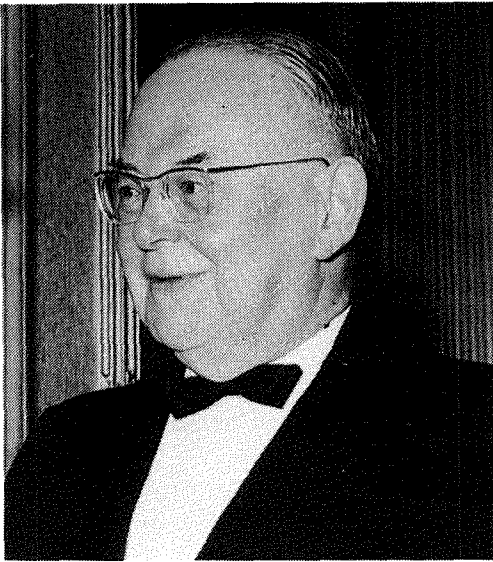


## **ROBSON LOWE**

**1905-1997**



I met Robbie, as he was affectionately known to his friends, for the first time in his London Office on April 20, 1970, when I sought his advise how to research the "Malta 1/2d Queen Victoria 1860-84 Printings". In no time he arranged for me an appointment to visit, view and examine the archives of De La Rue, the printers, the next day through Mr AG Rigo de Righi.

From that day onwards, we became close friends, and I began to seek often his advise, and help, especially on Postal History items, for which he had special affection. I

used to call on him at his London Office, whenever I had the opportunity.

I used to enjoy seeing his eyes twinkle, when I showed him some rare Knights of Malta Postal History item, researching it together, sometimes taking months of research in various archives, in London and in Malta. What a delight it was to see the lovely smile on his face, when finally he would come up with a solution.

To me this was Robbie the researcher — the man who was always willing to offer me an unstinted helping hand — the man who encouraged me with my research and publication of the "Malta 1/2d Queen Victoria Postage Stamp Printings" in the 1980 UK-Malta Study Circle Handbook.

The man who always wrote back nice complimentary letters after reading the Philatelic Society Magazine, which I have Edited through his constant encouragement.

My wife Elda and I have had the privilege of entertaining him in our home in Malta to reciprocate his generous entertaining he gave us at the East India Club whenever we were in London.

Thank you, Robbie, for your help, encouragement, and friendship which Elda and I have greatly appreciated through the years we have come to know you.

Lately I have received the enclosed landmarks about him from Messrs. Christie's, which I am publishing with their kind permission, so that our members will share with me the memory of this great man of British Philately.

**Dr. A Bonnici, MD, KM**



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Dear Dr Bonnici,

29. 1. 86.

Mr Lowe has approached me for a photograph of one Maltese item that was displayed at the Royal Philatelic Society, London on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1985.

A MEMBER OF THE CHRISTIES INTERNATIONAL GROUP



ROBSON LOWE at BOURNEMOUTH

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Please quote in all correspondence

Ref. RL/AFH

Please reply to:

17th May 1983

Dr. Alfredo Bonnici,  
"Casa Bonnici",  
Sir Augustus Bartolo Street,  
Ta'Xbiex,  
MALTA.

Dear Alfredo,

I have now read the PSM magazine and thoroughly enjoyed it. The cover illustrated on the bottom of page 1 was from a surgeon working at Scuarari where he described an extraordinary injury of how cross he was because the chief surgeon would not let him send the report on the injury to the medical journal in England. I sent a copy of the letter when it came into me and I am sure his ghost was pleased when they published it.

I read your article on Disinfection with great interest and without making a book of it I do not think you could have done better.

I also liked your contribution on the Napoleonic Period and Marseille De Malthe.

Best wishes to you all

Yours,



# CHRISTIE'S ROBSON LOWE

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Telephone 0202 295711 Telex 41146



Dr. Alfredo Bonnici,  
MALTA.

28th March 1984

Dear Alfredo,

We found a pretty cover this morning with a corner copy of the 6d. embossed first printing used during the first few weeks of use on a cover to Malta. I am enclosing a couple of photostats of the front as well as a photostat of the content which is of particular interest. It is written by B. Barton who was at Winchester College, possibly a cleric. On the first page he says "I hope and pray that this odious war from which no one can get any good except the French Emperor, may soon cease - its a just war, I believe but it is not less calamitous." On the second page he refers to the Saar of Russia and "I suspect some changes in the ministry are announced today and which show the predominance of the Whigs in the Cabinet whenever they have the upper hand, there is.... to this government and mis-fortune. Lord John Rupert the President of the Council - and Sir George Gray, Colonial Secretary - they will both of them have top opportunities of doing mischief and I shall be greatly surprised, if they do not avail themselves of this."

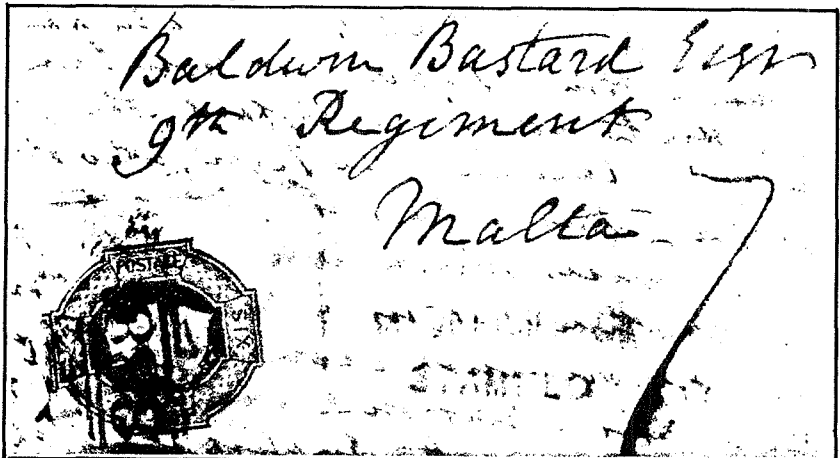
If you think there is a story in it for your journal I will send you a photograph of the front cover. It will at least establish the fact that there were British bastards in Malta and Mr. Mintoff should be delighted.

I found some more early Malta but am pressing on with the sorting and when I have finished the work will let you have photostats of any other early letters.

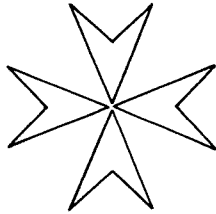
Best wishes.

Yours,

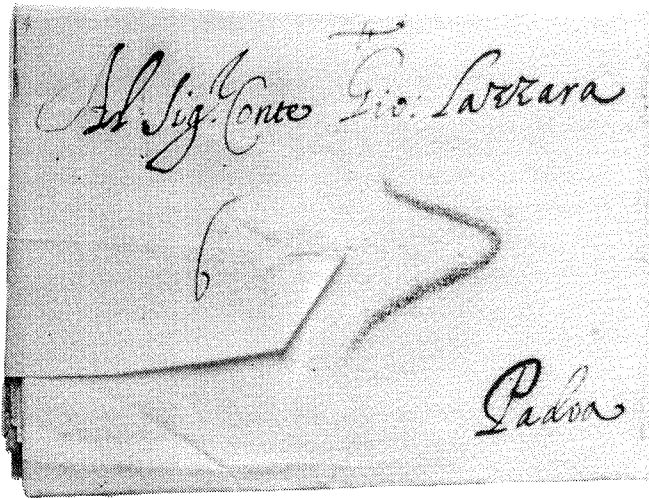
*Robbie*



# The Knights of Malta



## The Lazara Correspondence



1662-1669

1789-1798

By Robson Lowe

To Alfred Bonnici  
with gratitude  
Robson Lowe

## PHILATELIST AND PIONEER POSTAL HISTORIAN

Robson Lowe who died in Bournemouth aged 92 after a long illness which did not prevent him from working until the last few weeks of his life, will be best remembered as the father of postal history, a subject upon which he published many definitive works. He was, in all probability, THE professional philatelist of the twentieth century.

Robbie, as he was known to his many friends throughout the world, will be remembered as an avuncular character and his corpulent frame, cherubic visage, corn-cob pipe and penchant for risqué jokes, postcards and limericks were but a few of his distinguishing characteristics. His colleagues in business occasionally saw the other side of his personality which could erupt in outbursts of petulance should he not get his own way; however, the turbulence never lasted long and he was not a man to harbour grudges. From his staff, he expected extreme loyalty and dedication, yet he was not aloof and was always on hand to give paternal advice and practical assistance whenever required. He believed that teamwork was the cornerstone of a successful business. His relationship with the philatelic trade could be uneasy and more than one prominent dealer was turned away from an auction for not having settled an account.

John Harry Robson Lowe was born in London on January 7th 1905 and had an inauspicious start to life as his mother sustained a heart attack shortly after his birth; in his early years he was brought up by a foster mother and his sister. He began collecting postage stamps in 1911 and his first "major" purchase was made at the age of 10 when he acquired 1000 British Empire stamps for one shilling and nine pence. It was during his early school days that he started trading stamps with his fellow pupils.

On May 6th 1920 Robson Lowe embarked on a career in philately which was to span over five decades and have a profound affect on the hobby that was effectively his life; virtually every serious collector has benefited from his multifarious activities. To list all his achievements during a highly eventful life is the work of a biographer, but the following are some of the landmarks listed in chronological order.

1920 - he sold his personal collection for £20 and opened a bank account, one of his first successful transactions was the unlikely acquisition of a commode for 10/-, the commode contained a cache of early letters from India which were sold for £75.

1928 - he married Winifred Marie Denne; among the wedding gifts was an example of the famous USA 24c. Inverted Jenny donated by the finder of the sheet, Col. E H R. Green. Sold for £90, the proceeds furnished their home. He then travelled to South Africa where he did a thriving trade and unwittingly acquired an orange farm in Natal after a bibulous evening with fellow philatelists;

After two months he managed to exchange the farm for a stamp collection and made a profit.

1923 - he bought a box of some 10,000 stamps which proved to be forgeries by the Spiro Brothers of Hamburg; this "instigated his great interest and knowledge of the subject which culminated in him purchasing, on behalf of the British Philatelic Association, the master forger Jean de Sperati's stock for £8,000.

1926 - he opened offices at 93 Regent Street and made his first visit to the USA where he covered the country by car and made significant finds of correspondence, notably Wells Fargo and Co., and other Western Express Company letters during visits to the Gold Rush towns.

1932 - he published the first edition of Regent Stamp Catalogue and three years later this became the Regent Encyclopaedia of Empire Postage Stamps.

1935 - he started Regent Stamp company, specializing in retailing rare stamps and collections of the British Empire.

During the reigns of George V and George VI, when Sir John Wilson was the curator, Robson Lowe was a regular visitor to Buckingham Palace and assisted both Kings, who were avid and knowledgeable philatelists, in adding to the Royal collection.

1936 - he contracted hepatitis and retired to Bournemouth and wrote the first edition of the Handstruck Stamps of the British Empire.

1939 - he moved to 50 Pall Mall after a bomb had damaged the premises of the Regent Stamp Company. 50 Pall Mall was to become one of the Meccas of philately until the business was transferred to Bournemouth in 1976.

1941 - he held a series of Red Cross auctions in conjunction with Christie's. These were the start of a close relationship culminating in the acquisition by Christie's of Robson Lowe Ltd in 1980.

During the war years Robson Lowe's Specialised Stamp Sales continued trading and offered important collections including those of McGowan (GB), Beckton (Finland), Jewell (Argentina), Vallency (GB), Small (Br. Guiana) and Ginger (New South Wales).

1945 - he started Bournemouth Stamp auctions; operations started with a staff of two. The highly popular general sales attained an annual turnover of over £1,500,000 before they closed in 1991.

1947 - he set up an office in Philadelphia and held a series of successful auctions in partnership with Arthur Pierce; the operation ceased when the British Inland Revenue ruled that he had to pay both US and British taxes - the venture bankrupted him.

1948 - he published The Encyclopaedia of British Empire Postage Stamps, Volume I (Europe); subsequent sections have been published with the final volume remaining incomplete.

1950 - he founded the Society of Postal History to promote interest in and knowledge of the subject.

1956 - he acquired the eminent dealers P L Pemberton and with the business their stock and their house magazine "The Philatelic Journal of Great Britain".

1961 - he set up in partnership with fellow auctioneers Jacques Robineau (Paris), Urs Peter Kaufmann (Basle) and J.L. Van Dieten (Hague) who amalgamated to exploit the potential market in Switzerland; the conglomerate was named the Uncommon Marketeers. They were later joined by Adriano Landini of Milan making it a potent force in the European philatelic community.

1962 - he received instructions to offer the major part of the incomparable worldwide collection formed by Maurice Burrus, a tobacco magnate from Switzerland; the collection was dispersed over a period of some three years and Lowe's sales totalled over £2,000,000.

1964 - he acquired printers D. Wood and Sons of Perth.

1966 - he held a sale of stamps on board the Queen Mary, an adventurous operation which entailed radio communication links being set up from the ship to bidders in Great Britain, the USA and European capitals; unfortunately the auction was a fiasco due to adverse weather conditions and a telephone strike in Paris.

1968 - he continued to expand his business by forming Robson Lowe International, with representatives being appointed on a global scale (over 15 countries).

1980 - he sold Robson Lowe Limited to Christie's in September. Later in the decade, he processed the Corsini, Medici and Venturini 15th to 18th Century Italian correspondences which he meticulously researched.

In April 1993, Christie's acquired Spink and Son Ltd., the fine art and collectables dealer. At this time Christie's worldwide coin, banknote and medal auctions were merged with those of Spink and auctions are held worldwide in association with Christie's. Then in January 1997, in order to increase the services to stamp collectors worldwide, the stamp department was added to the collectables division of Spink.

In his later years Robson Lowe spent much of his time writing and producing The Philatelist but he never failed to keep in contact with his philatelic friends, his Christmas letter being appreciated by many throughout the world.

Robson Lowe was an avid collector who formed fine studies of historical letters, including missives from the Battle of Agincourt, Queen Anne and many other European monarchs; he also collected United States Local Posts and Postal History; his last interest was prisoner of war mail.

For his services to philately Robson Lowe received numerous awards including the 1970 Liechtenstein Medal award (Collectors Club, New York), the John Luff Award of the American Philatelic Society and the National Philatelic Writers Hall of Fame Award in 1980. He was also a signatory of the American and South African Rolls of Distinguished Philatelists. Although proposed, he declined to sign the United Kingdom Roll of Distinguished Philatelists unless they deleted the signature of the South African faker, Jurgens; they did not.

He is survived by his daughters Annabelle Forrest and Marion Fortnum both of whom with their respective husbands, were partners in his business for many years.