

# Postmen's Handstamps

By Hadrian Wood

A stamp collector's first introduction to Postal History has often been the result of acquiring an interest in Postmen's Handstamps. The reason for this is mainly due to the fact that many of these handstruck markings are too difficult to acquire. Any collection of pre-war picture postcards, either locally used, or incoming to Malta, is bound to produce a number of Postmen's Handstamps. Whereas in previous years these same markings were generally ignored, the inclusion of a section on this subject in Said's catalogue in recent years has understandably aroused considerable interest among collectors.

Once having acquired a number of these handstamps, usually without initial outlay, a collector is then tempted to start a collection, often with the result of "discovering" other interesting markings whilst doing so; and of inducing him to take a keener interest in other aspects of Postal History.

It now seems almost certain that Postmen's Handstamps were introduced in Malta in the year 1889, and for the first few years were used only on mail to Valletta and Cospicua. (Postman's Handstamp '13' has been recorded on a cover to Sliema in 1888, but it is likely that these handstamps originated within the Sliema area prior to the opening of a Branch Post Office there in 1895).

The first series of Postmen's Handstamps comprised of numbers '1' to '24'. A second series, '25' to '30', in a completely different style, followed in 1905. The third series, '27' to '50', was issued in 1913 and it is interesting to note that it was with the introduction of this series that Postmen's Handstamps first appeared on mail to the 'Casals', or villages.

A fourth series, with numbers up to '61', also included, and thus replaced, several of the numbered handstamps issued in the first, second and third series. The only 'new' numbers in the fifth series were '62' and '63'. Other numbers in the fourth series, were used to replace Postmen's Handstamps bearing the same number which had either become too worn, damaged or lost.

The sixth and final series, '64' to '74', was issued in the late 1920s. In this series, '67' has never been recorded in use and is the only number in the whole sequence of '1' to '74' of which not a single example, in any series, is known to exist.

Finally, we find a few Postmen's Handstamps which are unique in style and cannot be classified as belonging to any series in particular. These include '12', '38', '49' and '63'.

The impression one gets in trying to 'complete' a collection of Postmen's Handstamps is that those used on mail to towns and large villages are reasonably common, whilst the ones applied on mail to the Casals, or small villages, are usually scarce. Some very scarce indeed for obvious reasons. However, exceptions exist in both cases.



1st. Series



2nd. Series



3rd. Series



4th. Series



5th. Series



6th. Series



Unique in Style.