

Malta Newspaper Wrappers: Infrequent Appearance, Analysis of Sales & Size of Collector Market

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After reading about the Knights of Malta I have held a fascination to visit and explore Malta. This was stimulated even more when my then financial adviser told me he had purchased a small flat in Malta and had filled the bookshelves with books about boating. However, visitations to that part of the world will have to wait until a suitable opportunity arises. Which brings me to the question, what do the following have in common: Count Dr. G. Messins, Valletta; E. H. Rymer, Sub-Lieut. RN, HMS “Edgar”, Suez; Rev R. A. MacDonald, St. Patrick’s College, Manly, Sydney; Alfred Smith, Hawaii (surely not “the” Alfred Smith)? These names and addresses appear on used newspaper wrappers of Malta.

Frequency of Appearance

The purpose of the paper is to review the frequency of appearance of Malta used post office newspaper wrappers that have appeared for sale on the internet site eBay, the range of realised prices and some features about the size of the market.

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An apparent lack of scholarship into newspaper wrappers, the poor cousin of postal stationery, piqued John’s curiosity and led him to specialize. He is preparing a comprehensive handbook of worldwide wrappers utilizing eBay internet data bases incorporating wrapper images and sale transactions. He has written more than 50 articles in journals including the Postal Stationery Collector, Philately from Australia, London Philatelist, Collectors’ Club Philatelist, BNA Topics, Pacifica, British Caribbean Journal and others. John is a member of the Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria, Royal Philatelic Society of London, Hong Kong Philatelic Society, Australian Philatelic Society, American Philatelic Society, Postal History Society, and the Postage Due Study Group. He has exhibited wrappers of Great Britain at both the national and international levels and has received vermeil and large silver awards. He has a philatelic library of 3000 volumes and keenly awaits “retirement” to devote more time and effort into philatelic research and writing”.

The study utilizes the data base of 33 used wrappers of Malta that were listed for sale on eBay between February 2003 and May 2009 being a data-gathering collection period of 75 consecutive months. This sub-population was culled from the author's larger unique database of images of 13,800 worldwide wrappers. The Internet site eBay is used as a proxy for wrappers that have appeared for sale on the international market. Although imperfect, it is a starting point for developing the analysis and creating benchmark statistics as to what has appeared.

According to the Higgins & Gage Priced Catalogue of Postal Stationery of the World, only three basic types of wrappers of Malta were issued between 1885 and 1912. H&G "E" prefix catalogue numbers are utilized for the newspaper wrapper stationery subtype and have been used for this analysis. These 33 used wrappers represent about one per 400 wrappers that have appeared on the eBay Internet market. This is a measure of the relative scarcity of used post office wrappers from Malta. There would be other copies from other web sites, dealers and within collections.

I have been unable to find any reference to information about the De la Rue printing quantities of Malta wrappers. One E1 wrapper listed for sale on eBay did contain the following information as part of a write-up and it is reproduced verbatim. "With regard to the 1885 E1 wrapper there were two printings: 15 July 1885 – 50,000 + 106 specimens and 15 September 1893 – 50,550. They were put on sale August or September 1885. The reason they were not ready for the time of the change to Island control of the Post Office was that DLR declined to print from the ½d stamp die because they said the engraving was too fine to reproduce well on coarse paper and the Maltese Government were not happy because the design did not incorporate the Maltese Cross. These 'problems' caused some considerable delay in production" (source unknown).

The De la Rue basic key plate designs used for Malta were used also by them in printing the indicium on newspaper wrappers for several British Colonies:

E1: Gibraltar E1, Grenada E1; Jamaica E1; Leeward Islands E1; Morocco Agencies E1; Natal E1; St. Lucia E1; St. Vincent E1; Sierra Leone E1.

E2: Gibraltar E10; Grenada E5; Jamaica E2; Leeward Islands E3; Morocco Agencies E4; Natal E3; Nyasaland Protectorate E1; Orange River Colony E1; St. Lucia E3; St. Vincent E3; Sierra Leone E2; Transvaal E9; Trinidad E4.

E3: Bermuda E6; Cyprus E9; Fiji E1; Gibraltar E12; Grenada E8; Jamaica E3; Leeward Islands E5; St. Lucia E5; St. Vincent E5; Sierra Leone E3; Trinidad & Tobago E1.

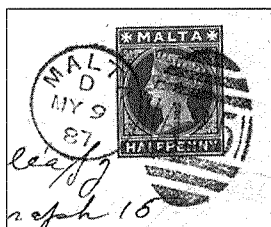
Table 1: Frequency of Appearance of 33 Used Post Office Wrappers of Malta

H&G Cat #	Basic Identifying Description	Number Listed	Malta Address	Non-Malta Address	Up-rated
E1	1885 QV ½d dark green	23	1	22	5
E2	1902 KEVII ½d dark green	6	1	5	1
E3	1912 KGV ½d yellow-green	4	0	4	1
	(All three indicia ² are left facing)	33	2	31	7

With regard to the demographics of these 33 postally used wrappers, 31 were addressed to postal entities outside Malta: Germany 8, Italy 5, Turkey 4, USA 3, GB 3, Germany 2, Austria 2, and one each to Syria, France, Australia, Switzerland, Belgium and one to an exotic destination being a naval officer in Suez.

A careful examination of the wrapper images revealed that there was a fairly even mix of the A25 bar numeral and circular date cancels. Censor markings were noted also.

Figure 1: Examples of Postmarks & Censor Marks



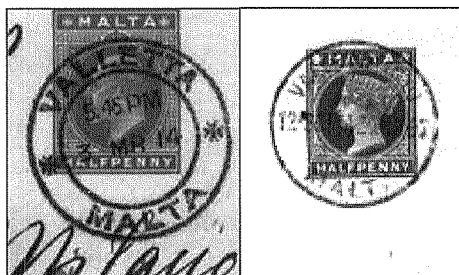
Cds with barred numeral A25



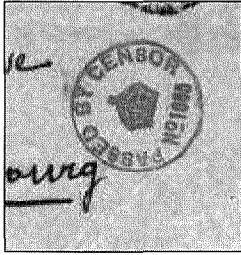
Barred A25 without cds



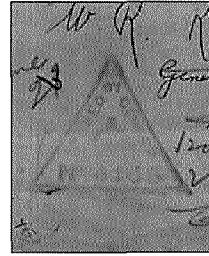
Malta cds



Double & single circle Valletta



Red Passed by Censor



Triangular Passed by Censor

Transaction Analysis

The author's database of 4,000 eBay sale transactions was collected between September 2006 and May 2009, i.e., a data-collection period of 33 consecutive months. An Excel spreadsheet for the 20 sales of Malta was extracted from the 4,000 worldwide transactions. These consummated transactions were undertaken by 16 different sellers located across five countries: UK, USA, Canada, Argentina and Germany.

Discussion of realised prices is not for everyone and some collectors have been upset with me for raising the issue of prices paid for philatelic material. However, without up-to-date postal stationery catalogues, collectors should be able to benefit from some awareness of realised prices as a guide to their own bidding limits. It must be noted that this analysis is restricted to eBay transactions and may not be representative of realised prices from other Internet sites, traditional philatelic auction houses or direct sales by dealers to collectors. Prices vary because of condition of the wrapper, but also because of clear and unusual markings, perceived relative scarcity, exotic destinations, and collector demand. Prices vary too because there is no readily available comparative and average price information to guide collectors.

A listing of sales transactions for each wrapper type is shown in Table 2. The number of sales per wrapper type, the high and low range of realised prices, and a computed average sale price are shown also. None of these average realised prices have any absolute or relative relationship to H&G catalogue prices which makes the disclosure of these transactions even more relevant. A budget-minded collector could have purchased all three types for less than USD30 and an "average" collector would have paid around \$60. A collector able to secure the best cancels and other markings and elusive upratings would have picked them up for about \$100.

Table 2: Realised Prices of 20 Sales of Malta Wrappers

H&G E#	Sales Details in USD	Number of Sales	Sales Range	Mean Price
1	11.5, 7.00, 23.06, 26.00, 43.27, 12.80, 9.30, 8.80, 9.38, 12.26, 9.50, 40.07	12	7.00-43.27	17.75
2	21.56, 26.01, 11.53, 17.62	4	11.53-26.01	19.18
3	9.95, 16.8, 27.20, 32.00	4	9.95-32.00	21.48
		20	7.00-43.27	18.78

Size of Collector Market

The transaction database includes the trading identities of the bidders for each transaction thereby providing evidence to deduce the size of the collector market for used post office wrappers of Malta. There were 29 identifiably different bidding participants in the 20 transactions. Recently, eBay has introduced a policy of disclosing only two random letters or symbols of a bidder's identity as a security measure to reduce unscrupulous bidders waging unwarranted bidding wars against known opponents that would unfairly cause a rival to unnecessarily pay more. Based on these two-letter identities there could have been another nine bidding participants. One measure of the size of the collector market using the eBay marketplace is therefore 38 being the total number of different participants in these auctions.

An analysis of the winning bidders' trading identities showed that there were 13 different identifiable names. Based on the two-letter identities there could have been another three different winning bidders, taking the total to 16. Winning bidders represent those with a more serious commitment to wrapper acquisition and hence can be an alternative size measure of the collector market, at least that portion that uses the eBay market place. However, what constitutes a true market is a philosophical question requiring definition, and more discussion about this topic can be found in Courtis (2007). Obviously there are other collectors of this type of postal stationery that have no dealings with eBay.

The profile of collector depth per transaction for the 20 sales was one sale with only one bidder, six sales with two bidders, four sales with three bidders, five sales with four bidders, and four sales with five bidders. In other words 45% of sales involved four or five bidders which is a stronger level of bidding involvement than the author has noted in many other country studies.

Conclusion

The study utilized the data base of 33 used wrappers of Malta that were listed for sale on eBay between February 2003 and May 2009. These 33 used wrappers represent an average appearance of about one per 400 of the 13,800 worldwide post office wrappers that have been listed on the eBay Internet market during this

time. Although the average rate of appearance of Malta wrappers is about one per 65 days, the three types are attainable with patience.

The demographics of these postally used wrappers reveal that all but two wrappers indicated non-domestic addresses. Wrappers were sent to addresses in 12 postal entities. A single uprating was noted. No wrapper was observed bearing private printing.

There were 20 consummated sales transactions undertaken between September 2006 and May 2009 by 16 different sellers located across five countries. All three wrapper types were sold and collectors could have purchased all these types for the reasonable average amount of about USD60. There were 29-38 identifiably different bidders engaged in the 20 transactions while there were 13-16 different winning bidder identities.

References

Courtis, John K. (2007), Analysis of Postally Used Newspaper Wrapper Internet Trading Participants, *London Philatelist*, Vol. 116, No. 1345, June, pp. 151-155.

Higgins & Gage (1974). *Priced Catalogue of Postal Stationery of the World*, Section 3.

My thanks as usual to my editorial advisor Alan Gory of Melbourne, Australia, for his comments on an earlier version.

² The Prepaid stamp on a wrapper is called an indicium (singular) plural indicia.

Several catalogues just use the word stamp, but this is ambiguous, because it could also refer to an adhesive.

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