

**THE ORATORY,  
CHOIR, SACRISTY,  
HALL AND SIDE PARVIS  
OF ST PUBLIUS  
PARISH CHURCH  
IN FLORIANA**

**METHOD STATEMENT FOR THE  
RESTORATION OF THE FACADES**

**JUNE 2020**

**Perit Mark Azzopardi  
B.E.&A., M.Sc.**

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**RESTORATION METHOD STATEMENT FOR FACADES OF  
ANCILLARY FACILITIES WITH ST PUBLIUS PARISH CHURCH IN FLORIANA**

## **2. General Information**

**Name and address of client:** Fr Charles Cini, 4 Sarria Road, Floriana

**Property address:** Various ancillary facilities accessible from St Thomas Street and St Publius Street.

**Date of inspection:** May 2020.

**Weather:** Fine.

**Limits to the inspection:** Visual.

**Ownership:** Floriana Parish.

## **3. Historical Context**

There were originally in the area where Floriana now stands two churches, and that of the Immaculate Conception (Sarria) originally built in 1585 and that of San Kalcidonju in 1740. The church of tad-Duluri Duluri in tal-Pieta' built in 1590 served as Vice-Parish as from 1721. Grandmaster Manoel de Vilhena sought the elevation of Sarria church to a parish, this being run by the Order and not answerable to the bishop of Malta. It was eventually decided to build a new church and following the insistence of Dun Giuseppe Guicciardi, parish priest of St Paul in Valletta, plans were drawn up by Francesco Marandon, presented to the inquisitor in 1728 and the first stone being laid in 1733. Construction progressed intermittingly and slowly and the sacraments were administered from the sacristy as from 1736. It was only in 1768 that the new church was blessed and the relics of St Publius brought to the church.

It was immediately felt that the church was too small to administer for the needs of the population of Floriana and in 1771 the main façade was dismantled and the nave lengthened. The new façade now included two bell towers. A dome was added later. The new church became Vice-parish to that of St Paul in Valletta in 1776 and a parish in its own right in 1844.

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**Plate 2: The old church of St Publius (late 1860s).**



**Plate 3: The old church of St Publius (undated).**



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**Plate 4: The church from the rear as represented in 1792 for the funeral of Admiral Angelo Emo.**

As the population of Floriana continued to increase it was decided to enlarge the church again in 1856, this time with the addition of two naves and side chapels on either side. Works continued until 1861 when the new naves were linked to the original church. The oratory of the Confraternity of St Publius was built in 1861 and works on the remodelling of the façade to the design of Nikola Zammit were started in 1885. The façade was completed in 1890, the bell towers in 1889 and 1892.

The façade of the Church of St. Publius consists of a neoclassical portico topped by a triangular pediment, flanked by a bell tower on either side. A statue of Christ the King stands on the top of the façade.

The church suffered extensive damages during the Second world War when in 28th April 1942 when the church was hit and sixteen persons killed. The dome destroyed and the façade severely damaged. These damages started being repaired on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1944 under the direction of Gustav Vincenti and completed by 10<sup>th</sup> December 1944.

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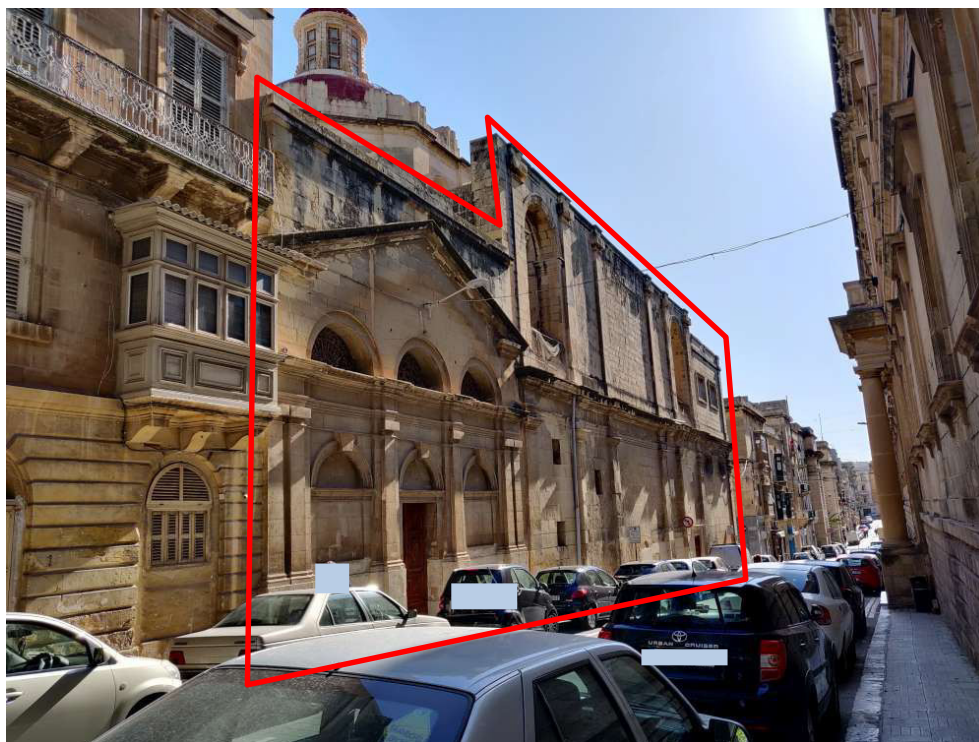


**Plate 5: The church of St Publius after the war.**

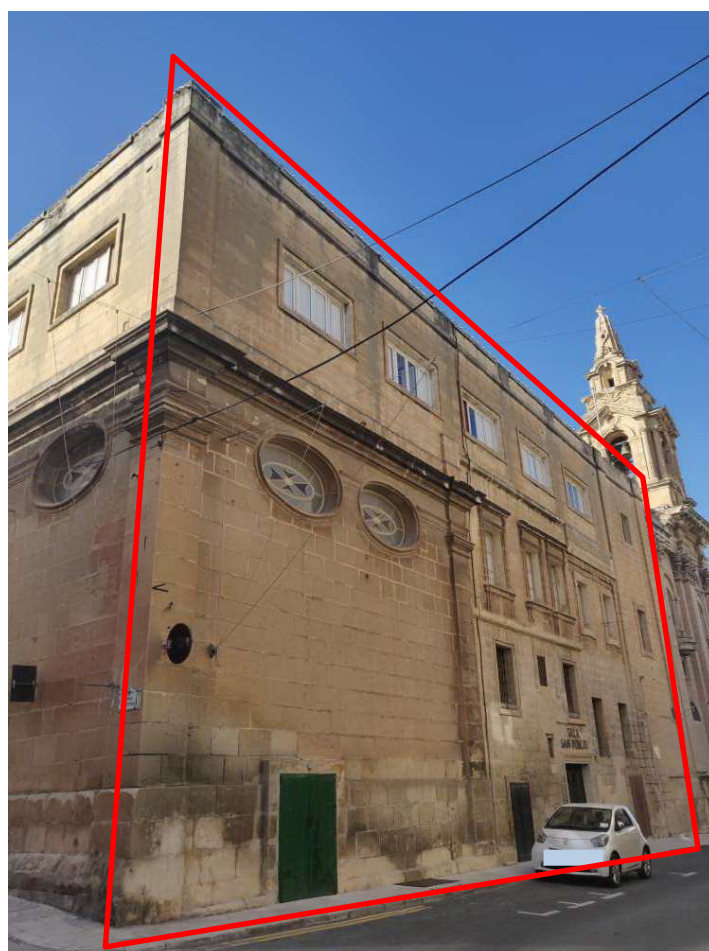
The church was scheduled as a Grade 1 monument in August 2011 as per Government Notice 782.

The areas of interest for this method statement are those along the back in St Thomas Street and along the south east side, that along St Publius Street. These areas have been much altered over the years. Along St Thomas Street is the back elevation of the choir itself, with two arches overlooking the lower roof on either side of the choir. To one side, that to the west, is the 19<sup>th</sup> century oratory with its separate access and neoclassical temple like façade crowned with a triangular pediment. On the other side, that at the corner with St Publius Street is the sacristy, located at ground floor level and again with its separate access. Overlying this sacristy and other small buildings along St Publius Street is the parish hall, a construction dating to the 1960s.

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**Plate 6: The elevation on St Thomas Street.**



**Plate 7: The elevation on St Publius Street.**



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**Plate 8: The elevation and balustrade on St Publius Street.**

The corner of these two streets has unfortunately been the scene of the arson on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2019 of the historic monumental arch dating to 1899 and used as part of the street decorations set up to celebrate the feast of St Publius.



**Plate 9: The arch and the fire of the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2019.**



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**Plate 10: The situation after the fire.**

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#### **4. Description**

**Description of façade:** The facades are a combination of many styles due to the various accretions to the building over the years. The choir and the sacristy are clearly one design, to which was added to the oratory façade, part of the works carried out in the neo-classical grammar in the late nineteenth century. The façade on St Publius Street is much more diverse, with the sacristy abutting two other diverse facades all being superimposed with an extension carried out in the 1960's. A wide opening has been introduced to give access to the hall above.

**Accommodation:** The relative section of the building forms part of the church itself and also houses ancillary spaces used for religious purposes.

**Outbuildings and parking:** Not applicable.

**Approximate age:** The building dates to the eighteenth and nineteenth century with alterations being carried out since particularly in the 1960s.

**Orientation:** The façades face the south west and south east.

**Location and amenities:** The premises and the area enjoy all the modern amenities.

**Summary of construction:** The original structure is built of thick walls of globigerina stone blocks.

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### **5. The Facade**

A visual and photographic inspection of the building has been undertaken to ascertain and record the condition of the fabric. While parts of these façades are in a relatively good state of repair, that of the choir is not and exhibits soiling on the lower levels, and deteriorated stonework and substantial biological growth on the upper levels. There are signs of previous attempts to carry out restoration works in the past and those of the fire of April 2019. The balustrade is in a poor state of repair due to rising damp with a number of balusters are slightly or even highly deteriorated and in need of repair or substitution. The actual deterioration comprises of:

- i) Biological growth on the areas of the facades that remain wet for longer periods of time. These are concentrated mostly on the upper parts of the building and along the cornices.



**Plate 11: Biological growth on the upper part of the elevation and on the cornice.**

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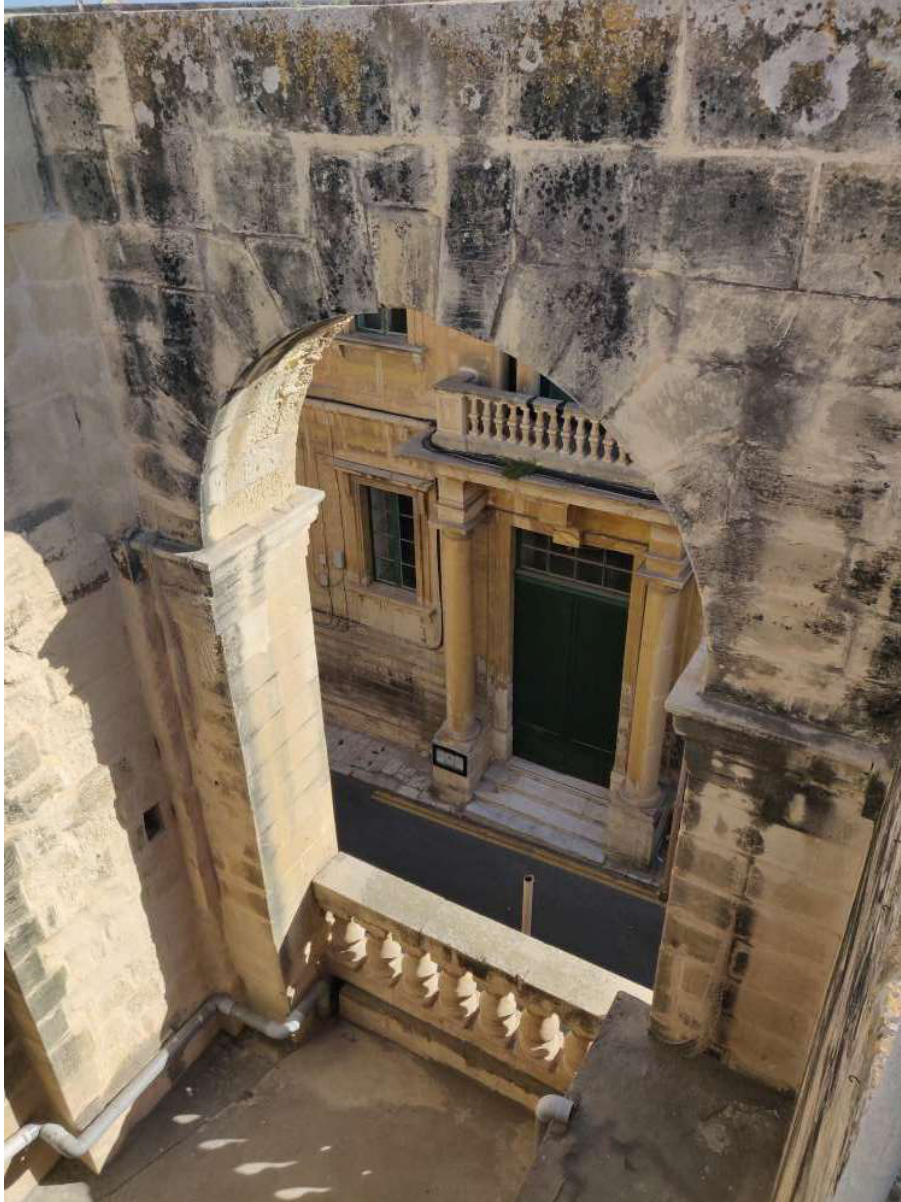
**Plate 12: Biological growth on the upper part of the elevation and on the cornice.**



**Plate 13: Biological growth on the upper part of the elevation and on the cornice.**



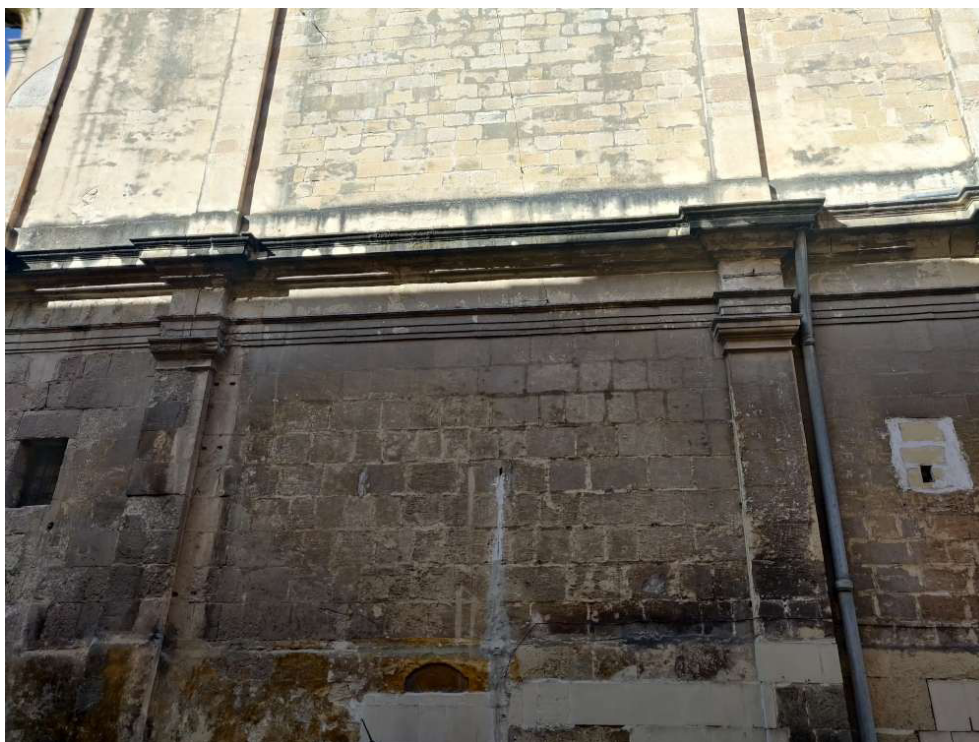
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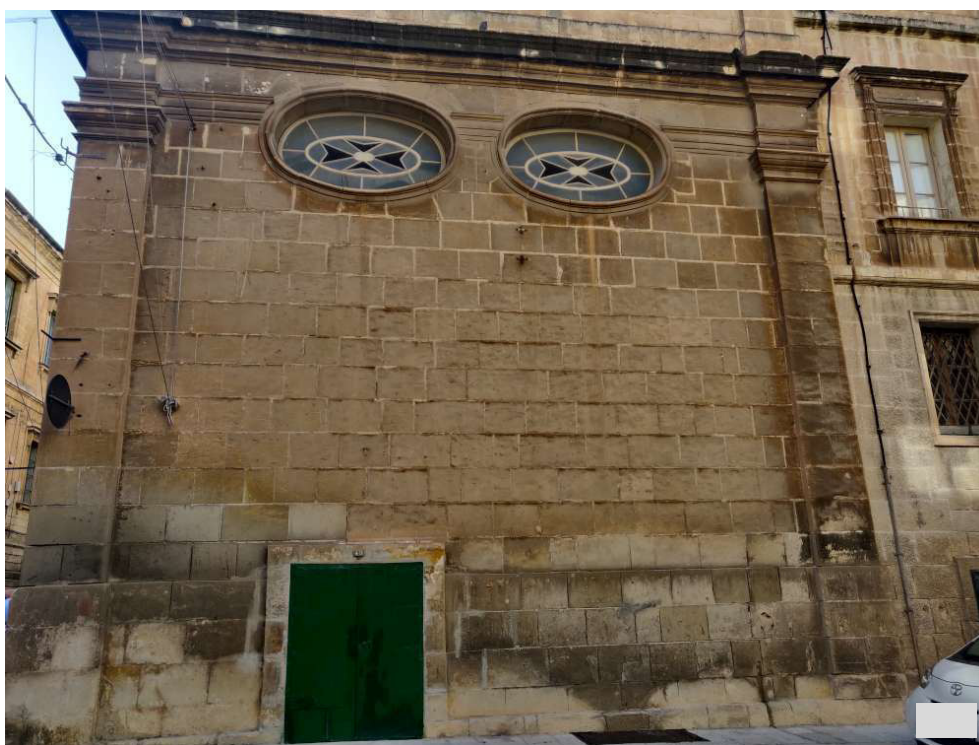
**Plate 14: Biological growth on the arches overlooking St Thomas Street.**

- ii) Areas of black crust in those areas sheltered from the rain, particularly the main cornice at roof level and recessed areas. Areas of soiling noted particularly along St Thomas Street and the sacristy façade on St Publius Street.

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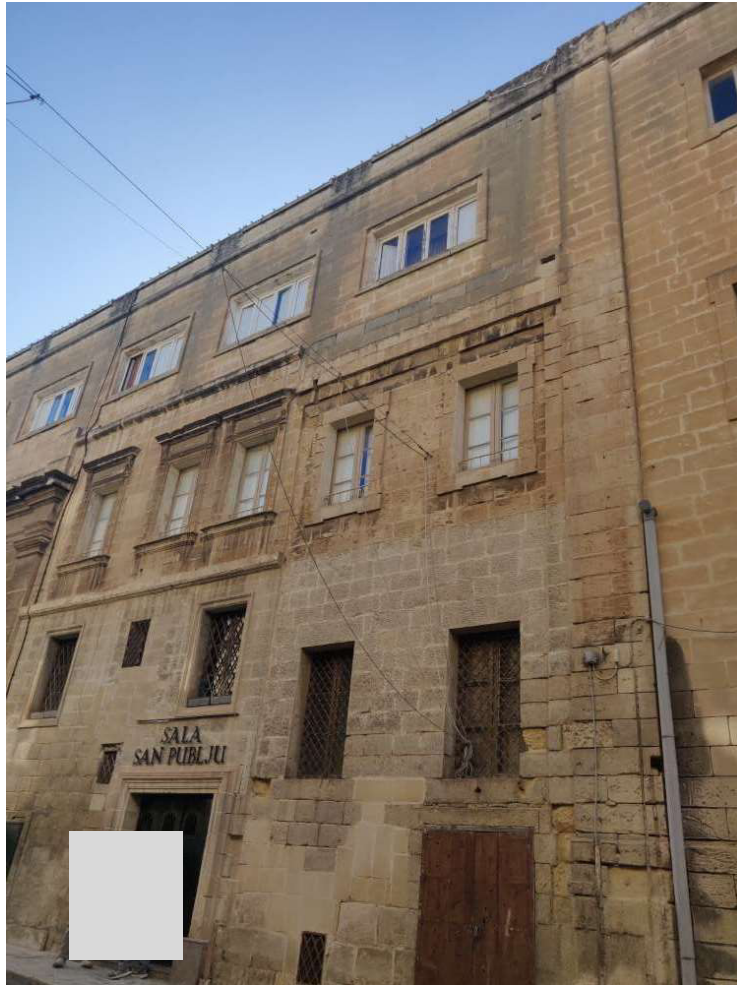
**Plate 15: Soiling on choir façade on St Thomas Street.**



**Plate 16: Soiling on sacristy façade on St Publius Street.**



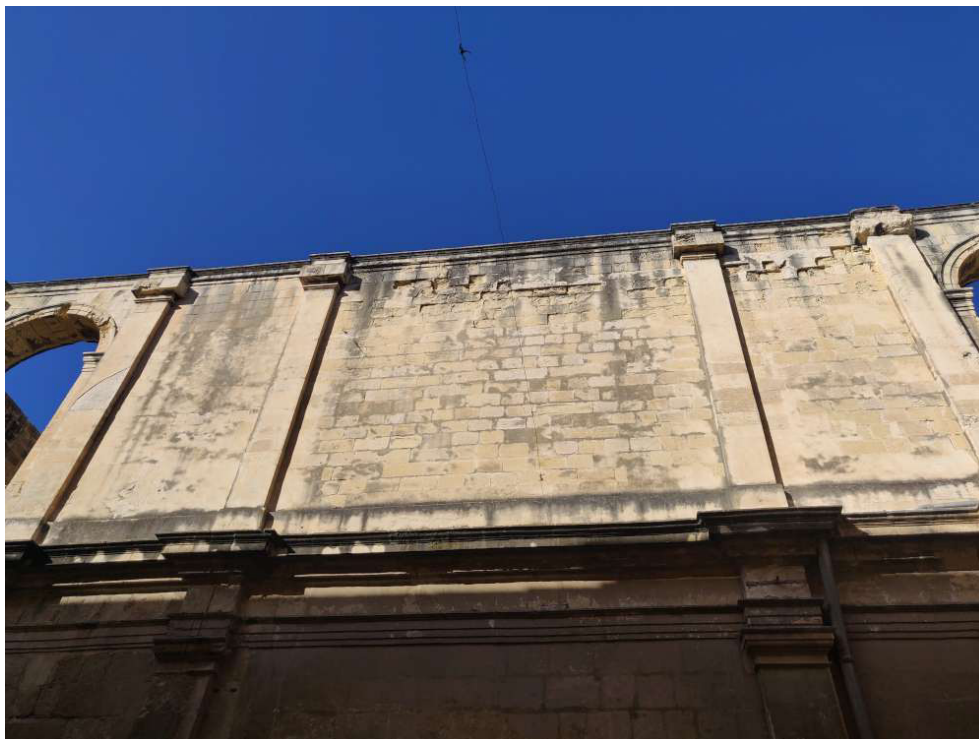
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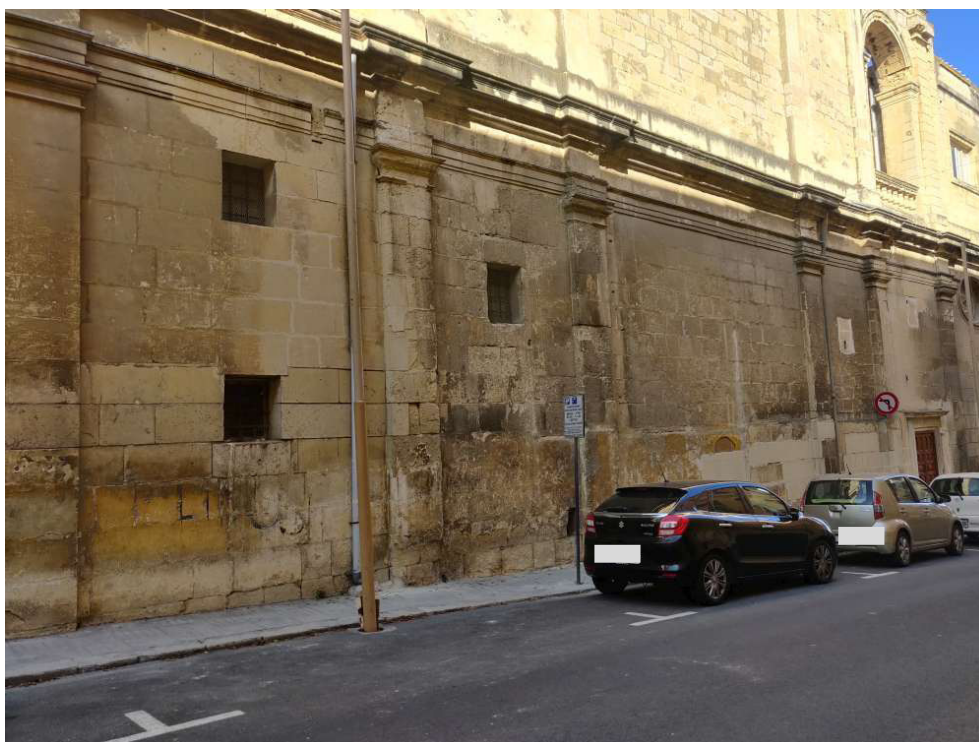
**Plate 17: Soiling on the façade on St Publius Street.**

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- iii) Some areas of powdering, alveolar weathering and flaking of the external masonry on the façade of the building, particularly the choir façade in St Thomas Street and the balustrade in St Publius Street.



**Plate 18: Flaking of the upper section of the choir façade on St Thomas Street.**



**Plate 19: Powdering and loss of material from the façade on St Thomas Street.**



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**Plate 20: Loss of material from the balustrade along St Publius Street.**



**Plate 21: Loss of material from the balustrade along St Publius Street.**

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**Plate 22: Loss of material from the balustrade along St Publius Street.**

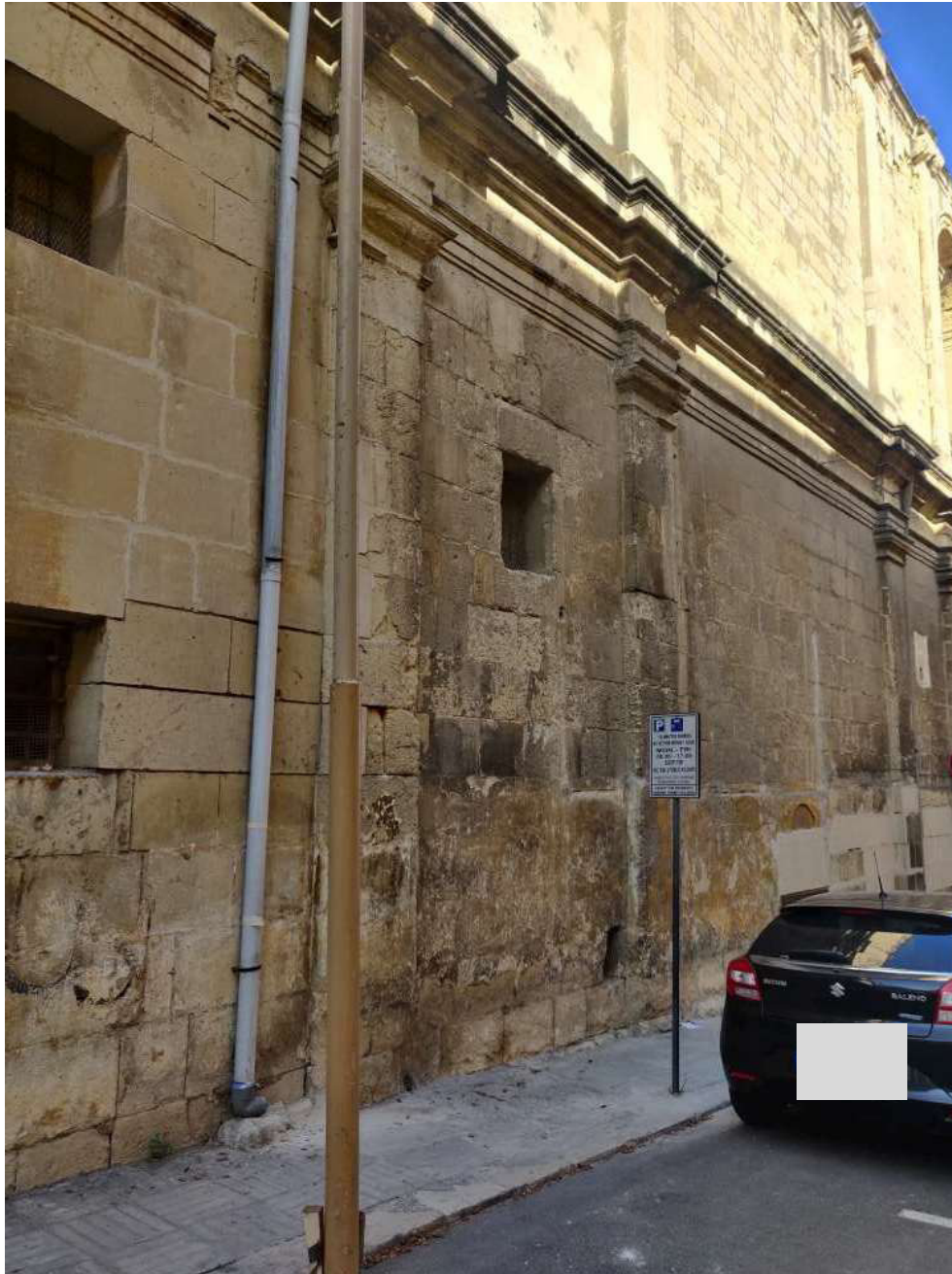
- iv) Several wires and cables and drain pipes.



**Plate 23: Wires and drain pipe in St Publius Street.**



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**Plate 24: Plastic pipework in St Thomas Street.**

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- v) An area of powdering, open joints and biological growth traced back to a leaking drain pipe.



**Plate 25: Leaking drain pipe in St Publius Street.**



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- vi) Area of previous interventions, particularly areas of replacement stone and areas of hacking. Areas of plastering and washes also identified.

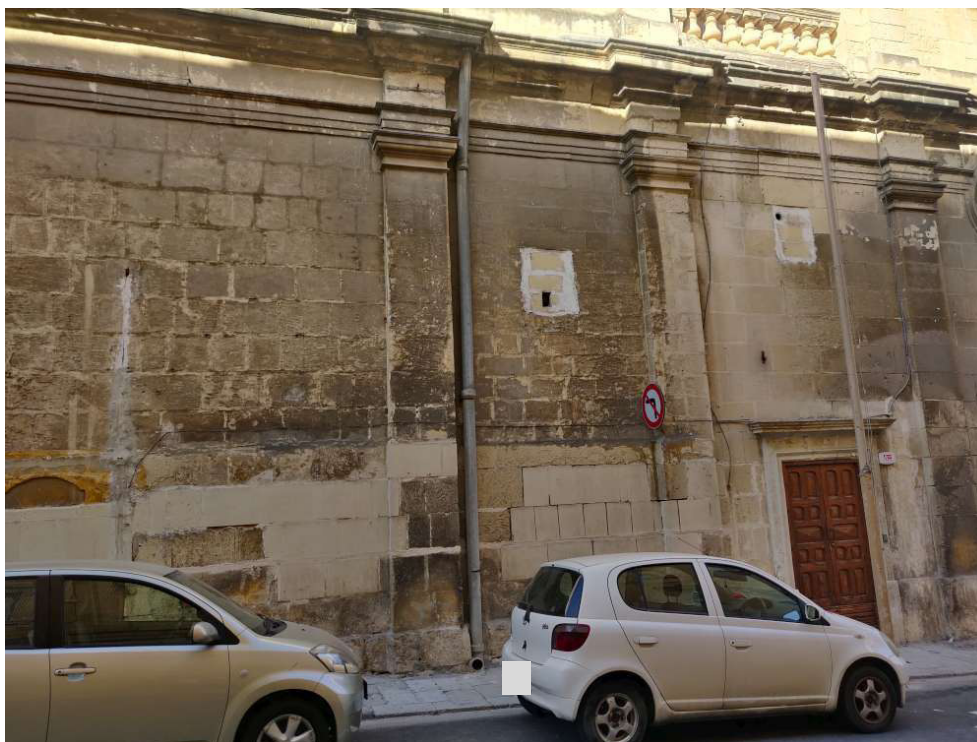


**Plate 26: Plastering in St Thomas Street.**



**Plate 27: Washes and plastering in St Thomas Street.**

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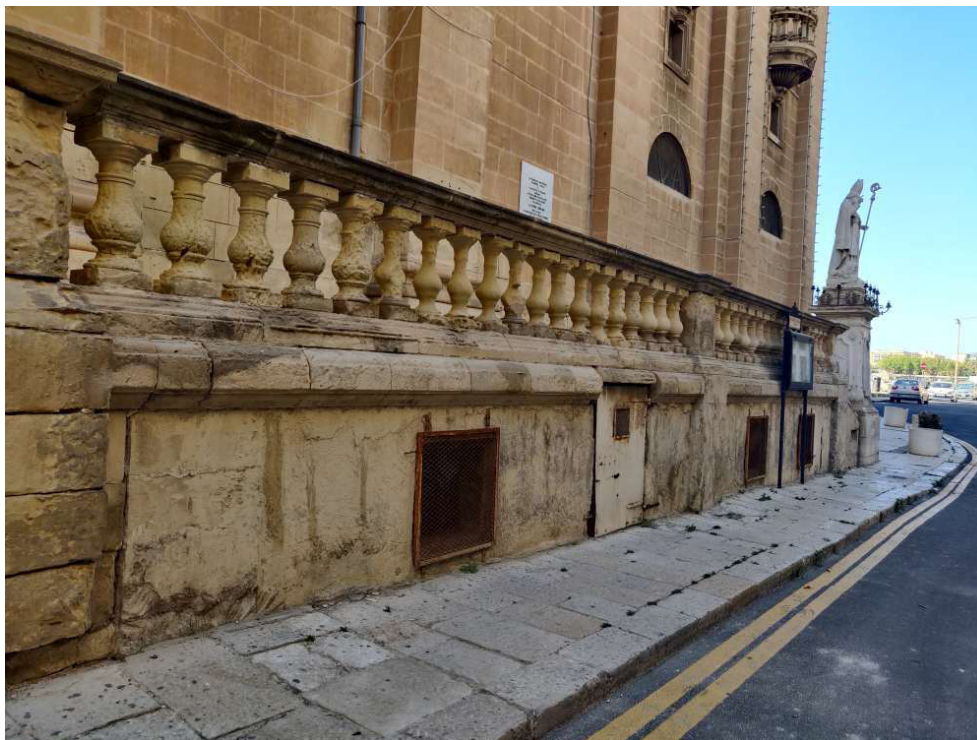
**Plate 28: Previous interventions in St Thomas Street using stone.**



**Plate 29: Hacking of the façade and previous interventions in St Publius Street using stone.**

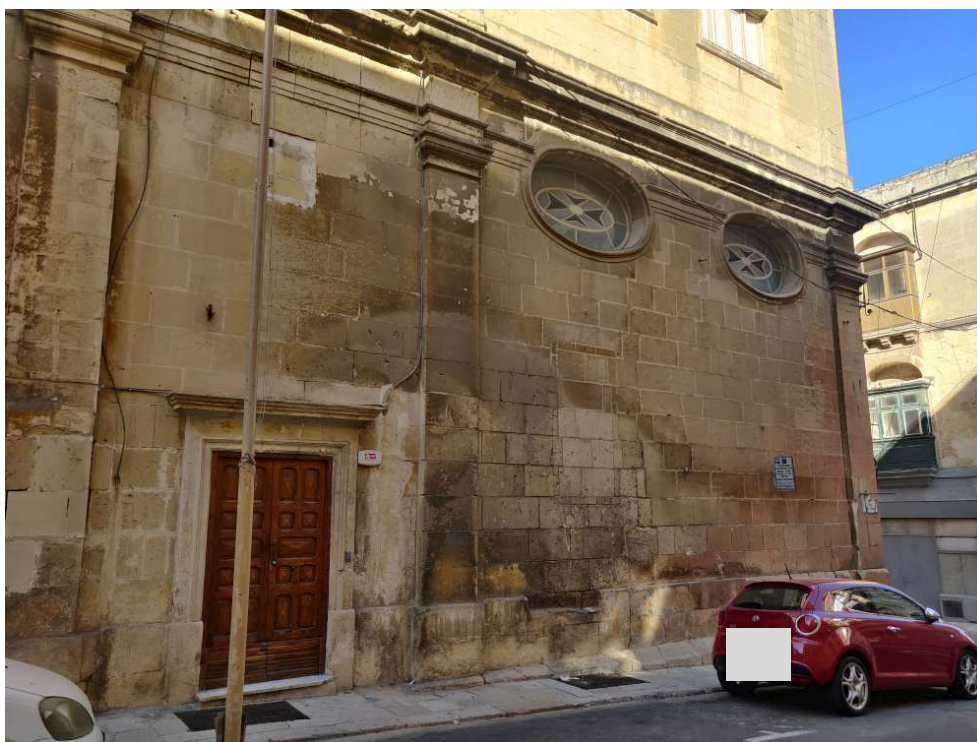


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**Plate 30: Plastering of the low wall along St Publius Street.**

- vii) Area of discoloration due to fire, together with the opening of the joints and flaking of the arises due to the heat of the fire.



**Plate 31: Discoloration of façade due to fire.**



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## **6. Method Statement**

Due to the nature of the damage, it is being proposed that conservation works on these façades be carried out as follows:

- i) All unwanted metal fixtures, such as nails, hooks, electricity brackets, metal conduits, *etc.* and any extra wires, plastic or asbestos pipes and drains will be carefully removed. Existing drains will be replaced with cast iron ones.
- ii) Pre-pointing will be carried out on all open mortar joints on the facades, using a lime-based mix, to eliminate any damage caused by infiltration of water during the cleaning works.
- iii) The biological patina is to be retained. Should the application of a biocide be considered, it will be proposed for the consent of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, together with reasons for its application. Should it be approved, the biological patina will be removed using a suitable biocide. The biocide will be applied in a dilute form by brush or spray and, following each application, will be washed down with water to remove any chemical residues.
- iv) The time gained patina is to be retained. Should cleaning methods other than soft dry brushing be considered, it will be proposed for the consent of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, together with reasons for its application. The facade will then be dry-brushed, using a nylon brush, to eliminate any loose material and deposits. Then it will be washed down using clean, deionised water.
- v) Cleaning will be focussed on those areas exhibiting black crust formation. In areas where hard crusts are present, such as underneath the cornices and protruding elements, nylon brushes will be used after softening of the deposits by means of water. If necessary, poultices will be applied to remove any remaining residue of black crust. No grit blasting will be used, but microblasting may be utilised as a last resort in areas of resilient crusts.

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- vi) For those areas where the stone is frail and extensive powdering is occurring, the use of consolidants may be considered. Should the use of consolidants be required, this will be proposed for the consent of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, together with reasons for its application. Such areas are to be first desalinated using poultices and then ethyl silicate based or ammonium oxalate consolidants applied by brush 'wet on wet' or by poulticing.
- vii) Any detached masonry would be reattached using stainless steel or carbon fibre pins/rods and lime injection mortars or epoxy injection resins. The same may apply to replacement stone.

Adequately sized holes are to be drilled down into the fabric of the walls, as well as in the corresponding part of the detached part. The holes are to be cleaned kept dry so that they can be filled the epoxy resin. The pins/rods are then inserted into the holes such that are at least 6mm away from the surface in the case of small diameter rods and 12mm in the case of larger diameters. The resulting holes are then to be filled in with a matching mortar.

In all cases of grouting, the stone surfaces are to be washed clean with de-ionised water. All cracks are to be sealed with the lime-based mortar to avoid the spilling of the injection mortar onto the stone surface. The injection mortar/resin will be then applied using a syringe.

- viii) The decaying/missing stonework will be repaired using plastic repair, based on a lime-based mix. A lime-based mortar mix will be used, reinforced if required using stainless steel or carbon fibre dowels. The mix will be applied in thin layers, using coarser aggregate in the initial layers if the repair is thick. For the final layers a finer aggregate will be used and these would be colour matched with the adjacent

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surfaces. The surface of the stone will be left clean and free from mortar and the repair works are to be kept humid as long as possible to assist curing.

- ix) If the need arises, any highly-deteriorated blocks of stone are to be replaced. This will be kept to a strict minimum. The decayed stonework is to be first removed. Attention must be made to protect the surrounding edges from damage and, should it be required, the surrounding masonry should be propped.

Replacement blocks of the same height as the original are to be selected such that course heights are matched, while a bedding of some 230mm is normally maintained. The same applied for any paving slabs which will be such to match the existing.

Should the replacement be that of a moulding, then a template from an adjacent moulding is taken such that the profile of the new stone is carved to match that original. All surfaces are to be finished manually and no machine finish will be permitted.

- x) On completion of the cleaning and stone repair, re-pointing works will be taken in hand. The process will involve:
- (a) Removal of existing loose mortar;
  - (b) Washing down;
  - (c) Re-pointing.

The existing pointing to all joints will be raked out to a depth of not less than 15mm. Where joints are defective to a greater depth, then all loose mortar is to be removed, irrespective of depth. This will be done utilising small mason hand tools, including small hacksaw blades and narrow screwdrivers. Special attention will be taken not to damage the arris of the stone, features, cornice bands, etc.



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Once the raking is complete the joints will be flushed with clean water to remove all loose material ready for pointing. One of the following mixes would be recommended for the pointing:

- (a) 1part hydraulic lime + 3 parts sand with stone dust/brick dust/terre d'ombra as colour additive;
- (b) 1part slaked lime + 1part brick dust + 3 parts sand with an addition of stone dust.

Mixing of pointing mortar will be done by means of gauging vessels to ensure consistency of the mix at all times. The pointing will be then completed by introducing the mortar to the joints using mason trowels. The joints will be filled with mortar to ensure that no voids are left within any one section of the pointing works. Where joints are deeper than 20mm the mortar will be applied in two separate operations, one to back out the joint and the other to complete the point to a smooth stone finish.

- xi) Finally, the timber apertures will be sanded down and repainted, was will the metal railings. Should the paint colour of the apertures be modified, then the colour is to be in accordance with DC 15 Guidelines Clause G.52.
- xii) The restored fabric is to be washed with clean water and then allowed to dry. Should it be necessary a velatura (limewash) will be applied as a protective/finishing coat at the end of the works, subject to consent by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. The limewash is to be produced from lime putty and water, and this it to be sieved into a bucket to avoid any lumps. Pigments may be added and it is then applied by brush as thinly and evenly as possible. The limewash in the containers is to be stirred constantly to ensure an even distribution of lime and pigment.

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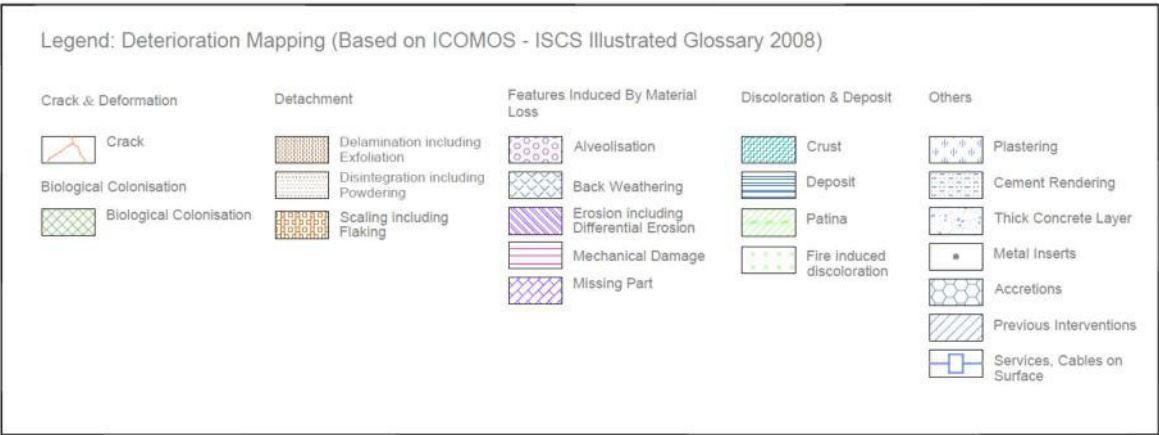
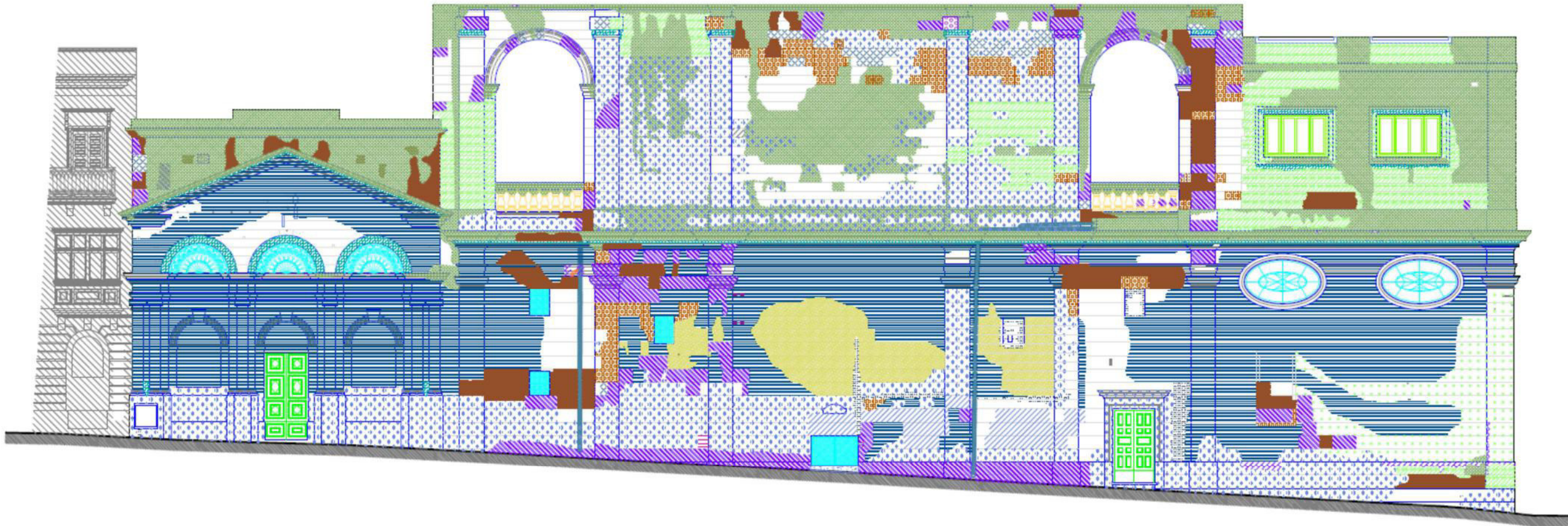


Plate 32: Deterioration mapping for elevation on St Thomas Street.



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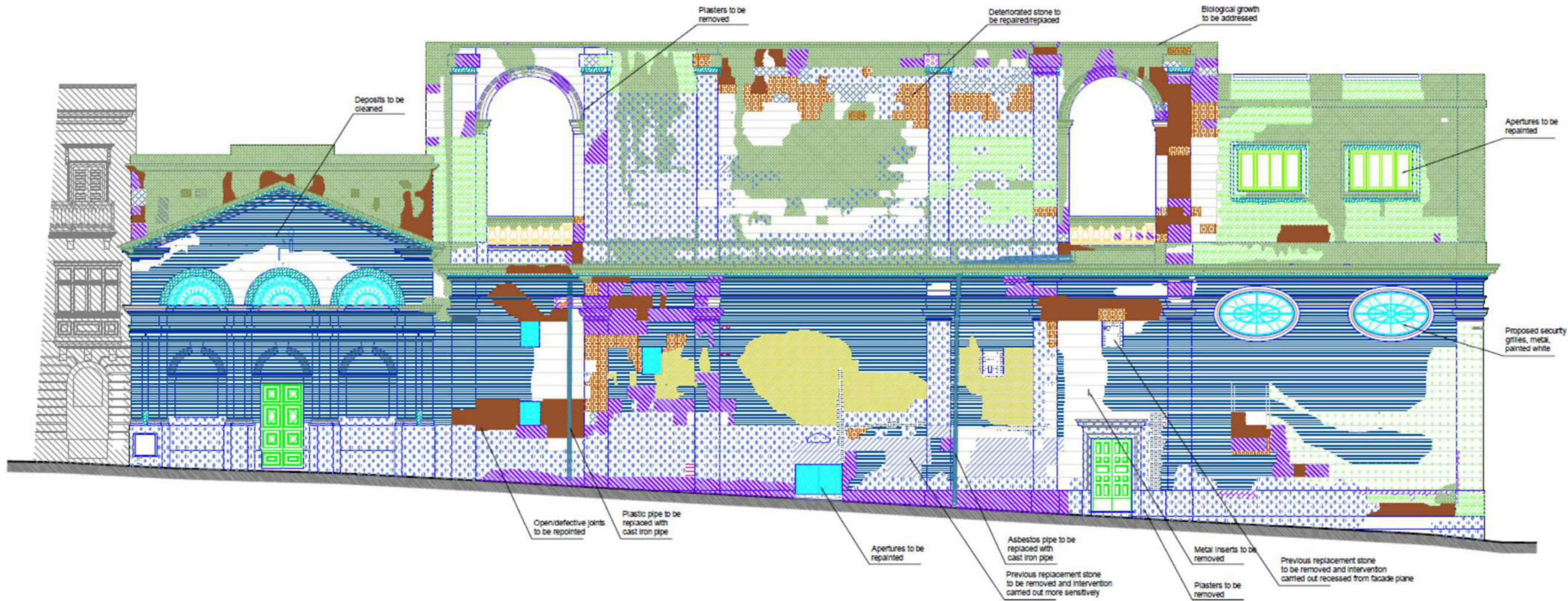


Plate 33: Proposed interventions for elevation on St Thomas Street.



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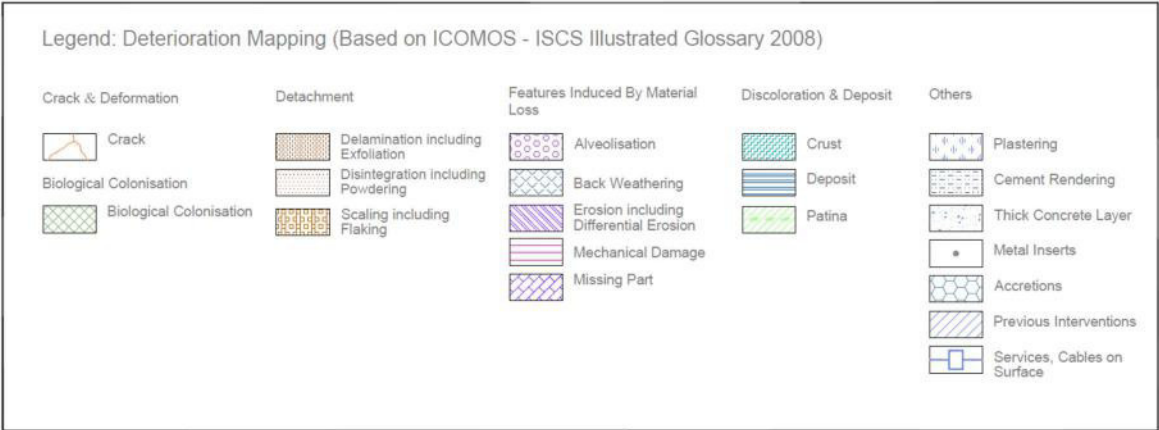
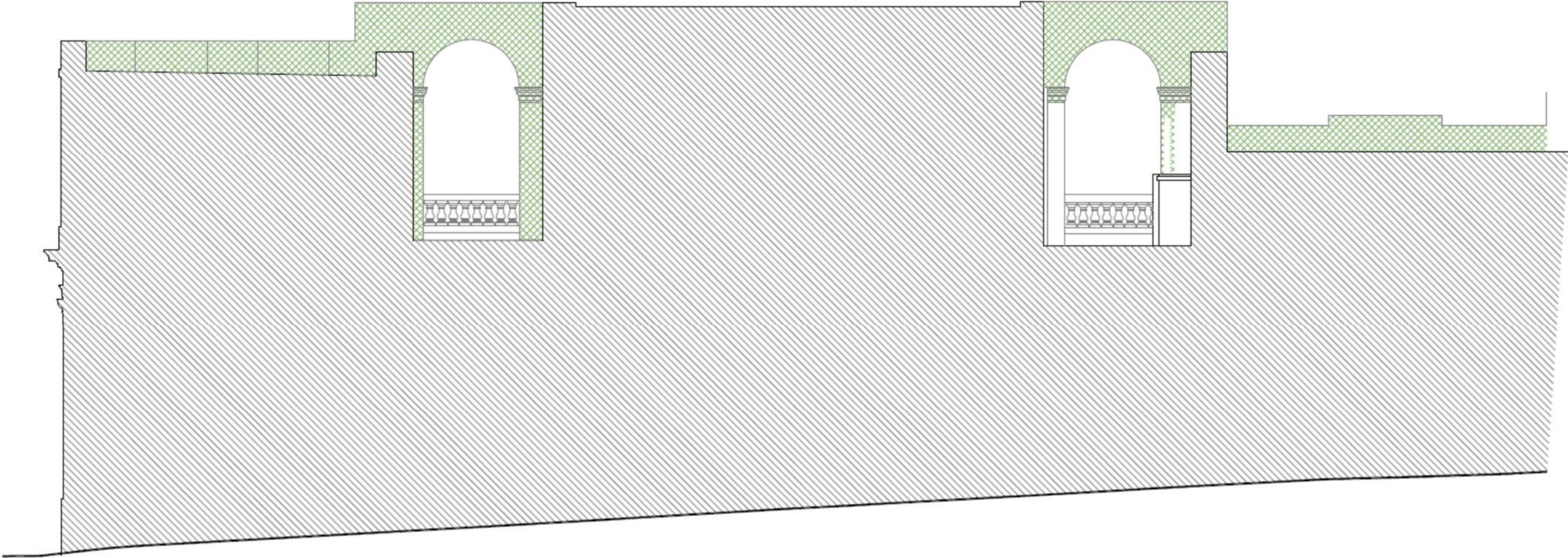


Plate 34: Deterioration mapping for internal elevation on St Thomas Street.



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Plate 35: Proposed interventions for internal elevation on St Thomas Street.



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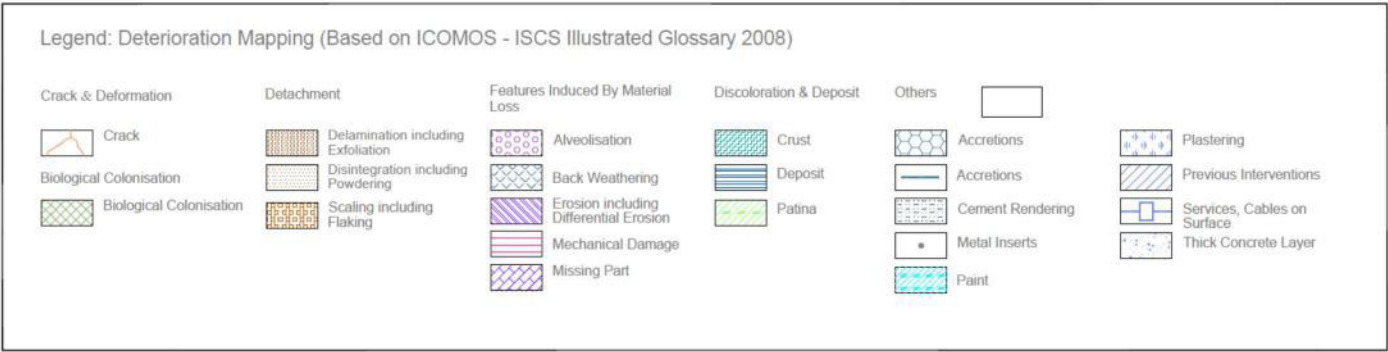


Plate 36: Deterioration mapping for elevations on St Publius Street.



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Plate 37: Proposed interventions for elevations on St Publius Street.

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## **7. Conclusion**

The aim of the recommendations outlined above is to address the observed deterioration to the building fabric such as to ensure that this building is safe for use and that it is better preserved in the years to come. It is thus hoped that this property will remain in use such that regular maintenance works are guaranteed.

**Perit Mark Azzopardi** B.E.&A., M.Sc., A&C.E.