



The view inside the model of Floriana parish church



A 100-year-model of a niche worked in quilling

IT'S A GREAT PRIVILEGE FOR THE CLUB TO OWN SOME LUCKY SURVIVORS OF PRE-WAR CHURCH MODELS WHOSE OWNERS LOVINGLY TOOK THEM WITH THEM TO SAFER AREAS AWAY FROM THE BOMBING

and the Floriana parish church were rebuilt. I used to like to observe the façade of our beloved church and when I became a pensioner, I decided to build an exact model of it. I chose to construct it out of used matchsticks. Day after day, I worked on my model, constantly taking measurements and copying the details of the façade.”

When Joseph's friends, most of whom worked at the Dockyard, got to know what he was doing, they started to collect used matchsticks for him, and when he exhibited the first version of the model to the public, matchsticks began to arrive from strangers in different parts of Malta. “I had so many in hand that I ended up doing all the parish church inside out, until eventually the model measured two metres by two metres with a height of 1.5 metres,” he smiled.

“People were totally mesmerised by my model and many, including several tourists, became emotional and even gave me a hug when they noticed all the details and work that I had put into my work. It was during one of the exhibitions that some officials from the Guinness Book of Records came to study and measure my model. They immediately informed me that I had succeeded in breaking the record of the



Simon Mercieca with his church model

previous matchstick model record holder. Soon a certificate arrived together with my inclusion in the Guinness Book of Records.”

Spiritedly Joseph showed me his model church displayed on the pages of this famous book. It was obvious that he felt great satisfaction that his hard work which took so many years had been given such an acknowledgement.

“Ultimately this model became part of my life as I have dedicated much of my love and my time to it. In return it gave me happiness as I saw people admiring it and appreciating my skill and patience. I have taken good care of it all along these years and my final wish is to donate it to our National Museum of Ethnography where it can be enjoyed by the public, who can perhaps remember me and also become more aware of this ancient cultural tradition. I feel sad that I have to leave it behind but one cannot live forever, can he?”>

Guinness Book of Records for his church model made out of more than three million matchsticks!

I met Joseph, now 93, in his son's home in Attard. Sitting cosily by his pet bird singing cheerfully at his side, Joseph told me the story of the model. “I was an electrician by trade but during the war I was employed as a soldier. I remember a particular day vividly when I was at work in Delimara and came to know that Floriana, where I lived, had just been badly hit by bomb attacks. I was desperate to see whether my family was safe and whether our house was damaged, and my superior allowed me to leave. I walked to Floriana and found that, luckily, both my family and my house were safe. The enemy used to target his attacks using Floriana parish church as a landmark. We lived nearby and one day our house did fall victim to these attacks, as did the church.

“Years passed and both our houses