

# A BRIEF SURVEY OF MODERN POSTMRKS USED IN MALTA

(1952 to date)

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Having completed a collection of Elizabethan Maltese stamps and, having before me only the prospect of waiting for new issues and variety hunting, I turned my attentions to the postmarks and envelope markings used in Malta since Queen Elizabeth came to the throne.

Expecting to find a small number of standardized types, I was agreeably surprised to find that in fact they are just as interesting and complex, in their way, as the marks of 50 or more years ago. With the added delight that most of them are still in use and readily available. Therefore the study of them is made far easier and can be much more complete and rewarding because of it. I will now give a brief survey of my findings so far.

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## HAND STAMPS

There are some fifteen permanent offices in the island, all of them delivery offices, and all have a standard type of handstamp which is used for cancelling and backstamping normal daily mail. We will deal first with this, the most common type. It is in the form of a double circle with diameters 27 mm. and 17 mm. The time and date slugs occupy the centre of the stamp, while the office name appears between the circles at the top, and MALTA at the bottom, in letters 3 mm. tall separated by line spacers placed centrally between the circles.

This standard cancellator appears in every office, indeed, most offices must possess several of them, and every office has at least two. Study in this field has not yet progressed very far, but it is evident from slight varieties in marks from the same office that more than one such stamp exists. A good number of offices omit to use the time slug occasionally, which produces more variety of cancellations. Not all stamps however have identical styles of lettering in spite of standardization. That used at Victoria Gozo office has a decidedly cramped appearance beside the large and clear lettering of Mgarr Gozo, or Gzira offices.

Lesser known, but vastly more attractive in appearance is the type with Malta cross spacers in place of line spacers. The only offices known to the author at present currently using this type are Valletta Central, who use it solely for the 5.30 a.m. and 9 p.m. posts, and Sliema, Prince of Wales Road. But Birkirkara used one as late as 1956, as proved by an untimed cover in the authors possession. This last named has also larger, and better formed

crosses when compared with the other two, possibly due to those at Valletta and Sliema now being old and worn.

By far the rarest known so far in this period is with Killer Block spacers. The only known instance to date of this type being in use is at NOTABLE. The impressions from this are very poor in that they show many frame breaks and worn lettering due to use of an aged stamp. No time slug was inserted with this type it seems, only an "a.m." or "p.m.". Again there were double circles of diameters 27 mm. and 16.5 mm. The lettering (3 mm. tall, but very thin type) reads "NOTABLE B.O." at the top and "MALTA" at the bottom, all between the circles. The spacers were solid and 3 mm. thick.

### SPECIAL HANDSTAMPS

The handstamps used for FDC's of the Independence and St. Paul's Shipwreck issues can be considered as special marks by virtue of the fact they were only in use for a very short time servicing first day of issue covers for each set. Their make-up is too complex to describe here but many perfect examples may be seen on most FDC's for the two issues. They were unusually large for handstruck marks being:—

For Independence	— 36 mm. across (approx.)
For St. Paul's Shipwreck	— 39 mm. across ..

To this can now be added the special marks employed for the duration of the E.N.T. Congress in May 1967, and that of the FAO conference recently which measure approximately 35 mm. across.

Perhaps one of the most unique specials ever used on the island in recent time was that at the Independence arena during Her Majesty's visit in 1967. This cancellation was in use for Forces Week which was coincident with the Royal visit. It could be used with any current Maltese stamps, on cover together with any current British stamps, which were separately cancelled with another date stamp. The proviso being that Maltese stamps were only cancelled with the special Maltese G.P.O. handstamp and the British Stamps with the Forces Post office cancellation.

Another unusual "Special" is in fact a standard type of handstamp but can be deemed as special since it is only used to cancel F.D.C.'s. At Sliema, in place of the more normal one with "PRINCE OF WALES ROAD SLIEMA" inscribed between the circles, the lettering states simply 'SLIEMA' 'MALTA' and is identical to the stamps used by other offices for normal work.

The last of the specials is one used at the Malta Trade Fair each year. Again it is of the standard type as already described, but is lettered: "MALTA TRADE FAIR" "POST OFFICE" and does not normally contain a time slug. It is here listed as a special since the office of its use is only a temporary one, open for the duration of the Fair.

## MACHINE CANCELLATIONS

There are six offices that possess "Universal" machines for franking mail these are:—

Valletta Central Office.

Valletta Branch office.

Birkirkara.

Hamrun.

Paola.

Sliema, Prince of Wales Road.

The central office uses the machine to backstamp incoming mail mostly, which far exceeds that going out, but at times of high post volumes, (e.g. Christmas).

This holds also for the other offices using machines.

Valletta Branch office has a more permanent use for its machine because the Government Lotto offices are nearby and push forth a large volume of post both inland and overseas. **Slogans:** A more important use for the machine is national advertising. A special block is made up each year to advertise the Trade Fair, and from time to time blocks are made up to advertise natural beauty spots or to extoll the virtues of Malta as a holiday resort. Valletta Central office, when not using special blocks has a continuous obliterator in the form of a Maltese cross to the left of a circular date stamp, (cross = 24 mm. across the extreme points and 14 mm. across the extreme valleys, it is bounded on either side by seven horizontal lines approx. 8 mm. long. The c.d.s. is a single circle of 21 mm. dia. with conventional 2.5 mm. lettering). Pre-paid blocks can be fitted to these machines for franking Government mail, when this is done, (usually at Valletta Central), the franking is struck in red.

The other type of machine cancellation used in Malta is the type known as "Meter-Franking." They are usually held by private firms on licence from the Post Master General. Their marks are always struck in red and provision is made for an advertisement block on the left of the date stamp, (which is in the form of a printed postage stamp including the perforations). All except one of the meters in use at present in Malta are made by Pitney Bowes. The study of these marks has been well covered in a Malta study Circle study paper, but more information is needed to complete this subject and any information you may have, or examples, would be gratefully received by the author.

## REGISTERED MARKS.

Most offices use paper stickers bearing the Capital letter 'R' at the left and provision for the number on the right together with the office name printed in. But the temporary office at the Trade Fair has a special rubber stamp, which is struck in black. It is 51 mm. x 19 mm. round the frame,

while the name of the office is contained in the right side separated by a further frame line 10 mm. in from the left. The lettering reads:

TRADE FAIR (MALTA)

No.

and the large "R" is contained in the left box.

Valetta Central posses two stamps which are unique on the island and each perform a special duty.

- (i) one is used for marking and dating Government registered mail, but not for franking it, while:
- (ii) the other is used for backstamping incoming registered mail, this latter has Malta cross spacers to differentiate between them and the lettering is a slightly different style.

The dimensions are as follows:— (i) horizontal oval 32 mm. × 25 mm. with 4 mm. tall lettering fount the inside perimeter reading "REGISTERED" "G.P.O. MALTA". The date slug appears as a straight line across the centre in letters 2.5 mm. tall. e.g. "22 MY 68." (ii) horizontal oval 31 mm. × 24 mm. lettering as for (i) but 3.5 mm. and 3mm. respectively. The Malta crosses are in line with the date slug and at the extreme ends of the oval.

Pre-paid registered envelopes which are purchased from the G.P.O. bear a very large printed "R" in blue bounded by an oval in the top left corner, and the envelope is crossed with blue lines. The use of blue lines on registered mail does not, however, appear to be compulsory. Provided that the word "Registered" appears legibly and clearly, the Post Office will treat it as a registered dispatch.

## "AR" MARKING.

"Avis de reception" is a service provided by most postal authorities in one form or another, (i.e. recorded delivery in the U.K.), and Malta is no exception. The AR is marked in red on the envelope and appears in an oval. Briefly the system is this:— The sender fills in a pink card form with details of the letter, addressee's and sender's particulars. A 3d stamp is affixed to the front and cancelled at the office of despatch. The envelope is marked as above and sent on its way to the office of destination together with the pink card. The office of delivery backstamps the letter and the pink card, the clerk signs the card and then the postman delivers them both to the addressee, who signs the card as proof that he has received the letter. The card is then returned to the sender as his receipt for the letter from the addressee. The service applies only to registered or insured letters and parcels, and money orders. Judging from the scarcity of AR marks it would appear to be a little used service in Malta. The dimensions and styles of lettering vary greatly from office to office depending on the age of the stamp in question.

## POSTED OUT OF COURSE AND COMPULSORY REGISTRATION MARKS.

For letters found to contain coins or other valuables, and not previously registered, the G.P.O. has a set procedure. The envelope is marked with the "COMPULSORY REGISTRATION" stamp, which is rubber and struck in black, and a printed label is affixed to the back with the appropriate lines scored out. A registered tag is stuck on and a postage due charge raised to cover the cost of registration. Then it is treated as a normal registered package and forwarded to the addressee.

A similar course is adopted for registered packets put into the post box instead of being handed over the counter and a receipt obtained. The same label is affixed to the back with the appropriate lines scored out and the rubber stamp "POSTED OUT OF COURSE" is struck in black upon the front. This would only apply to the envelopes supplied by the G.P.O. themselves and on which the registration fee had been pre-paid. An ordinary envelope bearing the word "Registered" and/or, crossed blue lines, and not having been pre-paid would be treated as a compulsory registration and the necessary dues charged. The label is approx. 71 mm. x 54 mm. and contained a G.P.O. and crown cypher in the top left corner. The wording is as follows:—

This packet, which was posted  
in the ordinary way, has been com-  
pulsorily registered by the Post Office  
because it  
\*contains .....  
\*bears the word "registered"  
\*is crossed with blue lines.

Valuable articles should not be sent in unregistered packets. Packets intended for registration should not be dropped in a posting box, but should be handed in at a Post Office and a receipt obtained. Packets found to contain money or jewellery and packets bearing the word "registered" or any similar word or mark, posted without registration, are registered by us and we charge on delivery.

- \* *Please advise the sender about this.*
- \* *Delete and amplify where necessary.*

The first seven lines are in lettering 2 mm. tall. The remainder 1.5 mm. tall.

## UNDELIVERABLE MAIL MARKS.

Mail that cannot be delivered due to wrong, or lack of address to treated in one of two ways. If there is an address to which the letter can be returned on the outside of the envelope, then it is returned directly to the sender marked:— "RETOUR A' L'ENVOYEUR/RETURN TO SENDER" in a rectangle struck in black. If, on the other hand, there is no address marked for return, the letter is passed to the "Returned Letter Office," where it is opened. Presuming the senders address be inside, the letter is put in a special envelope marked "Returned PAID Letter." If neither of these methods can be used due to the absence of any senders address, then the letter is of course destroyed.

The special envelope is approx. 24 cm. × 13 cm. and bears a printed cachet 50 mm. × 31 mm. enclosed in rectangle saying:—

UNDELIVERED LETTER'S BEARING  
ON THE OUTSIDE THE FULL NAME  
AND ADDRESS OF THE SENDER  
ARE RETURNED DIRECT AND  
UNOPENED.

in letters 2mm. tall. In the left top corner is printed:—

Returned PAID Letter

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and in the bottom left corner is printed:—

Returned Letter Office  
MALTA

The minimum permissible size of envelope transmissible by post in Malta is 4" × 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". If this is ignored, and an undersize envelope used, the letter not transmissible. Unless valuables are contained in the envelope, it will usually be destroyed, but, the opposite being the case, provided there is a senders address, it is marked "NOT TRANSMISSIBLE ENVELOPE BELOW SIZE/4 × 2 $\frac{3}{4}$  ins." and returned to the sender. This also is a rubber stamp with no rectangle bordering the lettering, and struck in black.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

The following is a list of further marks employed by the post office for purposes which are self evident from the wording used. Some of them are exceedingly poor stamps, and appear to have been made up from older stamps cut up and remounted on new bases, (marked \*). All are rubber, have no rectangles bordering the wording and are struck in black.

RECEIVED IN/THIS CONDITION\* RECEIVED WITH/WRAPPER TORN\*  
DAMAGED BY/STAMPING MACHINE FOUND POSTED/IN THIS  
DAMAGED BY/STAMPING MACHINE FOUND POSTED/IN THIS  
CONDITION RECEIVED IN/BAD CONDITION.

*N.B. An oblique stroke after a word denotes that the next appears on a fresh line.*

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My thanks are due to the G.P.O. for the many questions they have answered with great patience, and the help extended to me while investigating these marks and the methods of their use. Acknowledgment must also be made to the compilers of relevant publications of the Malta Study Circle.

Anyone who has further information or examples of any of the marks used in Malta, and is willing to allow them to be examined, is asked to contact me through the editor.

## STAMPS OF THE WORLD

A major extension to the National Postal Museum in London, which began on April 1, will enable 135 times as many stamps to be displayed as at present. When it re-opens in the latter part of this year it will show a virtually complete collection of the postage stamps from every country in the world since 1878 and many earlier stamps of which a substantial proportion were printed in Britain for postal administrations of other countries. It will also have a much wider selection of 19th century British stamps.

When the new museum is finished it will have direct access from the present gallery to a mezzanine floor and to a main gallery above. Since 1966, the Postal Museum has attracted some 60,000 visitors, many of them from other countries.