

The Melita Adhesives 1922-1926

by Dr. A. Bonnici

Political background¹

In the aftermath of World War I, the cost of living increased dramatically. There was a widespread belief amongst the populace that grain importers and flour millers were making excessive profits over the price of bread. The first meeting of the National Assembly, held on February 25, 1919, approved a resolution which reserved for Malta all the rights given to other nations by the Versailles peace conference; this would have meant independence from the British Empire.

The *Sette Giugno* event (7th June 1919)

A few days before the June 7 National Assembly meeting, the Secretary of State for the Colonies had informed Dr. Sceberras that the incoming governor for the islands, Lord Plumer, was to study the situation and report to London with regards to the possibility of giving the Maltese a larger say in the administration of their country.

The first spark of unrest centred on the Maltese flag defaced with the Union Jack flying above the "*A la Ville de Londres.*"

The crowd proceeded to the Officers' Club, insisting that the club's door had to be closed. The crowd then returned to the front of the Bibliothèque, shouting for the Union Flag to be taken away; it was promptly removed by the men on duty.

The crowd moved on to the meteorological offices which were attacked and then moved back to the Palace Square. The offices of the Daily Malta Chronicle were broken into, with pieces of metal jammed in the workings of the presses to break them.

The Police forces' acting-commissioner then called for military support. At 17.30, sixty-four soldiers from the Composite Battalions entered the Courts which housed the headquarters of the police force. Six soldiers, under the command of Major Ritchie, the G.C.O and Captain Ferguson, made their way towards Strada Forni to defend the house of Anthony Cassar Torreggiani, a leading importer.

The report of the inquiring commission then proceeded to state that a shot was heard from the direction of a window of the Cassar Torreggiani house. At face value, this gives the impression that the Maltese were the first to shoot during the uprising.

At that moment, as eyewitnesses reported, one of the soldiers shot a round into the crowd, with the rest of the troop following. The first victim of the uprising, Manwel Attard, fell. Ġużè Bajada was hit near Strada Teatro, and fell on top of the Maltese flag he was carrying. The officer in charge began shouting for the firing to cease. Meanwhile, in the Chronicle offices, Lietenant Shields ordered his men outside. To clear a way out, Shields ordered a soldier to shoot low, away from the

crowd. This shot hit Lorenzo Dyer, who tried to run away. Since the injury was serious, he was lifted by the crowd and carried to Palace Square. During this initial uprising, three died and fifty were injured.

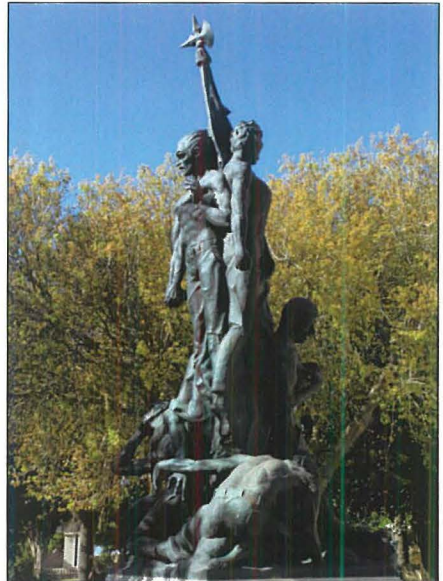
The Assembly passed a quick motion in order to have a resolution to present to the Imperial government. Count Alfredo Caruana Gatto then addressed the crowds, asking them to restrain themselves from further violence. The Assembly then sent a delegation to the Lieutenant Governor, asking the troops to be removed for the crowds to retreat. The Governor accepted, and Caruana Gatto addressed the crowd again, which complied and began to fall back.

The next day the Francia House was attacked and Carmelo Abela was in one of the side doorways of Francia's house, calling for his son. Two marines proceeded to arrest him, and when he resisted, a marine ran him through the stomach with a bayonet. Abela died on June 16.

Aftermath

A Military Court was opened to investigate the uprising on June 16, with a court martial instituted to investigate thirty-two people who had taken part in the uprisings. For legislative members, the *Sette Giugno* underlined the urgency of reform. The new Governor, Lord Plumer, recommended liberal concessions to the Maltese. The House of Commons of the United Kingdom stressed that Malta was to have "control of purely local affairs", with the Colonial Secretary sending a detailed description of the proposed constitution to the National Assembly. On April 30, 1921, the Amery-Milner Constitution was proclaimed; political censorship enforced after the uprising was repealed on June 15, 1921. The first election held under the new constitution was held in October 1921, with the Prince of Wales inaugurating the new representative chambers on November 1, 1921.

On June 7, 1986 the *Sette Giugno* monument was inaugurated at St. George Square (Palace Square) Valletta, and later moved to Hastings Gardens. It is again being considered to be moved. The Maltese Parliament declared the day to be one of the five national days of the island, on March 21, 1989, with the first official remembrance of the day occurring on June 7, 1989.



¹. Wikipedia

Artists who designed the Melita issue postage stamps²

The Artists who designed the Melita issue were Edward Caruana Dingli and Gianni Vella.

Edward Caruana Dingli was born in 1876 in what was then called Queensway in Valletta, incidentally in the area where City Gate and the new Parliament Building is. Caruana Dingli studied under Antonio Micallef and Giuseppe Cali. In his long career he painted several well known personalities.

After self-government was granted in 1921 various definitive stamps issued between 1899 and 1922 were overprinted. Self-Government, and a new set of stamps designed by Maltese artists Edward Caruana Dingli and Gianni Vella was issued on 1st August 1922

E. Caruana Dingli's design featured an allegory of Melita on the ¼ d to 6 d and £1 values, and G. Vella designed the 1/- to 10/- values.

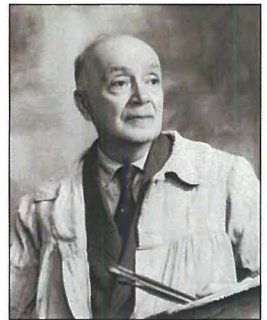
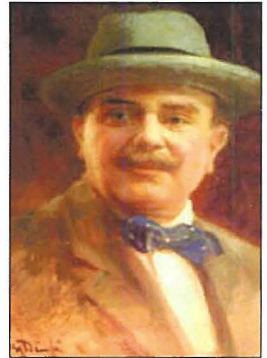
In 1926 it was decided that this set was to be overprinted **POSTAGE**.

Gianni Vella was born in Cospicua on 9th May 1885 and became one of the most prolific Maltese painters.

He was responsible for designing the 1/-; 2/-; 2/6; 5/-; 10/- depicting Melita leaning on Britannia. He was responsible for designing the Sette Giugno monument situated in Hastings Gardens.

For more details re the Melita Adhesives 1922-26 by Johnny Van Haefen, consult Malta Study Circle (UK) Paper, Number 24 revised 1972.

For the overprinted Melita **3d POSTAGE inverted**, see PSM Vol. 38/2 August 2009, article by Dr Albert Ganado.



² Wikipedia