Source: S

## Step 4: Take strategic decisions for the project

- to avoid alterations, extensions or demolitions of the historic structures. No new structures were to be proposed.
- all the site will be managed by Heritage Malta. Heritage Malta is the agency that operates government-owned museums.

## Step 5: Work out and decided on project details

Other facilities as decided upon by project team and as committed in the ERDF funding application:

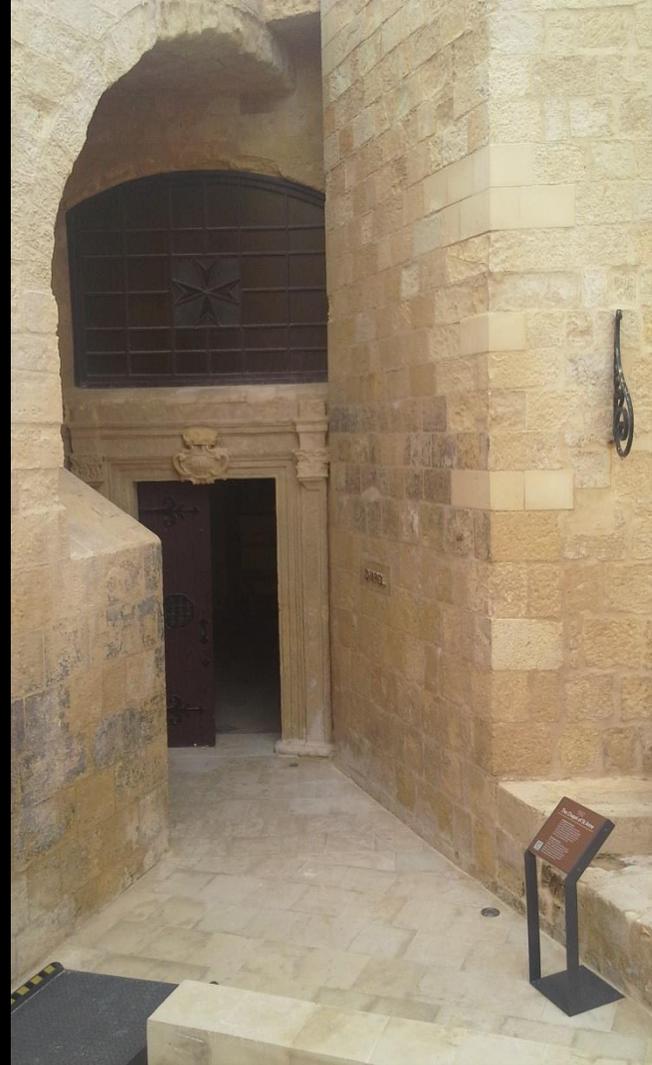
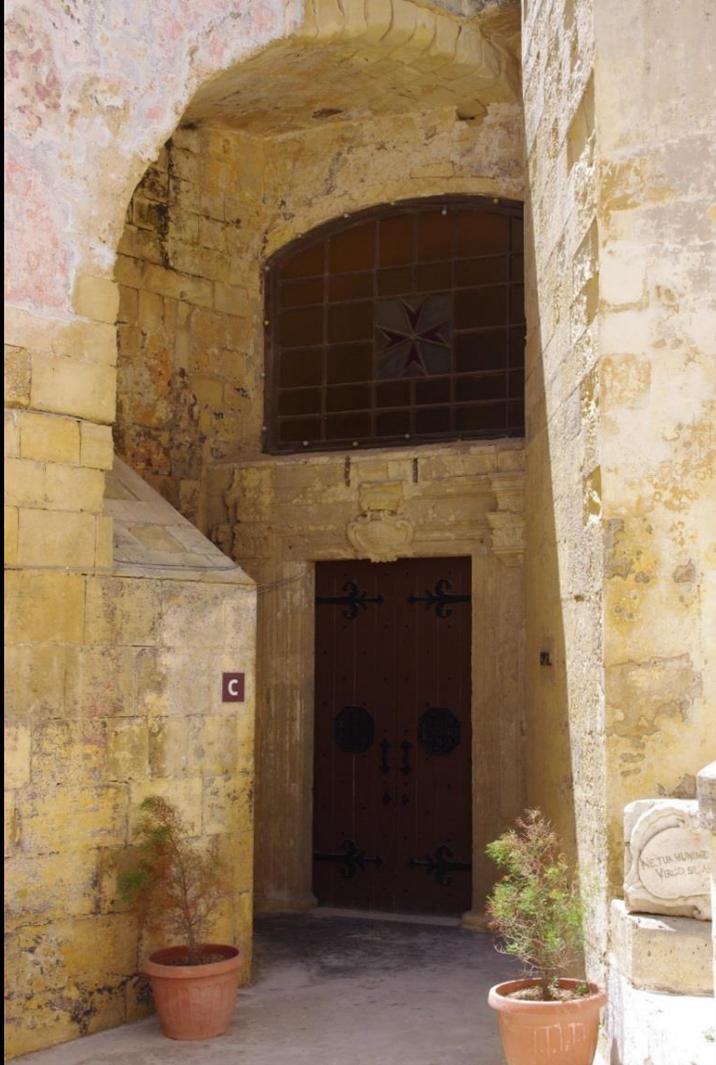
- An orientation room
- Existing church on central parade ground to be used for temporary exhibitions and small musical performances.
- Existing chapel to continue current use for religious services.
- Two catering facilities. One the ground floor adjoining the central piazza. A second at an upper level of the Fort. Each will have external tables and chairs.
- Small retail outlets
- Tourist information office.
- Space along the Ramparts Walk to be used for occasional open air market of, say, traditional crafts or books.
- An office for National War Museum Association.
- Parking for energy efficient small vehicles
- Public conveniences











## **Lessons learnt – developing project concepts for historic sites and buildings**

1. Have a single agency responsible for project concept development and implementation.
2. Set up a project team with the involvement of different stakeholders
3. Involve end user in developing the project concept.
4. Be clear early on what you want to achieve with the project
5. Identify a use for the site that is financially viable i.e. that will generate enough income to sustain maintenance
6. Ensure that what you propose is well within parameters of planning regulations.
7. Consider carefully transport issues. How will people get to your site?
8. Do not look at the site in isolation. Consider it part of a larger urban area.
9. Public participation at the project concept stage is advisable, if anything to develop a sense of ownership of the community to the project.
10. Be wary of prima-donna architects and of narrow corporate interests.



**Thank you for your attention**

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Restoration involves making interventions at various scale and levels of intensity which are determined by the physical condition, causes of deterioration and anticipated future environment of the cultural property under treatment.

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