

Plate Blocks and Imprint Blocks on Maltese Stamps

By Joe Farrugia

The collecting of Plate & Imprint blocks is becoming over more popular, as it offers a new side-line to philately. In this and subsequent issues, we shall try to establish a comprehensive list of all issues of Malta's stamps, submitted by a member of our society, to whom we are indebted. Mr. Joe Farrugia assures us that he has in his possession, or seen himself, any mention of plate numbers:

(the Editor)

The hobby of collecting stamps in blocks of four, besides singles, is increasing everywhere, Malta being no exception. Many of us who collect Malta stamps in blocks, prefer to collect Plate Blocks or Imprint Blocks or both. For those collectors who never interested themselves in this type of hobby, perhaps it will be of some help to try and explain what this side-line is about.

Without going into all the complicated details of what happens between the time that the winner of a stamp design competition is chosen and the actual sale of the same stamps from across the counters, it is enough to say that different processes of production may be adopted to print these stamps. The main processes used are: Recess-printing, Photogravure, Typography, Lithography and Delacryl. It is interesting to note that all these processes were used, at some time or other, in the printing of Maltese issues, by different printing firms. Whichever process is used, a printing plate is always involved, by means of which the final printed sheet is produced. This sheet may be composed of two or more Panes, and each of these panes is the actual sheet that is sold from the counters. In the majority of cases, all the panes that make up a printed sheet, are marked by numbers or letters or a combination of both. These markings are nearly always found in the bottom margin of each pane, either to the left or to the right. The Imprint, which is the name of the printers of the stamps, is also found in the bottom margin. Occasionally, plates are not marked in numbers or letters, and we say that an un-numbered plate has been used. In this case, we, plate-number collectors, refer to such a case as plate-number 'nil' or 'none'. There are also cases when the imprint is not printed.

The Plate collector's aim is to acquire a corner block of stamps, from the bottom of each pane that make up a printing sheet. Each of these blocks will have a different number or letter or both, and taken together will form a sequence, which corresponds to the number of panes that make up the printing sheet, from a particular printing plate. When study papers of particular issues are being prepared, Plate corner blocks are very helpful, and I would advise any collector possessing such blocks, especially of the earlier issues, not to break them up if they can help it, or at least

to try and exchange them for singles with other interested collectors.

The Imprint collector's main concern is to obtain a block of four or more stamps from the bottom of one of the panes, on the margin of which, the printer's name is shown in full.

Many converts to plate collecting, conveniently, started their collection with the first Decimal Coinage issue of May 1972. Others took their year of departure 1964, with the Independence issue, while the real hunters go back even further: Queen Elizabeth II, with the Coronation issue of June 1953; King George VI with the Coronation issue of May 1937. To satisfy both 'old' and 'new' collectors of plate numbers, I shall endeavour to give as much information as possible, starting from all issues of 1974, and going back, year by year, up to 1937. As new Malta stamps are issued, information about plate numbers will be inserted with each future issue of this magazine, which we hope, under our new energetic editor, Mr. N. Cutajar, will be issued regularly.

Naturally, the Editor needs the help of all of us and this is exactly what prompted me to write this humble contribution. This is my first try at writing for our magazine, and most probably, I shall commit errors and receive deserved criticism, but please, at least, put your criticism in writing to the Editor, who will be more than glad to receive it and publish it in our magazine. That way all of us will benefit and learn more about our hobby. Before I close, I would like to forward a suggestion to our newly elected committee. How about inviting someone from "Printex Ltd., Malta", the printers of Malta stamps since the Europa issue of 1972, to give us a lecture on how Malta stamps are produced, (or perhaps a visit)?

PLATE AND IMPRINT BLOCKS — 1974

Prominent Maltese Personalities (12th January)

Plate/Pane numbers: There are three panes for each value. All plate numbers are under the first stamp, of the bottom row.

1c3, 3c, 5c, 7c5 & 10c=

1A x 3 up to, and including 1C x 3.

Imprint Blocks: The printer's name 'PRINTEX LIMITED MALTA' is under the last two stamps, of the bottom row. An Imprint block of four would also include the traffic lights, or colour checks, which are on the right side margin, to the last stamp.

Air Mail Definitives (30th March)

Plate/Pane numbers: There are three Panes for each value. All Plate numbers are under the first and second stamps of the bottom row.

3c, 4c, 5c, 7c5, 20c, 25c & 35c=

1A x 5 up to, and including 1C x 5

Imprint Blocks: The printer's name "PRINTEX LIMITED MALTA" is shown under the last stamp of the bottom row. An imprint block of four stamps

would also include the colour checks, which are on the right-hand margin, next to the last stamp and the one above it.

Europa (13th July)

Taking issues in a reverse order, as we are proposing to do, this will be the first set that we come across which was issued in small sheets of ten stamps each. The 1c3 and the 5c sheetlets are in a horizontal format, while the 3c and the 7c5 values are printed in vertical format. From a study of all the Panes of the values issued, I think that the printing sheet was made up of thirty-six panes, that is nine panes per value, and each pane being a sheetlet. I arrived at this conclusion after a study of all the perforations along the margins, cutting lines where they still showed, and especially the watermark. I would appreciate the opinion of other collectors about this.

Plate/Pane numbers: There are nine Panes for each value. For the 1c3 and 5c sheetlets, the plate numbers are under the middle stamp of the bottom row. Since the bottom row consists of three stamps only, for those who do not want to buy whole sheetlets, a block of four from the bottom left-hand corner, would also include the Plate numbers. For the 3c and the 7c5 sheetlets, the Plate numbers are under the first stamp of the bottom row.

1c3, 3c, 5c & 7c5 =

1A x 3 up to, and including 11 x 3.

Imprint Blocks: The printer's name "PRINTEX LIMITED MALTA" is under the last stamp of the bottom row in the 1c3 and 5c sheetlets, and under the last two stamps in the 3c and 7c5 sheetlets. An Imprint block of four from the 1c3 and 5c values will also include the Plate number, but not the colour checks, which are in the top right hand margin. An Imprint block of four from the 3c and 7c5 values will include the colour checks but not the Plate numbers.

Centenary of the Universal Postal Union (20th September)

Besides the four values, in Panes of fifty stamps, a miniature sheet incorporating the four values, was also issued, but no Plate numbers are involved in its printing.

Plate/Pane numbers: There are four panes for each value. All Plate numbers are found under the first stamp of the bottom row.

1c3, 5c, 7c5 & 50c =

1A x 3 up to, and including 1D x 3.

Imprint Blocks: "PRINTEX LTD. MALTA" is found under the last stamp in the bottom row. The word "LIMITED" is abbreviated in this issue. An Imprint block of four would also include the colour checks, which are next to the last stamp in the right hand margin.

Christmas (22nd November)

For this issue, no miniature sheets were printed. There were three Panes of fifty stamps each for each value.

Plate/Pane numbers: All plate numbers are found under the first stamp, in the bottom row.

8m+2m, 3c+1c, 5c+1c & 75+1c5=
1A×4 up to, and including 1C×4.

Imprinted Blocks: "PRINTEX LTD. MALTA" is again found under the last stamp, in each bottom row. An Imprint block of four stamps also includes the traffic lights, which are found next to the last stamp and the one above it in the right hand margin.

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