

1844 MALTA MAIL SACK

by John De Battista



A curious exhibit during this year's Maltex Exhibition was a Post Office sack from 1844 which comes from the private collection of Mr. Jesmond Borg. Visitors raised a number of questions about it and here I attempt to give a little background information to hopefully clear some of them.

In 1844, Inland and Foreign mail services were still two distinct setups from one another. The Island Post Office being run by Mr. Vincenzo Mamo (1838-1849) was entrusted with the handling of local mail, while the Packet Agency which was under the direction of Mr. Richard J. Bouchier (who was the Packet Agent from 1828 up to ca. 1853), handled foreign mail.

The Packet Agency was located at what was previously the “*Banca Giuratale*” at 197, Strada Mercanti (Merchant's Street) Valletta. It had moved to these premises in 1841, from the “*Casino Maltese*” located in Strada Reale (Republic Street) which incidentally is the place where the Maltex 2018 Exhibition itself was held. The latter premises still remained the building from which the Island Post Office operated from up to 1849. From that year even the Island Post Office moved to the ex-*Banca Giuratale* building, when both post offices were amalgamated under the direction of H.M. Packet Agent.

The preface to the Anglo-French Postal Convention of 1843 confirmed the importance of Malta as a communication center in the middle of the nineteenth century:-

“Since 1837, our paquebots from Levant have chosen the Island of Malta for the dividing line for the regions declared suspect by the sanitary rules and where navigation takes place under free licence. For its part England has carried on from the same point two lines of paquebots, one leaving every month from Falmouth and touching Gibraltar; the other leaving every month also, from Marseilles and Alexandria and carrying correspondence from the East Indies passing through France. These different combinations make the Island very important from the

point of view of postal relations in the Mediterranean waters.”

There exists a likely possibility that use of these particular mail sacks came into being as a consequence and following the signing of the Anglo-French Postal Convention of 1843 just quoted.

One telltale that the sack belonged to the Packet Agency can be arrived at from visible information on the sack itself, as it records that it was the property of the Malta Post Office. The year 1844 is an outright proof that the sack could not have originally belonged to the reorganized Post Office as in that year the two postal services were still not combined together under the direction of Mr. Richard J. Bourchier. However, the possibility that the sacks were still in use post 1849 following the amalgamation and reorganization of the Maltese postal services remains.

The fact that the sack is being requested to be returned to Malta is another pointer that they must have been commissioned to be used to transport mail outside of these islands by the Packet Agency. This marking further clarifies that it was not intended as a single use transportation sack, but was to be recycled and made use of as required between the Malta Post Office and foreign postal authorities.

The size and four-loop “hanging” configuration of the mail sack shows that it was designed with the intention to enable easy use and handling during filling, weighing and transportation all the way from the Packet Agency, on board the steam transporting mail vessel and beyond in mind.

Technical details:

Material:	Sail Cloth	Lettering:	
Loop Durability	Metal D-Rings	POST OFFICE	7.5 x 34.5 cms.
Protectors:		RETURN	4.0 x 16.0 cms.
Length of sack:	96.0 cms.	TO	3.5 x 5.0 cms.
Breadth of sack:	57.0 cms.	MALTA	5.0 x 18.5 cms.
Tapered Loop size:	5.0 x 2.0 top & 3.0 bottom cms.	✱	5.0 x 5.0 cms.
Distance between loops:	27.0 cms top, 25.0 cms bottom.	1844	4.0 x 12.5 cms.
		A	4.0 x 3.0 cms.

**AGM to be held on
Wednesday 30 January 2019 @ 6pm
Capuchin Hall, Floriana**