

The Malta Independence Commemorative Stamps

By

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After “*The Break with Britain Resolution*” was moved in Parliament on the 30th December 1957, for the first time in Malta there was a common united front and cry by the two major political parties, that the road forward for Malta was that of Independence¹.

Following the May 1964 referendum, while the Independence negotiations with the British Government were still ongoing, minister Dr. Carmelo Caruana (1916-1992) who was responsible for Agriculture, Fisheries and Communications, asked celebrated artist Chev. Emvin Cremona (1919-1987) to design a set of stamps so as to mark and commemorate Malta’s Independence.

Emvin Cremona was not new to this genre of work because he had already designed eight sets of postage stamps for Malta². The artist shortly after this request submitted his designs to the Ministry, which in its turn gave the necessary approvals.

The printing contract for the stamps was awarded, through the *Crown Agents*, to the renowned British printing firm of Harrison & Sons who were based in London. The firm started sending what in the printing industry are known as “*proofs*” for approval. When the last one was delivered, Harrison & Sons requested the Minister to give them permission by a certain date so that the actual printing of the stamps could commence; as otherwise they held it would not be possible for them to complete the order in time by September as requested.

Since the talks for Independence had taken longer than originally thought and a final decision had still not been taken, the minister was not in a position to give the go ahead. Notwithstanding this, we learn from an article penned by the minister’s secretary Mr. John Scicluna published in the “*Il-Mument*” newspaper of the 4th February 2007, that the minister at the time had told him that regardless of the uncertain situation he was going to give the go ahead to the printer just the same. It is said that the minister had taken this decision in the light that if Independence was not granted, the option remained for the stamps to still be released with the words “*Independence not granted*” overprinted on them^{3,4}.

In due course it resulted that this alternative measure was not necessary, as Malta’s Independence was approved and the stamps were released as planned on the 21st September 1964, the day Malta became Independent.





The Independence Postage Stamp Set



Emvin Cremona

It is worth mentioning that the designs submitted by Cremona are very noteworthy in that they show the artist's skill in how to capture an idea and transmit a message. The basic design of all the stamps is composed of a dove, symbol of peace, superimposed over a vertical banner made up of our national colours, flying towards the Maltese eight-pointed cross located at the upper left hand side. At the top right hand corner one finds the word 'Malta', while at the bottom one finds the word *Independence* together with the stamp face value.

On the two-pence and one shilling values, at the top left hand corner of the basic design we find the addition of the British Crown, a symbol of Malta's Colonialism, with the eight-pointed cross positioned right underneath. The Crown is replaced by the Pope's Tiara and a Cross, symbols of the Roman Catholic religion, for the three-penny and one shilling sixpence values. For the final two stamps which comprise the set, those of the sixpence and half crown values, these additional symbols are substituted with the emblem of the United Nations, a symbol of universal recognition of the sovereignty of member states.

With the varying of these symbols one may visualize the change which took place in Malta from a colonized country, embracing catholic values, to a sovereign state. However through the unchanged symbolism present in the basic design, one is also able to see a deeply rooted nation that throughout this journey also embraced and did not change what distinguishes us as Maltese. Finally, each stamp is given a unique appearance through the different colours used for the background; which some have interpreted to represent the innumerable hues of the colourful Maltese culture and character.

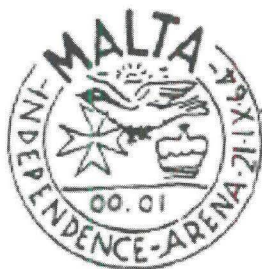
The stamps were printed by means of the *photogravure* process on Maltese Crosses (upright) watermarked paper, with an Arabic gum coating as adhesive. Each sheet consisted of sixty stamps, made up of six rows of ten stamps each. The perforation used for all the stamps is of 14.5 x 13.5 comb. Two printing plates were used for each of the six values, in each case with the alphanumeric designations of the plates being 1A1A1A and 1B1B1B.



Cancelled with the first minute of Independence on 21 September 1964

For the occasion of Independence Day, the Department of Posts set up a temporary branch within the annex of the Floriana Primary School in order that the needs of those present in the “Independence Arena” could be catered for. This branch was open on Independence Day from midnight up to four o’ clock in the morning, from eight up to noon and in the evening from six o’ clock till midnight.

The Department of Posts also thought of commemorating the event through the use of a commemorative hand stamp. This special hand stamp has an unusual twist behind it as well, since besides the “normal” time set it may also be found used with the time reading 00.01 so as to indicate the first minute following Independence⁵.



The Government, on its part, prepared a special commemorative folder with these stamps which was distributed only to the Members of the Maltese Parliament as a memento⁶.

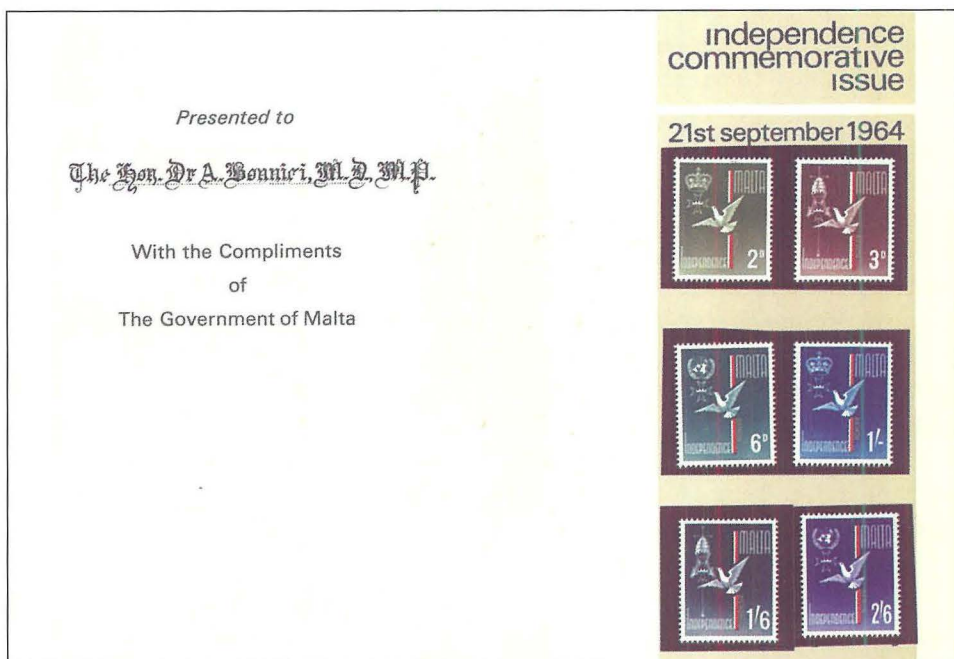
This stamp set was on sale by the Department of Posts up to the 31st December 1964. During the three months the stamps were on sale the following quantities were sold:

2d = 1,150,927; 3d = 1,797,145; 6d = 600,777; 1/- = 349,203; 1/6 = 221,468; 2/6 = 151,358

In concluding, it is worth mentioning that on the 15th May of last year, MaltaPost p.l.c. has made use of one of the original designs, with a slight modification, for the issue of one of the two stamps released in the “Anniversaries 2014” miniature sheet which marked the fifty years from the granting of Independence and the forty years since the declaration of Malta as a Republican State⁷.



The Miniature Sheet issued in 2014



References:

- ¹ Dr. H. Frendo, Patrijott Liberali Malti Dr. G. Borg Olivier. p.229
- ² Said Malta Stamp & Coin Catalogue 1981
- ³ Il-Mument – 4th February 2007
- ⁴ Malta Philatelic Society Journal Vol. 43/2 August 2014
- ⁵ Malta Study Circle Paper 7 - Commemorative and First Day Postal Markings of Malta 1923-1999 (2002).
- ⁶ Card presented to the Hon. Dr. A. Bonnici MD, MP (1962-66). Speaker Emeritus House of Representatives (1966-71). MP (1971-76). President Malta Philatelic Society and Editor Journal of MPS.
- ⁷ Dr. A. Bonnici was both part of the acquisition of Independence in 1964 and Republic in 1974.