

CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF MAHATMA GANDHI

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Following the decision of the Government of India to commemorate the year October 1968 — October 1969 as the *Gandhi Centenary Year*, many countries throughout the world decided to issue a set of postage stamps to commemorate the occasion.

Among these lies Great Britain with its startling news given by the Rt. Hon. John Stonehouse M.P., the Post Master General stating that later on in the year (1969) Gandhi stamps were being issued to commemorate the event. This is the first time that a foreign statesman is to be commemorated on a British Postage Stamp.

Judging from such policies, it is far from out of place for Malta to take similar lines of action. Thus on the 24th March 1969, the General Post Office issued a 1/6 stamp as part of its contribution to Gandhi. This event was a final touch to 3 days of celebration held in Malta between February 3rd and the 5th, under the auspices of the National Commission for UNESCO on the suggestion of the Indian Government.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar on the 2nd October 1869. He studied law in London and practised his profession in Bombay. It was here that his policy of passive resistance in protest against the conditions imposed upon the Indians was first organised. His activity was intensified after World War I, when he also encouraged home industry such as hand weaving of cloth. Although imprisoned several times, he remained adamant to his beliefs and came to be recognised as a great religious leader of the Hindus.

With the proclamation of Independent India in 1947, Gandhi although against the Hindu-Moslem partition, remained fighting in his own way for the reunification of his country. Ironically enough it was during his last effort to solve the Hindu-Moslem enmity, that he was shot dead on January 30th, 1948 by a Hindu fanatic.

Some years before his assassination, people from all walks of life, considered Gandhi himself as a religious fanatic boarding on the verge of madness. Times do, however change quite substantially. Today we see in this man the champion of passive resistance, the apostle of peace and non-violence, and at the same time the leading pioneer in the legitimate struggle against colonialism.

The Maltese Gandhi stamp was designed by Chev. Cremona and portrays the statesman in typical Hindu robes with the spinning wheel to the right, against a gold background of a brown coloured stamp. The wording inscription is again in Maltese, while the date 1869 — 1969 lies on the left.

The stamps perforated 12 by 12½ were printed in photogravure by Enschede of Holland on the 'Malta Cross' watermarked paper and presented in sheets of 60 (10 x 6). There is no plate number but simply coloured guide lines. The inclusion of the Plate numbers has always been the order of the day with the British Philatelic Establishments, even since the early Malta Victorian Issues. On the other hand, foreign Firms whether Enschede, the Austrian or Italian state printers have always excluded this addendum from their products, thus we quote the 2nd Xmas Issue of 1965, the Gafa Centenary, as well as the Foundation of Valletta and Dante respectively as examples.

We are more than convinced that if arrangements are made and enough pressure is exerted, plate numbers will reappear in all printings by Non British Firms.

Gandhi is not the first on the list of prominent people commemorated on the Malta Postage stamps. Since the grant of Independence in 1964, the following have had an issue all to themselves.

- i) Dante — Centenary of birth (7th) — 7th July 1965.
- ii) Churchill — 1st Anniversary of death — 24th January 1966.
- iii) Kennedy — Inauguration of Memorial Grove — 28th May 1966.
- iv) Gafa — 3rd Centenary of Death — 1st August 1967.
- v) La Valette — 4th Centenary of death — 1st August 1968.

This list stop here for the present, the future may well have some surprises in store for us.

As for the long awaited 'First Day of Issue' cancellor, this was certainly marked by its absence, it is the sincere hope of one and all that it will make its appearance with the next commemorative issue.