



July – September 2013

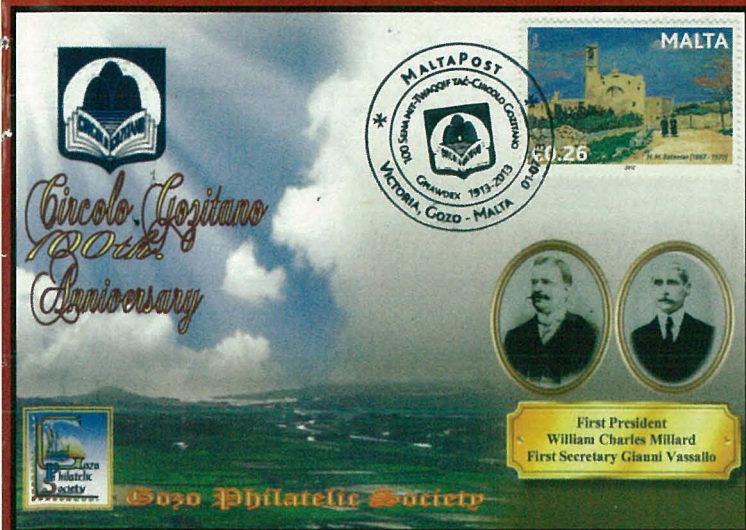
No. 53– 2013

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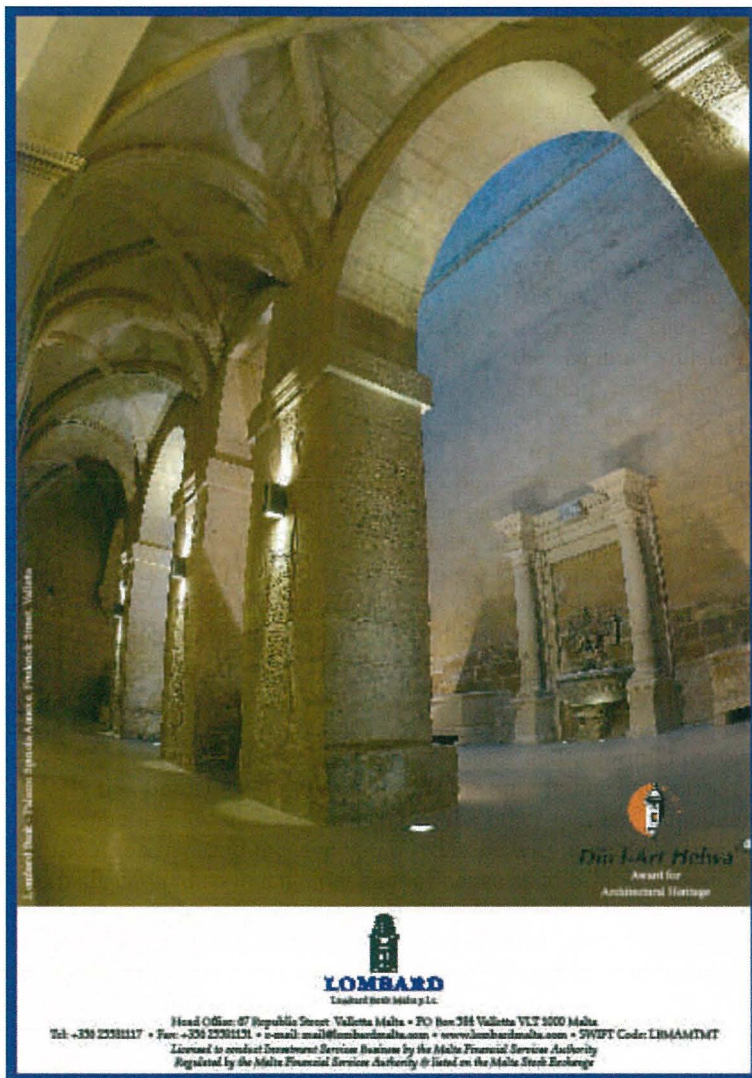


**GOZO  
PHILATELIC  
SOCIETY**

**Newsletter**



**NEWSPAPER POST**



*Front Cover: Commemorative Cards:*

1. Postcard with Gozo related stamp showing a wild rabbit on Comino - 20.06.2013
2. Postcard with cancelled special postmark commemorating the 100 Anniversary of Circolo Gozitano - 01.07.2013

# In Kriegsgefangenschaft auf Malta 1914 – 1919

Seeleute des Kreuzers „EMDEN“



Wolfgang Juncker

A long-time GPS supporter Wolfgang Juncker has written an impressively researched and comprehensively illustrated book about German Prisoner of War mail in First World War Malta. Even those who are not at home in the German language might find it interesting! Do contact the Secretary for more information.

...and we have issued the first 2 cards and personalised stamps of the long awaited and promised series commemorating

## Malta's Prime Ministers.



# 400<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF MATTIA PRETI - 24 FEBRUARY 1613



## SILVER REPLICA STAMP

MaltaPost is issuing a Limited Edition Silver Replica Stamp depicting Mattia Preti's portrait. It is struck in 999.0 Silver.

Each stamp is individually numbered and the issue is limited to 2,000 pieces.



## COMMEMORATIVE FOLDER NO. 7

MaltaPost is issuing a numbered Commemorative Folder (limited to 3,000) which includes a miniature sheet of the 400th Anniversary of the birth of Mattia Preti - 24 February 1613.



committed to deliver

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**GPS NEWSLETTER**  
**Quarterly Organ**  
**of**  
**THE GOZO PHILATELIC SOCIETY**

*First issued on 12 February 2000*

*Editor: Austin Masini*

Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the Committee's official policy.

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**GOZO PHILATELIC SOCIETY**

*Founded on 3 September 1999*

For "the promotion of the hobby"

"the provision of a point of reference" and "co-ordination"

*Postal address: PO Box 10, VCT 1000, Gozo, Malta.*

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(52) *G.P.S. Diary*

Antoine Vassallo  
Gozo Philatelic Society Secretary  
VO/056



**14 June 2013** Committee discusses technical problems with the Prime Ministers personalized series and agrees about future events.

**20 June** Anthony Grech produces Card for Sepac rabbit stamp

**1 July** Anthony Grech produces Card for *Circolo Gozitano* centenary handstamp

**13 July** Anthony Grech produces Card for Victoria Scouts 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary handstamp

**5 August** First issue of the set of “Prime Minister” personalized stamps designed by Anthony Grech - to continue appearing monthly on the first Monday (see p?)

**27 August** Anthony Grech produces Card for Victoria bus stamp

**28 August** Committee updates Exhibition regulations (flier with this issue).

**1 September** Members’ Meetings on first Sunday of the month resume at Victoria Scouts HQ after summer break.

A non-existent 2 June Members’ Meeting gatecrashed into last issue’s Diary - sorry!

**Please note that “ISLE OF JOY”, the full colour A4 book with that innovative viewpoint of Gozo produced through the support of the Eco-Gozo NGO scheme, is still available: write to [secretary@stamps-gozo.org](mailto:secretary@stamps-gozo.org).**



**REMEMBER TIMES & THEMES.**

The annual Gozo Philatelic Society exhibition is to be held from 21 to 27 October 2013 at the Gozo Ministry Exhibition Halls, Victoria.

Make sure you do not miss it.



## Is there money in the mail?

Problems concerning the carriage of mail to and from Malta during the late nineteenth century.



©Michael Refalo

If we could exercise our imagination and go back in time, we might perhaps be able to appreciate some of the problems attending exchange of information, mail communication in particular, between countries, and between individuals in the age before air transport (or indeed, the Internet). Specifically with regard to the Maltese Islands, the middle to late nineteenth century provides us with a glimpse of these problems and the difficulties encountered in assuring a regular and efficient method of transport of mail to or from Malta. We need to remember that we are speaking of the age of steam; hence at least some of the uncertainties and delays relating to sea voyages by sailing vessels had already been solved. Nonetheless, problems persisted.



Ferdinand de Lesseps the French developer of the Suez Canal.

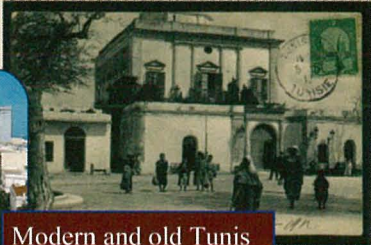


We could better understand the subject – and the reasons why an efficient postal communication was vital – through a brief overview highlighting the structural conditions of the Maltese Islands during this period. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Malta's colonial status had been well established. A resident British governor, various bureaucrats, and a substantial naval and military presence on the island were only one of the factors which necessitated a reliable mail service. Another relevant factor was commerce. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, but also earlier, the links between Malta's commercial class and the outside world were extensive. The third factor was emigration: many Maltese had, during the nineteenth century settled in the various ports of the Mediterranean, particularly the north of Africa. One of the benefits of this type of



emigration was the relative vicinity between the home island and the place where enterprising men and women sought to make their fortune. This necessitated good lines of communication through which men, money, news and mail could travel. Specifically with regard to North Africa, in 1874 the British Consul General in Tunis calculated that there were some five thousand

Maltese resident there, and about one tenth of these had taken advantage of the removal of the prohibition of foreigners in owning property there. Commercial transactions between Malta and the African coast were also voluminous. Suffice it to say that between 1865 and 1877, the value of British trade with Tripoli rose from £9,000 per annum to £50,000 per annum, and the tonnage of British ships from 600 to 160,000. Most of this trade, particularly that in meat



Modern and old Tunis

and hides was monopolized by the Maltese; and as to the rest it is enough to remember that the Maltese port was the nodal link between Britain and the north of Africa. Of equal importance were the interests of the Maltese business community in Europe more particularly Italy. The neighbouring peninsula was a place of study, of vacation, of business and of culture for the Maltese. Ties between Malta and Italy's southern island, Sicily, date back to Classical times, and even earlier. If proof were needed of these close links, it is enough to remember that the Italian language in Malta was the language of the law, of culture, of commerce, and of the so-called 'polite society' were a legacy that pre-dated the two hundred thirty year old rule by the Order of St. John.



Tunisian, Libyan Italian and British coins





All this made the stability of all types of communication with the outside world of vital importance. It is no wonder, then, that the provision of a regular postal service was a constant concern of the local business community. Furthermore, under British rule, this was compounded by the need of the colonial administration to have a good, reliable and predictable line of communication with the home country. At the same time, the economic and financial realities had to be borne in mind. From the commercial point of view, the provision of marine communication between Malta and the rest of the world was certainly profitable. In so far as postal communication was concerned, however, it may not necessarily have been so. The local authorities, civil, naval and military, whose volume of correspondence with Britain constituted a relevant percentage of the mail, for example, expected their mail to be carried free of charge in exchange for the subsidies they were paying for the establishment of such lines of communication and the provision of the postal service. There were, therefore, two major interests in any such project: those of the private sector (comprising private correspondence but, more importantly, the commercial one) and those of the Imperial Government. For this reason, there was generally an arrangement so that the subsidy paid to the operating enterprise would be forked by Malta's civil administration (of course, with funds coming from taxation) in part, and in part by the Imperial Government.

Within this context, it is the transport of mail between Malta and mainland Europe and from there onwards to Britain that is the principal concern here. This was particularly relevant to ensure the smooth relay of information and instructions from the small island colony to the home country, and vice-versa.



The underlying problem worrying bureaucrats in all this was the financial one. How far, and to what extent, could the island pay for such a vital service? Who should, and would, contribute to ensure it? As will be seen throughout this discussion, there were, from time to time, various enterprises providing the mail service so important to Malta, but this came at a price. The entity of that price, and from where it would be forthcoming, was the big question upon which everything depended.



For the (steam) shipping companies interested in the service, there were advantages and disadvantages. Being favoured with a government contract for the carriage of mail was tantamount to a monopoly over that line of communication. This enabled the favoured company to capitalise on the mail contract to transport cargo and passengers,

thereby augmenting its profits. Furthermore, the grant enabled the company to expand its commercial operations. At the same time, it was assured of a regular payment. On the other side of the scales were the negative aspects. First of all, such contracts were generally awarded for a number of years at a fixed yearly sum. This meant that any increase in the price of coal and the maintenance of the steamships would have to come off from the profits of the company with no possibility of refund. Furthermore, mail occupied space on the steamship which could otherwise have been utilised to transport cargo.



As from the 1840s the main player in the field was the renowned P & O Company. In virtue of its contract with the British

Government, it held a virtual monopoly over Mediterranean mail transport, one which, as we shall see, was being threatened by its competitors with increasing aggressiveness. The ambitions of that Company were fixed on the oriental route (to India and China) but at the moment, it operated a line from Britain to Alexandria with coaling stops at Gibraltar and Malta. In 1840 it was further awarded the contract for the line between Malta and the Ionian Islands. Two years later the Company gave up this line as being unprofitable. At the same time, P & O operated the non-contract branches Malta – Marseilles and Malta – Constantinople as well. The latter, for which P & O unsuccessfully tendered for a mail contract, was initially lucrative. However, this line was to prove less profitable after the Crimean War (1853-1856) when other British steam companies, as well as Austrian and French ones, entered the field.



In 1867 the British Post Office declared that its upcoming contract for the transport of mail would be awarded by a competitive tender. Matters got further complicated for P & O when the financial secretary at the Treasury in the new Tory government declared his willingness to invite the French steamship company *Messagerie Impériales* to tender for the new contract.

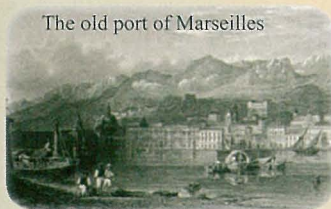


Specifically to Malta the problem arises in 1868 when there were proposals for the mail packet on the Marseilles-Alexandria route to omit the Malta stop. Others – not British – were prepared to fill this gap. Both the Marseilles Company, *Frassinel père & fils* (offering a service between Marseille and Malta, three times a month), and Paris-based *Messagerie Impériales* (offering that their steamers on the Levant line would touch at Malta), for example.

Of course, money was involved. Both companies expected to receive from the British government a subsidy to serve postal needs of the small island. However, political considerations, too, came into play. Thus, for example, both the Duke of Buckingham, Colonial Secretary, as well as the Admiralty demurred from having communication between Malta and the rest of Europe (specifically Marseilles) dependent on ‘a foreign line of vessels.’ Accordingly, they



The old harbour of Marseilles



The old port of Marseilles

approached, P & O once again to see whether these could maintain a weekly service there. For the Company, the cost to run such a service on a weekly basis was said to cost £50,000 yearly (or half that if the service were to be of three times a month). Another alternative which needed to be studied was that of having the P & O vessel on the Marseilles – Alexandria line stop at Messina from where the Malta mail would be collected and delivered. This, the Ministry was informed, would cost about £20,000 per annum.



The Treasury took the pragmatic view. They had no objection to having a foreign company carrying the mail. Confidentiality and security could be ensured 'by sending a Messenger (whenever needed by the Admiralty) with such despatches, and that the cost of such an arrangement would be trifling in comparison with providing for the service by subsidizing an independent line of steamers.'

How best to deal with this problem and ensure an efficient service with concurrent savings would continue to be a matter of discussion in London for some time. In the meantime, in Malta another story about the same subject was being woven by the British administration, by some businessmen, and by some politicians; Maltese, British, and/or Italians. In due time, the story would have to be revised and re-edited in London because it was the imperial capital which held all the threads. And it is this story which my discussion will focus upon.



In 1873 the problem of postal communication between Malta and the rest of Europe, but more particularly Britain, came once again, to a head. The relevance of the incident is not limited to the narrow confines of postal communication. Rather, it gives the opportunity to appreciate how geographic conditions, financial constrictions, and political considerations came into play in the framing of policies and in the decision-making process in colonial times.

The problem of postal communication, at the time, was succinctly described by Governor Sir Charles van Straubenzee in one of his despatches to London. On 11 February of that year, he wrote to Colonial Secretary, the Earl of Kimberley as follows:

The inconveniences of the present state of our postal communication with England and the continent, are being so generally and so strongly felt by the inhabitants as well as by the Garrison and the Navy, that I make no apology for bringing up the subject again to Your Lordship's notice, with a view to a speedy remedy.



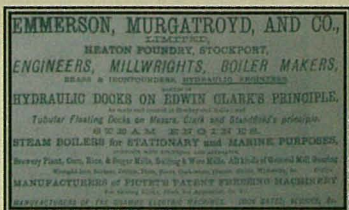
Governor van Straubenzee sought to sweeten the ‘subsidy pill’ which he intended to administer to the Colonial Office by referring to the excellence of communication *within* Italy, and from there on to London. There was, he said a railway line between Messina and Naples which could carry the mail for onward despatch to London. What remained, he noted, was a ‘fixed and regular communication between Malta and Syracuse.’ The problem, was how to provide this and make it worthwhile for the operating enterprise at a minimal cost to the Maltese coffers. Because, the price could be too high. Representa-

tives of the English company *Emmerson & Murgatroyd*, the company that had recently built Malta’s hydraulic dock (i.e. the dock in which a vessel is raised clear of water by hydraulic pressure), had contacted the Governor proposing to undertake the carriage of mail, three times weekly between Malta and Syracuse, asking an annual subsidy of £5,000 but exempting from payment mails for Malta as well as those intended for the Imperial Government. However, there was a proviso: the project would be undertaken if the Government ceded to the company, for ninety nine years, and at a nominal rent, the Ordinance Building in Valletta – a property then worth about ten thousand pounds. This company proposed to convert that building into a hotel.

An examination of that Company’s offer reveals that it was the hotel which was uppermost on the minds of its representatives, rather than postal, or, indeed, any other sort of communication. These representatives refer to the financial potential of erecting in Valletta ‘a First Class

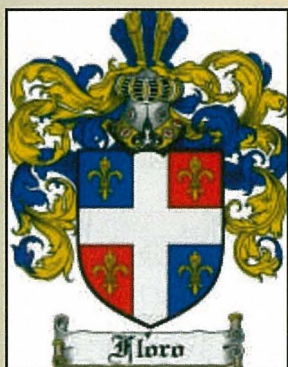
Hotel, containing not less than 100 Bedrooms, with a proper proportion of sitting-rooms, together with large Drawing, Dinner, and Billiard-Rooms, Hydraulic Lift, with hot and cold, fresh and salt water Baths, Turkish Baths, and, in fact, all the modern conveniences now established ...’





In making this proposal Emmerson & Murgatroyd were in effect confirming that undertaking the task of providing postal communication was merely a sop for a larger bite. Not only would they be given that building at a nominal rent, but the Company would have had a good part of its investment subsidised by the Government through the mail contract. As the proponents perceived it, better communication between Europe and Malta would lead to the development of the island's tourist potential. In other words, the former would be a function of the latter. With the provision of the postal service being an added bonus for the company considering that it would be getting £5,000 per annum for the trouble, as annual subsidy.

In his despatch, Governor van Straubenzee also refers to the offers of two Italian companies willing to undertake the postal business. One of them, based in Genoa, was the *Peirano* company, the other was *Florio*. The former already had lines of communication joining Messina and the north of Italy and the Governor believed that it could, perhaps, be induced to extend that line to Malta. The latter company was the current contractor on the Malta-Messina route. However, in late 1872 it had relinquished part of the service because of lack of profitability. The twice-weekly service had been reduced, with the Friday trip stopped. The Governor went on to suggest that maybe *Florio* might be enticed to resume their Friday service against a financial inducement. This, he noted, would be the most economical course to pursue.



Let me pause here for a moment to introduce the Florio family. The connections between that family and Malta were not limited to the provision of the shipping service. These connections had their roots in the very rise to wealth and fame of that family. The large commercial interests which that commercial enterprise was to acquire during the early and middle years of the nineteenth century, and the vicinity of their home island to Malta – a British colony – ensured that, from early on, some contact between the two would be inevitable.

The road to wealth and status of the Florio had begun in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and culminated a century later by which time the Florio were the most prestigious Sicilian family. It had been the exertions and initiative of the brothers Paolo and Ignazio, sons of a poor blacksmith, which launched the family into the world of business. And it was Paolo's son, Vincenzo who attained the apex of fame, such that he was condescendingly known by the Palermitan aristocracy as *il facchino fortunato* (the lucky porter – earned because of the work which members of his family had engaged in). The two brothers Florio had started their commercial life by establishing sea communication between Sicily and Marseilles for the carriage of medicines. In 1814 they were trading under the trade name of 'I. e V. Florio' and within a couple of years the brothers had expanded their commercial operations well beyond its modest beginnings. Thus, for example, Ignazio Florio visited Malta regularly to ensure a steady supply of trading goods (including aluminium, quicksilver, cinnamon, nutmeg and saffron), trading these most probably with such medicinal products as gentian and valerian.

It should be kept in mind that between 1806 and 1815 there was a conspicuous presence of British merchants in Sicily. This was conducive to the opening of new lines of communication, and trade, with other parts of Europe. Furthermore, trade with France had been re-opened after the Napoleonic Wars. And the Florio family was quick to see the commercial potential of all this. The contact with British merchants in Sicily, particularly with one of the most renowned, Benjamin Ingham, resulted in the Florio's first involvement with the sea. Ingham encouraged Vincenzo Florio to become a shareholder in the *Società dei battelli a vapore siciliani*. That company had been established in 1840 having Vincenzo Florio, Benjamin Ingham and Gabriele Chiamonte Bordonaro as principal shareholders together with some other one hundred twenty smaller ones. sulphur mines, wines (*Marsala* wine), chemicals, the export of lemons, as well as property dealings.





In 1856 the Bourbon government had decided to privatise the mail service. The Florio were ideally located to occupy this position, having the only Sicilian steamship fleet. Furthermore, their wealth had also led to the acquisition of political friends who could push their cause. The award of the contract relating to Sicilian mail proved to be very profitable for the *Florio*, such that they

invested more money in the purchase of a new steamship, the *Etna*. Two years later, they also managed to get their hands on the contract for the carriage of mail between Sicily and Naples, and this proved even more profitable. It was this latter contract, coming a few years before the Unification of Italy, that placed the Florio family on the Italian map, launching them into the restricted elite of the great Italian merchants and, according to their biographer, *ai vertici dell'high society internazionale*. Eventually, Florio's company was given contracts by the Italian government covering weekly trips from Palermo to Genoa, Malta, Syracuse, Catania, Naples, as well as three (then four) weekly trips to Naples and a fortnightly one to Tunis. By this time, Florio's company was the only Italian enterprise capable to competing for such contracts since the other two large commercial lines, the *Rubattino* and the *Accossato*, were heavily indebted companies. Florio had acquired so much clout and influence as to be able to acquire an interest free loan from the Italian government with which to purchase still more steamships and to construct a proper landing place for its ships at Palermo. Prior to this construction the Florio steamships had been sent to the Malta docks for repairs.

This was the company which, until the impasse of 1873, held the contract for the carriage of mail to and from Malta.

We must now return to consider what was happening in local official circles to solve the problem which had arisen following the *Florio*'s threatened default on part of its service.



In the wake of the offer made by *Emmerson & Murgatroyd*, the Governor felt that the best way to proceed was by issuing a public call so that anyone interested in providing the service of carriage of mail to Syracuse could make an offer. That call had hardly been issued when the Governor was approached by a British company, whose identity was to remain confidential. This unnamed company offered to establish a line of communication between Malta and Syracuse, in return for a subsidy of £2,000. Such a contract, thought the Governor, would have 'secured all the postal improvement that was necessary,' since there was already the weekly voyage operated by the *Florio* on the strength of the contract which this latter company had with the Italian government. Yet, the governor demurred. He felt that, in such a matter, the local Council of Government should be consulted. The governor however was dismayed to discover that the Council members i.e. the elected part of the Council, was not ready to give its go-ahead as easily as he thought. He informed London that,

*The majority, however, of the elected members having stated that they were not, at that moment, prepared to express an opinion: and two of them having added that the Notice published the day before, rendered it necessary or expedient to come to no conclusion before the 15<sup>th</sup> of March [i.e. the last day, according to the call, fixed for receipt of offers], and that it was necessary to know all the particulars of the intended contract, the subject was postponed, for further consideration ...*

In the meantime, the body representing Malta's commercial community, the Chamber of Commerce, informed the Governor that it had been holding talks with the *Florio*. This company had agreed to resume its Friday service against a subsidy of £4,000, later reduced to £2,000. The situation obtaining in December 1872 had, by February of the following year, been overturned. Now, there were four commercial enterprises offering to carry Malta's mail. All of them, however, were asking for money. At the back of the Governor's mind must have been how to solve the

economic problem: where to get the whole, or at least part of the money to ensure the service. He spelled out to the Colonial Office the benefits which would accrue to the Imperial Government, noting in the 11 February letter that,

*If the intended postal improvement were for the benefit of the local community alone. I should not have ventured to ask for pecuniary assistance from the Imperial Treasury; but the advantage is shared equally by the Officers of the Garrison and of the Navy, to say nothing of the Government correspondence.*

If the Governor thought that the problem was on its way to being resolved he was mistaken. Five of the elected members of the Council of Government, led by Malta's leading merchant, Emanuele Scicluna, presented a Resolution to counter that of the government. Scicluna noted that it was better to wait until March 18 (the closing day of the public call) 'in order to afford an opportunity to all parties to compete, and the Government to select the most advantageous tender; and that from this moment, a committee composed of Members of Council, should be appointed, and that such Committee should be instructed to examine in due time, the tenders, and to point out to the Council, by a report, the tender which will offer the best advantage.' It should be noted, without any hint of malice, that Scicluna was the leading merchant on the island and member of the Chamber of Commerce which had put forward Florio's proposal. The Chamber had openly declared to the governor that it favoured this latter proposal for a variety of reasons. Among other arguments, it referred to the coincidence with the steamer which left Naples on Wednesday and arrived at Messina on Thursday (thus the mail to Malta would not be delayed in the latter port, with the Florio steamer operating on Fridays); and to the coincidence of the Palermo steamer which, too, arrived at Messina evening Wednesday. Further, *Florio* was prepared to commence operations as from the first day of February of that year. In fairness, it should be added that even the Governor himself seemed inclined towards the *Florio* offer, as we have seen earlier. What is curious – and it is not known whether the Maltese authorities were aware of it or not – was that negotiations between the Italian government and *Florio* had been going on concurrently with the discussions held in Malta. At the same time that *Florio*

was making its offer to the Maltese Chamber of Commerce, it had already bound itself with the Italian government to resume its Friday service to Malta.



France, Cape of Good Hope and Great Britain stamps used in Malta

As was to be expected the offer made by the British company whose name was not revealed, was eventually withdrawn in view of the dragging over weeks of the whole matter. On 8 April 1873 – by which time the Colonial Office knew that *Florio's* Friday service would be resumed on the strength of the contract between that company and the Italian government – the Malta governor informed London that ‘the Florio company of Palermo ... have also withdrawn their previous tender.’ Now, it made a fresh one: they were prepared to reinstate the Friday service against a yearly subsidy of £2,000 for only nine months, commencing 1 April. It was this offer that was presented to the Council of Government and, the Governor thought that he had ‘reason to believe that it will be recommended for acceptance.’ As a consequence of the anticipated acceptance of this offer, the governor informed London that, in Malta’s tight financial situation, it would be necessary to make ‘some provision for at least a portion of the subsidy that will have to be paid.’ That meant, of course, increase in taxes; but that would hardly be enough, said the Governor. Additionally, the governor was fully conscious of the reluctance of the elected members of Council to vote extra taxation, and that of the Maltese public to pay them. Accordingly, he, once again, asked London for confirmation that the imperial subsidy would be forthcoming.

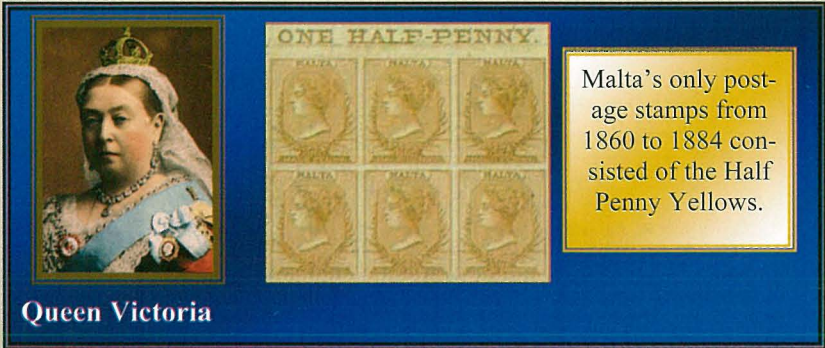
As is to be expected, London was perplexed by all this: how could *Florio* still be negotiating with the Maltese government on something over which it had already agreed with the Italian one? An official at the Colonial Office suggested that a telegram be sent to Malta asking whether, in fact, *Florio* had resumed the Friday service; and Colonial Secretary, the Earl of Kimberley concurred. Malta’s answer to London’s telegram was laconic (as telegrams usually were). It said: ‘Arrangements Florio broken off, no regular Fridays packet Sicily and Malta.’ Later on, in his despatch

to London, the Governor went into details. Apparently, the Council of Government had suggested some modifications to *Florio's* tender and these had been refused by the company's representative resident in Malta (identified as Mr di Bartolo). The Governor went on to say that,

*The Friday's mail has been re-established by Messers Florio since the 28<sup>th</sup> ultimo, quite independently, however, of any contract with this Government for a subsidy and entirely of their own accord, and I am not able to state whether the Friday's Mail will, or will not, be continued as I have not received further information from Messers Florio on the subject.*

The situation was still uncertain. The Governor feared that *Florio* would not continue with the service since these had broken off discussions. There was, furthermore, the problem of financing the transport of mail. London did not seem inclined to fork out any money and they informed the Governor accordingly in June of that year.

Somehow or other, the *Florio* service continued to be provided for the rest of 1873, but without the Friday trip. Van Straubenzee, the Malta Governor was, understandably, still wary of this company's reliability. When he checked on the contract which *Florio* had with the Italian Government, it transpired that the latter had the facility to suspend the Malta service and thereby saving some £2,500 a year.



Queen Victoria

ONE HALF-PENNY.

MALTA

MALTA

MALTA

MALTA

MALTA

MALTA

Malta's only postage stamps from 1860 to 1884 consisted of the Half Penny Yellows.

There was also the problem of the subsidy. London had refused to make any payments towards the service. They were not prepared to pay the small sum of £1,000 towards the expense, something which the Governor 'deeply regret[ted] ... in the earnest hope that the question may still be reconsidered.' The Governor was aware that if he were to turn to the local Council of Government for funds, particularly if no help from Britain being forthcoming, this would object to vote the required funds. The next best solution suggested by the Governor was that of asking the Colonial Office whether these could intervene with the Italian Government. Maybe, he wrote,

*Your Lordship will consider if it is possible at least to enter into some arrangement with the Italian Government for a portion of the subsidy now proposed, or for the reinstatement of the Friday service by Messers Florio & Co on a contribution by the Italian Government, as long as both the Tuesday and the Friday services would continue, of £1,000 a year.*

A new player had in the meantime come on the scene. A Mr P. L. Henderson contacted the Governor to offer the provision of the mail service – twice, or even thrice – weekly against an annual subsidy of £4,000 or £5,000. Henderson proposed to use his steamship, the *Italia*, to carry mail, as well as passengers and goods, between Malta and Sicily. However, he wanted an urgent reply to his proposal. The Governor, accordingly informed London that he would be convening the Council of Government to discuss this latter proposal.



Arms as used by the Kings of Italy from 1848-1880



The arms of Italy—1870



An eventual acceptance of this offer would have meant that there would have been *two*, not one, contracts for the carriage of mail: one funded by the Italian Government (namely, the *Florio* service) and another one by the Maltese (Henderson's). Van Straubenzee, a Malta-born British governor, sought in this any possible benefits. He could avoid asking for an increase in taxation to finance the contract if a compromise was reached with the Italian Government. Accordingly,

*I requested some information as to the probable amount that would remain for the benefit of the Malta Treasury from postage on letters etc., carried by a Packet trading between this Island and Syracuse, and subsidized by the Malta Government.*

From calculations he made, it resulted that the subsidy which the Italian Government was paying the *Florio* for their Malta service amounted to £2,500 per year. At the same time, that contract empowered the Italian Government 'to suppress that service and thereby to save that large amount.' Perhaps, thought the Governor, it might be suggested to the Italian Government to withdraw the *Florio* service (once the Henderson contract had been accepted by Malta's Council of Government) and, in consideration of the savings made, contribute towards the subsidy to be paid to Henderson.



This brief overview of the problems relating to the carriage of mail between Malta and the rest of Europe limited to a very brief period brings to the fore Malta's peripheral geographic position. On the one hand, we have seen how private interests sought to provide a service that was vital to both local and imperial interests, against payment. On the other, we witness the

reluctance of the imperial government to contribute to such a service despite the importance of having regular and reliable communication between Malta and London. Somehow or other, however, the service would continue to be provided. In 1891, for example, a new governor, H.A. Smyth, would inform London that the contract with the *Florio-Rubattino* company (*Florio* had in the meantime run into financial difficulties and had merged with the *Rubattino* company in 1881 under the name of *Navigazione Generale Italiana*) would run its course on 31 December of that year. Now, however, the volume of business had increased substantially such that as much as six weekly trips between Malta and Sicily might be required. Accordingly, the Governor requested permission from London to raise the amount of the subsidy then being paid to the Italian company. The problem of getting enough money, of course, remained. In the wake of the 1873 events related above, the Imperial Government had reluctantly started to make an annual contribution of £1,200. This, however, had with time proved to be insufficient to provide an efficient service even if augmented by local funds. The financial conundrum would remain long after the events of 1873: everyone wanted the service but no one would, or could, pay for it.

The triangular competition between private interests, the local government and London concerning the transport of mail is but an example of the structural forces and economic limitations impinging upon political realities. Ultimately, it resolved itself to trying to find an answer to just one question:

### *Is there money in the mail?*

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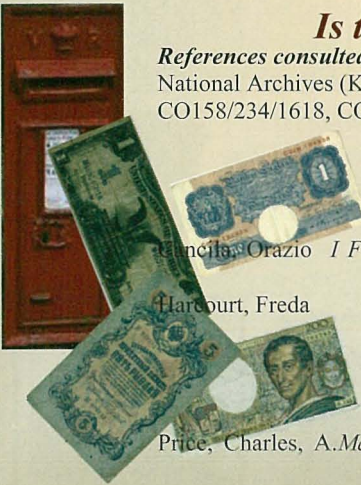
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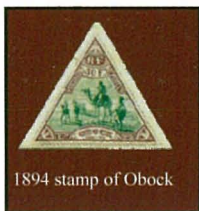
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## Stamp terms used in **PHILATELY** (39)

Emanuel Vella.



1894 stamp of Obock

**Obock;** Seaport of French Somaliland. Colonial 'Commerce' keytypes first appeared in 1892. Striking triangular and large oblong stamps were issued the next year. Since 1901 Obock has used stamps of the French Somali Coasts.

**Obsolecent;** About to become obsolete—to remain in use until existing stocks are exhausted or withdrawn. E.g. The death of a pope renders all existing stamps bearing his portrait obsolescent immediately. This also apply to the death of a king or queen. They normally become obsolete when the new issue is stocked. This happened also in Malta with the change over to the Euro.

**Obsolete;** In philately -no longer in use; or has ceased. i.e. Stamps have been discarded or replaced by a new issue. It also means that these stamps cannot be sold from post offices, but not necessarily invalid for prepayment of letters.

**Oceanic Settlements;** French islands in Easter Pacific, including Tahiti, the Society Island, the Marquesas, etc. Stamps first issued in 1892—through a few of the general French Colonial issue were overprinted for Tahiti from 1882. The Island was renamed French Polynesia in 1958.



**Oceanic;** Oceanic Settlement.



### **Odontometre;**

Tooth measure. The continental name for perforation gauge.



Invented in 1886 by Dr. Legrand of Paris.

**Oesterr or Oestereich;** Stamps of Austria.







**Off Centre;** A stamp not centrally printed within the limits of the paper i.e. With margins of uneven width. Early stamps which are off centre are generally regarded as less valuable or desirable than those perfectly centred.

**Offentlig Sak;** Inscription of certain official issues of Norway, now abbreviated to O.S.

**Officials;** Stamps issued for the use of Government Departments, public servants, members of parliament, the army,



etc. Such stamps may or may not be supplied free, but are a check upon usage and expenditure. In some countries, like India, they are known as Service Stamps



**Official 'Paid Post';** These are 'Franks' (q.v.) in the strict sense of the word in that they indicate that the letter or package as impressed is not liable for payment either in advance or on receipt. They were in use as hand-struck stamps since the 17th. Century and are still used today.



**Official Reprints;** Stamps reprinted by the original stamp issuing authority for special purpose, person or body or as a commemorative; either in the original colours or the same type of paper or otherwise.



**Off paper;** Used stamps which have been soaked in water to remove superfluous paper.

*(to be continued)*

## PHILATELIC CENTENNIALS (9)

*glances – and longer looks – at  
events from a hundred years ago*

*Antoine Vassallo*



**Perth. The complete G.P.O. Staff. 1863**



2013 marked the centenary of the first Australian Commonwealth postage stamp. For some 60 years prior to its release, the separate colonies in the island-

continent had produced their own. Normally called states by stamp collectors, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and the island of Tasmania continue to provide a vast area for philatelists.

Released 12 years after Federation, the first Australian national stamp had a troubled beginning. This was partly due to the complexity of a changing postal administration; but it was also political in nature. Despite convening a specialist board and holding an international competition to obtain an outstanding design, the “Kangaroo and Map” proved a contentious result. The design of no single artist, it engendered widespread anger that the King's head was absent. Other criticism revolved around the idea that a kangaroo should be adopted as a national symbol, within a design that was considered rudimentary compared with the ornate standards of the time. Since its turbulent release, however, the Kangaroo and Map design has obviously gained much respectability - and offers much possibility for specialization. The World Stamp Expo celebrated its centenary.

*You might also like to refer to parts 10 and 11 in the Posthaste series which appeared in Newsletters 40 and 41.*



## Not just PAPER (5)

*Antoine Vassallo*

### *examples of unusual stamp production*



**Jersey** Post took the opportunity offered by the 2013 Superman movie “Man of Steel” starring Jerseyman Henry Cavill to issue a set featuring numerous innovative production techniques (developed by France’s Cartor). It can be said that each stamp pays tribute to the hero’s

different super powers.

The 45p stamp triggers the augmented reality app which allows you to view bonus material by hovering with smartphone or device. The self-adhesive



55p is transparent, representing the ability to fly. The gleaming 60p is printed on flat simili-silver foiling, reflecting his incredible strength. The 68p is printed with thermochromic ink which, when warmth is applied (even through holding with fingertips), reveals a further image. Crushed granite taken from a pebble on Beauport beach (the actor’s



favourite spot in Jersey) is applied to the face of each 80p thermographic stamp to give its rough, tactile finish. Printed with glow-in-the-dark ink, the 88p reveals a hidden message

(visible only in darkness). The lenticular Miniature sheet completes this issue: a fast moving image flies across when tilted.

## MALTA OVERSEAS

*Antoine Vassallo*

### local connections on foreign stamps (16)



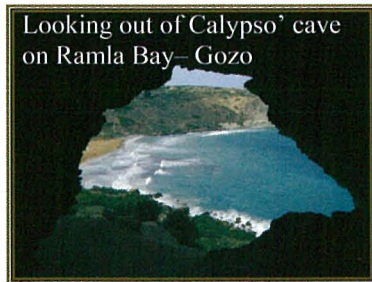
Various countries (including Malta itself - in 1998) have commemorated Jacques Cousteau, the renowned explorer of the seas. Probably not all of us know of his connection with Malta. In fact his ship “Calypso” plied the Gozo-Malta route for a few months. So Cousteau’s vessel can truly be described as a Gozo ferry which has featured on numerous Cousteau stamps (sometimes anonymously). For example, Romania had this in a 1985 Explorers & Pioneers set.



The Calypso was originally a wooden-hulled minesweeper built for the British Royal Navy by the Ballard Marine Railway Company of Seattle, USA. Made from Oregon pine, she was launched on 21 March 1942 and assigned to active service in the Mediterranean (HMS J-826). Soon after laid up at Malta, this ship was struck from the Naval Register in 1947.

The contract to transport mail between Malta and Gozo had just passed to Joseph Gasan (previously involved in operating the pre-war sailings to Sicily). “Supply” permitting a very limited service, Gasan had to acquire a new boat.

This one seemed ideal since he had already chartered similar vessels. Purchased in May 1949, she was converted for commercial service and renamed “Calypso G” in obvious reference to the Homeric nymph who hosted Ulysses right overlooking Ramla (Ogygia transmuted into Gozo!). Placed on



Looking out of Calypso’ cave on Ramla Bay– Gozo

the sailings in March 1950, Gasan sold her at a good price in July the same year. The name was however kept, just dropping the “G”.

Irish millionaire Thomas Loel Guinness leased her for a symbolic one franc a year to Cousteau who restructured and transformed her



at Antibes into an expedition vessel and support base for diving, filming and oceanographic research. Calypso carried advanced equipment, including one and two-man mini submarines

developed by Cousteau, diving saucers, and underwater scooters. The ship was also fitted with a see-through "nose", an observation chamber three meters below the waterline, and was even modified to house scientific equipment and a helicopter pad.



To conclude, I add further examples - thus crossing the oceans too!



**A romantic painting of the nymph Calypso and Ulysses in their cave at Xaghra-Goze.**

## E & O not E (31)

*glances at stamps with design or printing mistakes.*

*Antoine Vassallo*

The Ordnance Survey is the official mapping agency for Great Britain, one that prides itself on order and detail. Celebrating its 1991 bicentenary, this error of value cannot escape a certain measure of irony. How upset they must have been when some of their commemorative stamps were released in 1991 with the wrong price on them! Though ultimately printed with 28p as the value, Royal Mail issued some trial stamps to an exhibition (just before the postal rate increase) showing 26p. The "official" line is that this was not really an error; but examples were reported to have been found in at least one post office.

One should always check thoroughly what may appear common and cheap stamps!



## PROMOTING GOZO THROUGH PHILATELY

### Comino: the Church



*Antoine Vassallo*

Further to the two previous articles (issues 43 & 47), there is a final Comino building to note: a chapel located above *Santa Marija* Bay – quite an uncommon setting. One can reach this single-storey building (surrounded by trees) by

walking up from the sands, past the police station.

Known to have been built in 1618 (because of the new security offered by the Tower – and enlarged in later centuries), it has been desecrated and re-consecrated at least once in its history (by Bishops Bueno and Cannaves respectively). Like many countryside chapels around Malta and Gozo, it was probably ransacked quite a few times by raiders from the Barbary Coast; this could explain the buttress at the back. The earliest record of a chapel here can be seen on a 12<sup>th</sup> (or 13<sup>th</sup>) century navigational map (extant at the Greenwich Observatory Museum).

On the **66c** stamp in the **2004** Chapels set (designed by Renè Sacco), Comino church is described as “*ta’ Santa Marija*” (like the bay itself) – as often simply called. It was originally dedicated to the Annunciation (one of the commonest and earliest devotions connected with the Madonna) but this was changed in 1716 to another very joyful moment in her life – her safe return from Egypt to her hometown in Nazareth. This is sometimes described as “the Holy Family Upon its Return from Egypt”; however, to conserve its Marian nature, it is usually referred to as Our Lady on the Return from Egypt – probably uniquely! Old documents state that the feast-day was 7<sup>th</sup> January but is now celebrated liturgically on the last Sunday in July.

A priest crosses over from Gozo to offer his services: interestingly, though the island is under Ghajnsielem’s responsibility, it seems that he has usually been from Qala. His presence is confirmed by bell peeling, rung from

the tiny sacristy. When rough seas stopped him, the residents gathered on the *Tal-Hmara* rocks to follow Mass said for them in the Immaculate Conception chapel (“*tal-Blat*”) above Hondoq ir-Rummien (Qala) across the channel – with the help of a complex flag code.

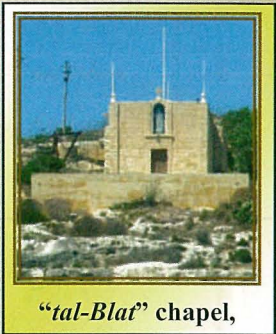


On entering through the doorway in the plain façade, one is struck immediately by the unusual layout: the altar (with its titular painting attributed to the important Maltese artist Francesco Zahra) on one side and the benches on the other. But then the aura of silence and peace overwhelms! There is

something else which is striking: what can be described as a wooden trellis separating the presbytery from the rest of the church; this surely counts as proof of antiquity! Other contents include an elegant confessional, three lesser-than-life-size statues (the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady and St. Joseph with the Child Jesus), a Crucifix and a set of *Via Sagra* (Way of the Cross) .



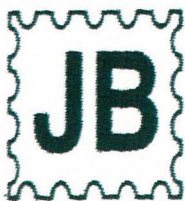
Dun Karm Xerri  
Rector



“*tal-Blat*” chapel,

Other contents include an elegant confessional, three lesser-than-life-size statues (the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady and St. Joseph with the Child Jesus), a Crucifix and a set of *Via Sagra* (Way of the Cross) pictures. Linguists may note the inconsequential wooden collection box because it is written in the non-standard Maltese orthography of the pre-1930s. Anti-aircraft shells are recycled as flower pots for decoration: they were brought over by the island’s only active soldier in World War II. There is a 1950s marble skirting going around the wall but unpretentiousness remains the main impression. Until 1949 Comino used to have its Maltese-style *fiesta* in the summer but tragedy struck that year when a petard exploded on the ground, killing a young resident. No more outside celebrations have been held since – and the decorations stored away.





**The JB Catalogue of Malta Stamps  
and Postal History**

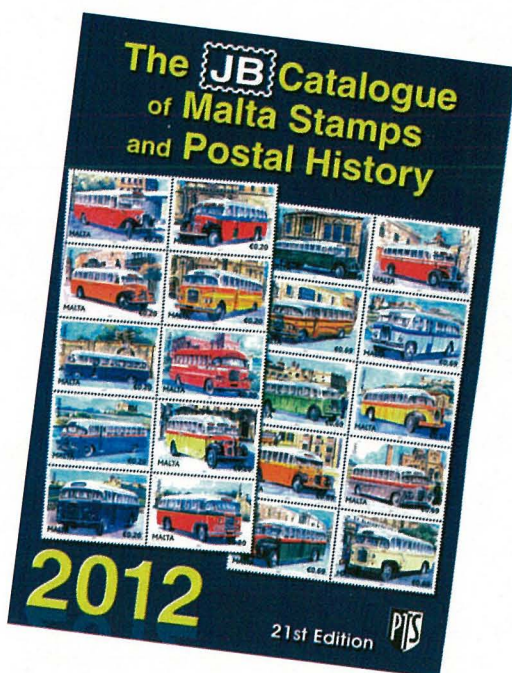
**Published by Sliema Stamp Shop**

**91 Manwel Dimech Street Sliema - Malta**

**21st Edition  
in Colour  
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