

A VISIT TO THE ROYAL PHILATELIC SOCIETY — LONDON

THURSDAY, 8th JANUARY, 1981

By GRAHAM SMEED

I was invited to attend a meeting of 'The Royal' on the occasion of the lecture by Michael Lawson on the subject of Classic Issues of Malta. I was the guest of Gerald Davis, a well known postal historian and author of several works about India and Burma. Before the lecture started Gerald gave me a conducted tour of the museum and library housed in several rooms. The museum had several glass cases displaying a wide range of old handstamps and ephemera associated with days gone by, while in an adjoining room there were displayed round the walls and in glass cases, some of the litho stones used to produce early issues of India, the dies, transfer rollers and parts of plates from many Colonial issues (I did not notice any Malta), and examples of the gauze from 'Danny Rolls' with bits attached that were used to make the water-marks in the paper.

Leaving the museum rooms we passed through a room containing bound volumes of old journals, including the predecessors of Stamp Collecting and Gibbons Monthly etc., and then on into further library rooms each containing many volumes carefully indexed to enable the researcher easy access to a wide range of esoteric topics. There only appeared to be about six publications devoted entirely to Malta, so hope our Handbook will soon join their ranks.

At four o'clock the rattle of teacups heralded the start of serious business with a dash by most of those present to reach the biscuits!

After a general chat and informal discussions everyone started to drift towards the meeting room and promptly at five o'clock the President, Mr. Ron Butler F.R.P.S.L., opened the proceedings and introduced Mr. Michael Lawson who then read his paper on the Classic Issues of Malta. He outlined the early postal history of the Island and introduction of the stamps of Great Britain at the Packet Agency in Valletta and the stages through which the postal service changed over the years until the Malta Post Office issued U.P.U. accepted adhesives in 1885. He outlined many points in the talk by referring to some of the exceptional items on display and also thanked many eminent philatelists and dealers who had helped in his researches.

The material displayed ranged from issues of Great Britain used in Malta, with several entries, also some unusual frankings and large used blocks cancelled A25, e.g. 4d. brown block of 12; 6d. overprint, block of 4, 1/- orange-brown, block of 6 etc., other unusual items included singles, a pair, and a cover with the wavy line grid, a cover with the Malta-Palermo 'key-hole' strike dated 1865, several maritime covers with Piroscafi marks also two superb registered covers dated 1864 and 1874, and very clear strike of the MALTA SHIP LETTER handstamp. These all preceded the main part of the display which was a study of the ½d. yellow, showing numerous examples of shades, watermarks, perforations, die proofs, plate proofs, specimens including a gutter margin of 12 copies overprinted CANCELLED. Several of the shades were shown used on entries, while others were displayed in large mint blocks of 6, 12, 15, 24 also two complete panes of the 1882 printing.

Some of the more unusual items shown included, Sperati forgeries, a rather dubious example of the B31 cancellation, a blue 'star burst' patterned cancel of unknown status as well as faked imperforate and faked perforations 12½ x 14. To conclude this erudite study was a cover with five ½d. yellows used well after the last issue date, 3-12-02, and examples of the first U.P.U. series of definitives of 1885, and a fine used block of four of the 1886 5/, postmarked VALLETTA (C.O.) 20 AU 02.

After some brief comments from the floor and presentation of a token to Mr Lawson, everyone was invited to look at the exhibits, and many found it difficult to conclude discussions in the room so adjourned to a nearby hostelry!

I found my visit most enlightening and company of so many eminent philatelists a very awesome occasion which I shall remember for a long time.