

# AN INTERESTING BATCH OF POSTAL EXAMINATION PAPERS, 1930

Lara Bugeja M.A. (Lond.)  
*Curator, Malta Postal Museum*

A recent donation of documents to the Malta Postal Museum has shed light on the general procedure and examination process of applicants wishing to join Malta's postal service. The documents belonged to Paul F. Gasan who in March 1930 applied to join the General Post Office (GPO).

Paul F. (Fenech) Gasan was born in Valletta in November 1906, the eldest of four children, offspring of Calcedon Fenech and Matilde Gasan. At the age of 24 he applies to join the GPO and sits the required examinations for the grade of Postal Clerk Second Class. Later in life Gasan drops the Fenech part of his surname retaining the 'F' (which he changes to Francis), but that is a story for some other time. This is the story of his application to join the GPO.

In chronological order the documents are as follows: On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1930, Paul F. Gasan receives a notification [Fig.1] from John Bonett who had become Postmaster General the previous year. In it, he is informed of the forthcoming examinations of

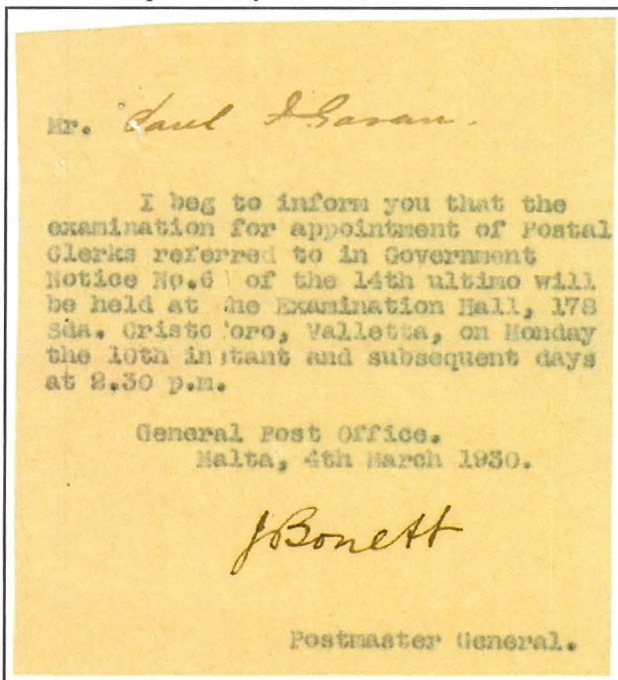


Fig.1

Postal Clerks referred to in Government Notice No.65 stating that the sittings will be held at the Examination Hall, 178 Sda. Cristoforo, Valletta on Monday the 10<sup>th</sup> instant and subsequent days at 2.30pm.

Three weeks previously, Government Notice no.65 of February 14<sup>th</sup> 1930 spells out the usual requirements one would expect to fill the vacancy of Postal Clerk Second Class but interestingly limits the applicants' age to between 18 and 26 years. Clearly they were looking for *young* men. In

the middle of the Notice is a list of obligatory subjects: English, Italian, Arithmetic and Handwriting. This is promptly followed by three optional subjects: French, Geography and Book-Keeping. It would seem the postal authorities expected much of their employees. Applications were to be received by no later than the 25<sup>th</sup> of that month and had to be accompanied interestingly, by an admission fee of 5/-.

At some stage between March 4<sup>th</sup> and the first exam March 10<sup>th</sup> a timetable headed *Competitive Examination for Second Class Postal Clerkships – 1930* [Fig.2] is sent to all candidates. This stipulates the specific days on which each of the exams are to be sat. English (Composition and Translation – *from Italian into English*) is first up.

**COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION FOR  
SECOND CLASS POSTAL CLERKSHIPS—1930.**

**TIME TABLE**

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**Candidates will assemble at the Examination Hall,  
178 Strada Cristoforo, Valletta, on Monday, 10th March, at 2.30 p.m.**

MONDAY,	March 10	English (Composition & Translation)	3. to 6 P.M.
TUESDAY	.. 11	Italian ( do. do.	2.30 to 5.30 P.M.
WEDNESDAY	.. 12	Arithmetic...	... 2.30 to 5.30 P.M.
THURSDAY	.. 13	Handwriting	... 2.30 to 3 P.M.
FRIDAY	.. 14	French (Translation & Dictation)	2.30 to 5.30 P.M.
SATURDAY	.. 15	Book-keeping	... 2.30 to 5.30 P.M.
MONDAY	.. 17	Geography	... 2.30 to 4.30 P.M.

ARTH. GALEA,  
Chairman Board of Examiners.

Fig.2 Examination Schedule

All papers are between 2-3 hours duration with the exception of Handwriting which is understandably, a mere half hour. The total score per paper for English, Italian and Arithmetic is 200 points, 100 each for French, Geography and Book-Keeping; and 50 points for Handwriting - bringing the total number of available points to 950.

The examination papers themselves are rigorous, reflected, I suppose in the calibre of their clerks and overall reputation of the GPO. Just as an example, I reproduce here the content of the Arithmetic paper [Fig.3] with Paul F. Gasan's markings in the right hand side margin.

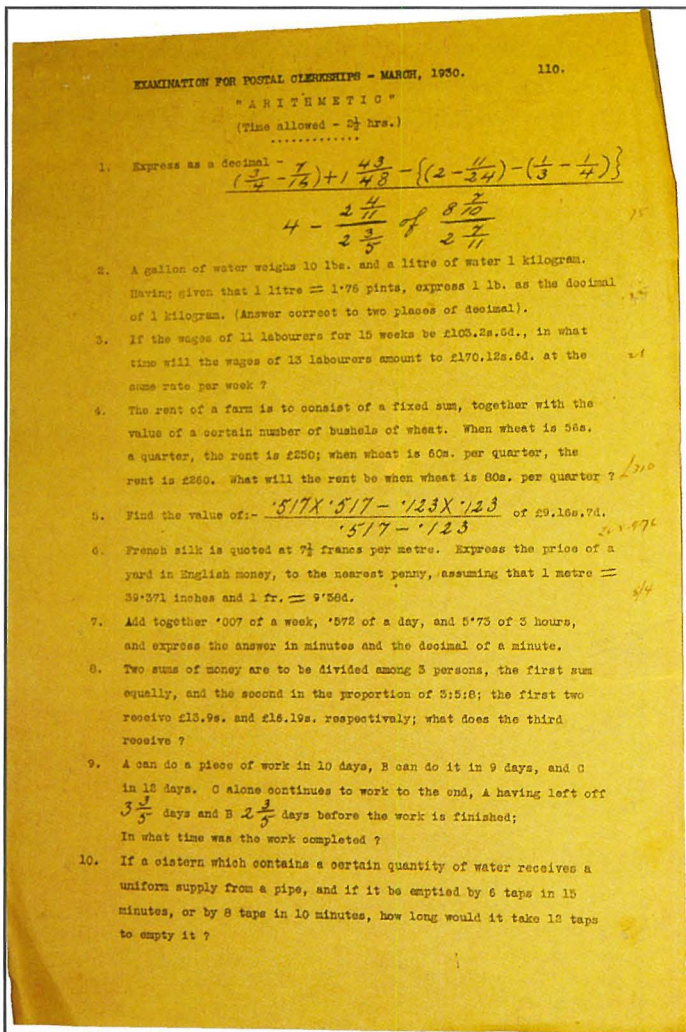


Fig.3 Arithmetic paper



The French, English and Italian papers are not to be sniffed at either. In one way or another, they emphasize dictation, composition and translation. But it is Geography [Fig.4] that really catches my attention.

This is broad in scope and unusually detailed requiring a thorough knowledge of world geography way beyond our limited shores. There are ten questions in all and one would assume that all were compulsory, to be answered within the stipulated two-hour time frame. With limited access to knowledge books and absolutely none of today's tools such as the internet, the questions posed seem unusually difficult. Take for example the first question: 'Where and what are the following:- Pomona, Carpentaria, Griznez, Landes, Huron, Agulhas, Dwina, Cervennes, Lemberg, Lofoten?' The answers (which I had to look up) range from cities, gulfs, capes, regional departments and lakes to mountain ranges and archipelagos in far flung places. I think that today, without Internet use, many of us would be hard pressed to answer just a few of these correctly!

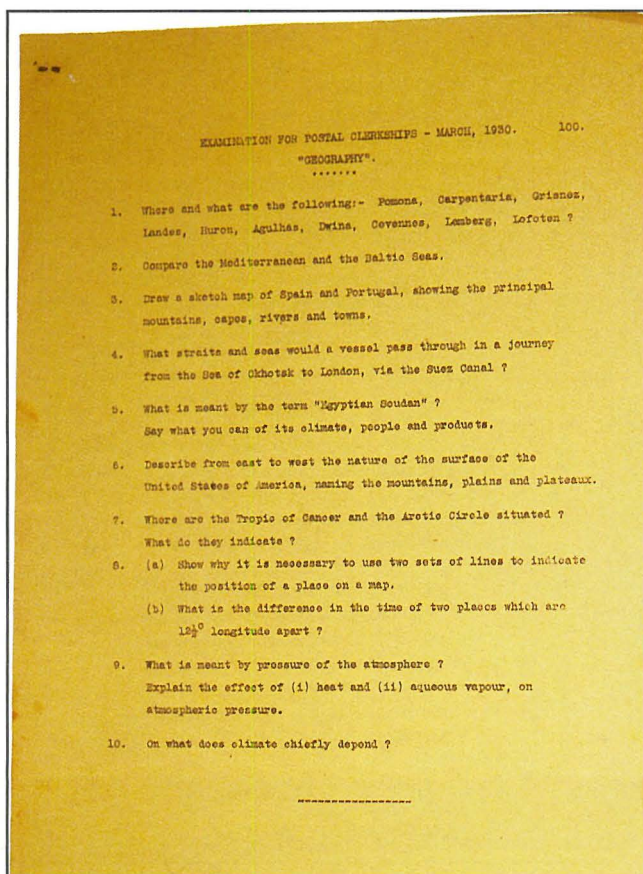


Fig.4 Geography paper

Paul F. Gasan scores well in the examination and out of the 100 applicants listed in the Result Sheet dated 26 March 1930, he places 4<sup>th</sup> with a decent total of 664 points. It is clear that his *forté* is Italian.

His letter of appointment arrives at 21 Sda. Vescovo on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1930 and is signed by R. E. Hamilton, Minister for Posts. His annual salary is set at £72 rising to £120 by yearly increments of £6 as was the norm. A newspaper cutting dated 18 April 1930 (in pencil in Paul's handwriting) congratulates 33 of the 100 applicants on qualifying in the Examination for Postal Clerkships. Their names are given in order of merit. Thus, on 1 April 1930, Paul F. Gasan together with Iginio Xuereb and Walter Castillo<sup>1</sup> join the GPO as Postal Clerks Second Class.

Paul F. Gasan enjoys 23 years of employment within the GPO, however between July 1941 and December 1949 he is seconded for duty with the British Intelligence Service, specifically REME<sup>2</sup>. He spends most of this period in East Africa, some of which in a POW camp as an Italian Interpreter, Employment, Records and Pay Officer. Clearly his Italian serves him in good stead.

On his return to Malta in 1949 one would assume that he resumed his duties with the GPO for a few years more. A letter dated 13 November 1953 and signed by the Postmaster General Alg. C. Crockford refers to the following: *'During tenure of office as a Postal Clerk he has given efficient and faithful service, and his conduct was without blemish. He retired on pension on the grounds of ill-health as certified by the statutory Medical Board'*.



Fig.5 Paul F. Gasan in Cairo, signed and dated 22 December 1941

<sup>1</sup> In the Blue Books and indeed in this cutting, no mention is made of Spiro Farrugia who in fact placed first in the March 1930 examinations.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.