

1. Migiarrow Branch Post Office

by

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Tony Abela Abela Medici raised various questions regarding the use of the first datestamp at this Sub Post Office and from this flowed the questions of when was it opened, when did it become a BRANCH Post Office and when did it close? Incidentally the postage stamp illustrated with his article was actually dated 86 not 85.

There is fairly strong evidence that it was opened as a SUB Post Office on 1 December 1885 in the form of a letter from the Maltese Post Office during the First World War and which was reproduced in an early Malta Study Circle Newsletter (the first Circle - not the current one).

At the time we believed that in 1900 when Victoria became a Branch Post Office it was likely Migiarrow had as well, but this had never been proved and there were strong indications developing to say that it was either some time later or, indeed, that it had never become one. When searching Government Gazettes for postal information I found in the *Report on the Post Office for 1924-25* the following comment:-

“The striking difference between the figures against Migiarrow under headings Money Orders, Postal Order and Sale of Stamps and the corresponding figures for Victoria, Gozo, is due to the fact that until November 1924, the office at Migiarrow was not an authorized office for the issue and payment of money and postal orders. The Migiarrow District includes the villages of Ghainsielem, Kala, Nadur and Xeuchia and until then, holders of money orders residing within the district presented those orders, at the Migiarrow Office only for the Office in charge to transact them to his colleague at Victoria who remitted the relevant amounts for payment to the owners through the office at Migiarrow. As regards stamps the Postmaster at Migiarrow replenished his stock by supplies made to him by the Postmaster at Victoria. It was thus, be seen that the figures for money orders issued and paid and for stamps sold at the Victoria Gozo Branch Post Office, include respective amounts for those services transacted at Migiarrow until November 1924.”

Then:-

“By Government Notice No. 346 of the 27th November 1924 the authority, referred to elsewhere, for money and postal orders to be issued and paid at the Migiarrow District Post Office was legalized. As a consequence, the service of the Postmaster, who was also a Customs Officer and whose salary was paid in halves by this and the Customs Department were done away with and the Post Office at Migiarrow Gozo **was elevated to the status of a Branch Post Office** having the

identical attributions of the Office of Victoria and of the Branch Post Offices in Malta, and was placed under the charge of a regular (sic) appointed 2nd Class Postal Clerk.”

Government Notice 346 reads:-

“It is notified that in exercise of the powers conferred on the Minister by article 2 of “The Post Office Act 1924”, the undersigned has directed that postal and money orders be issued and paid also at the Migiarrro Branch Post Office, Gozo, as from the 1st December 1924.

November 27, 1924

Enrico Mizzi,

Minister for Industry and Commerce.”

The necessary conclusion is that it became a BRANCH Post Office only in 1924 and the reason was simply to allow it to issue and pay money and postal orders.

An interesting aside to the above concerns a very few covers which show both VICTORIA and MIGIARRO cancellations. Two have been identified so far.

The first is a picture postcard to Firenze franked by a Queen Victoria ½d. value cancelled by VIC-1 dated A/AU 27/00. To the left is a strike of MIG-1 with the same codings and further to the left is a strike of VAG-7 later in the day. This was sold on e-bay in May 2004 and it turned out that the purchaser was none other than Tony Fenech. He had purchased it in the belief that Victoria was a newly created BRANCH PO and therefore Migiarrro, remaining a SUB PO, was required to recognise that they had received the item but had to leave it to the superior office to actually cancel the stamp i.e. the system that was used for a period after both of the offices were first opened when it was left to the General Post Office to actually cancel the stamp. This is the latest recorded date of use of MIG-1 on a complete item.

However, the second item is from a slightly later period being dated 1904 but it is similarly treated. Due to the fact that other items were known from Migiarrro during this extended period the owner, myself, had come up with a totally different theory. I concluded that the item had come from a location that was under the control of Victoria BPO but which had actually sent mail to Migiarrro SPO which then had to forward it to the correct office for normal treatment. As it was addressed outside of Gozo it would then have been returned to Migiarrro, the village, for despatch on the ferry. In looking for a location from which it might have come I concluded that the only candidate was COMINO.

Tony was shown this second item and the theory put to him. Sadly he passed away before he had come to any firmer conclusions and these covers still pose a problem as to why both offices used their datestamp.

2. 1885 Definitives. bisected 1d. Value.

It has been known for a long time that the 1d. value was used in bisected form in December 1900. This was thought to have happened when the local Police Station at MELLIEHA ran out of ½d. value on 6th December 1900 during the holding of a military exercise in the area which led to an unexpected increase in local mail being posted there. The only problem with this supposition is that the bisected stamps appear to have been used for REVENUE purposes. It is known that W. Gatt, a local stamp enthusiast was in the Maltese forces at the time and was probably on the exercise. He certainly was the person who, on 24th May 1902, datestamped bisected stamps at the MELLIEHA Branch Post Office. It may be that the stories have been mixed up, but it may also be the case that Gatt had tried the same thing earlier when the Police Postal Agency did not have a postal datestamp and so the datestamp for revenue uses was used to meet a need.

An example of a bisected postage stamp with a datestamp tying it and showing the date 8 DEC.OO (it initially looks like a 6 at the front but close inspection shows it to almost certainly be an 8). This is not a postal datestamp and although the top is not visible it has all of the characteristics of the POLICE datestamps used at that time on revenue documents. The reverse of the paper shows no printing to indicate what the whole item might have been. These stamps are extremely rare, this being the only example I have seen in 35 years of collecting such items. What is interesting is that it was purchased from Sliema Stamp Auctions at a time when they were selling various rare items, generally linked to Gatt in some way and this item may have come from the same collection.

As always there is an interesting coincidence with the MELLIEHA bisects. The Postmaster of the Branch Post Office was Joseph Gatt Rutter. Is it possible that Gatt and the Postmaster were related and this led to the misuse of the datestamp by Gatt.

3. The 1956 3d. Value with inverted watermark

Many specialists in Maltese stamps have never seen an example of this variety and the question is regularly asked “does it exist?” The simple answer is that if it is listed in Gibbons then it certainly does exist because the catalogue editor will only list items he knows exist, generally by seeing an example of each.

Personally I can say “YES” because sitting in my collection is an example -

possibly the only one in existence. When I started to collect way back in 1964 I focussed on Malta because the first stamps I purchased were from the GPO whilst I was on a “Sunspot” exercise with four Vulcan bombers at Luqa Airport. About five years later an example in a small auction house, North West Philatelic Auctions, caught my eye simply because I didn’t have the item in my collection. A bid placed and a short while later I became the proud possessor of the stamp.

As the years have gone by I have come to realise that it is very rare and probably unique. Gibbons lists it at £850 but they have never actually sold one in the last forty years and the figure is just one at which they would sell the stamp if they had it. My example is used - Gibbons only list it as used - and I presume it is the item the listing came from. The stamp has a slogan postmark which dates from early 1957 so it must have been used on commercial mail. This almost certainly means that the other examples were used in the same manner and the others have either been lost or not yet identified.

Incidentally the 6d. of the same issue also exists with inverted watermark. This is a different ball game as I was told that Gibbons purchased a complete mint pane many years ago and they were sold over a period of time to collectors. My own example was purchased in the early 1970’s and it regularly comes up for sale in different places.

4. “T” Markings

Waterlow Setting Marks

Waterlow setting or ‘T’ marks are frequently met with. Although small they are intriguing and the reason behind their existence is given in the following letter, published in Stamp Collecting on 24th September 1954, from P.A. Waterlow, the Chairman of the Company, to W.T. Williams who had queried their presence on the GB 5 shillings value. The final sentence is of particular importance and relevance.

Dear Sir,

King George VI High Values

In reply to your query regarding the ‘T’ mark traced in the above stamps, this mark is used by us when transferring printing plates and is used to line up the transfer cylinder with the marked out plate. It is cut into the original die on both sides of the stamp and taken up together with the stamp impression when the transfer cylinder of the die is made.

The method of use is to move the cylinder in the transfer press until such time as

these marks coincide with the marked outline of the plate. This may entail several attempts before correct alignment of the stamp is obtained. When the correct position is found, the cylinder is held in position and the various marks made and the area of the marked outline on the plate are removed by burnishing.

In this particular instance we would imagine that these 'T' marks have not been completely burnished out. It sometimes happens that to the transferor's eye the burnishing is complete, and in the facing of the plate with chromium these marks become able to print due to the building up of the deposited metal around these burnished marks, making them just prominent enough to give a weak impression.

For this reason we try to place these marks in some position of the engraving, where it is either rolled out by transferring or hidden by surrounding work.

All stamps are transferred in this manner and not solely the ones in question.

Yours faithfully,
WATERLOW & SONS LTD
P.A. Waterlow, Chairman

At first sight it would appear that these markings are irrelevant to us but in fact they are often the reason for small, or large, varieties appearing on the stamps we collect. Indeed examples are recorded by specialists on the majority of the King George VI definitive stamps of Malta and some of them raise basic questions.

Perhaps the best example of one of these which was not cleared at all is the "semaphore flaw" on the King George VI 5/- value. This has achieved catalogue status as SG. 23a and SG. 247b. What is intriguing about the two stamps is that the first is relatively common whilst the second is extremely rare - but only printing plate is stated to have been used.

I have believed for a long time that when the SELF-GOVERNMENT stamps were created the bulk of the stock held in Malta was returned to Britain, overprinted and then returned. I also believe that when stock of the 1953 set was received in Malta it was simply put on top of the existing stock. The result of this was that the stamps sent to Britain could be from ANY PRIOR printing as well as the latest received although the vast bulk would always be stamps from the latest printing. I personally have corner plate blocks showing plate numbers which can only have been produced had the stamps been originally handled in the manner I believe. I have also seen a report that a block from plate 3 of the ½d. Brown shows the "joined NT" flaw but have not had this confirmed. Plate 3 was last used for the March 1944 printing and there were three later printings from plate 4 before that stamps were overprinted. Of course, for some of the stamps only the latest printing existed and even if earlier printings were returned to Britain they might be from quite early

printings with later ones used up.

In thinking this two things become clear. SG. 247b is rare because only a few sheets were sent for overprinting which came from an early 5/- printing and these were simply used in the normal manner - indeed the stamp is only listed so far in used condition. The other is that at some point another printing plate for the 5/- value was created or the original plate was treated again to remove the "semaphore". If this is the case then the change must have been carried out relatively early because nearly all of the stamps were used BEFORE the overprinting was considered, i.e. only a very few of the early sheets were still there with most stamps overprinted being from a more recent printing.

The new King George VI study paper by Graham Pound gives information on more stamps showing traces of the "T" markings and it may well be that these reveal more apparently new printing plates. A research project for a member who has a large KGVI collection?

By sheer chance I have come across the following in the middle of some papers I kept. It comes from a series of articles written by Dickon Pollard.

"and the 5/- (British 1939 - 48 type) may be found with a "T" guide mark in the hair. The late Gerry Bater, well known as a philatelic photographer and philatelist, wrote a series of articles in Gibbons Stamp Monthly, which were full of new observations on the British "square" high value of 1939 - 48. Gerry was responsible for getting me to understand how "T" guide marks came into being. I quote and paraphrase him, from his book *Waterlow Procedures: King George VI "Arms to Festival high Values; Design to Press:"* For most of the arms high values two "T" guide marks were impressed in the original die, one each some 5-6 mm ABOVE and BELOW the stamp design. (These could) "sometimes be transferred to the printing plate". The "T" guide mark ABOVE would become the lower "T" of the stamp above. Few actually appeared on the plate; most were carefully burrished off and the position re-engraved when necessary. Sometimes partial marks remained. Doubled marks, marks on the neck (from a plate differently set up), marks at the base and even one where there is a clear "T" in the hair as well as another, diagonally placed across the hairline all exist. The assumption by philatelists that ("T" guide marks) must always appear in the King's hair on Great Britian high values is now proven to be unfounded."

This explains to me why the "T" marks on King George VI stamps of Malta are in different positions and why they happened. I hope that it helps you as well.