

THE INTERNAL POSTAL SERVICE DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by
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The following article is based on the text of the talk delivered during the October Monthly Meeting of the Philatelic Society by Mr. Peter Buttigieg — Editor's Note).

The fascinating datestamps popularly known as the Malta Village Postmarks constitute a very important aspect of Maltese postal history and is so closely linked to the Inland Postal Service that a resumé of the story of this public utility is befitting.

During the Maltese revolt against the French oppressor on the 2nd September 1798, the leaders of the insurrection had to have some sort of communication. It is a well known fact that Captain Alexander Ball, who was sent by Lord Nelson later that month to help organise Maltese resistance, was a prolific writer and kept in constant touch with the Maltese leaders by runners.

After the French capitulation, two years later on 3rd September 1800, Domenico Montanaro, who served as Postmaster both under the Order and during the French occupation, retained his position at the Government Post Office until his retirement in October 1816, when he was temporarily relieved by Mr. J. Bonavita until the appointment of Robert McNab as Packet Agent and Super-

intendent of the Government Post Office on the 9th July, 1817.

The first official reference to an organised internal postal communication was during the plague epidemic of 1813, when restrictions of movement from one place to another had to be imposed because of the high risk of contagion and further spread of the disease. By a notice dated 18th August, 1813 issued from the Island Post Office, it was announced that messengers have been appointed for every district including Floriana, who carried a box for the reception of letters and a hand bell to announce their presence, each doing two rounds daily. The letters collected were then taken to the Post Office, which at that period was situated at Piazza Tesoreria (now Queen's Square), where, after being fumigated they were despatched to their destinations. The messengers collected 1 Tari for every letter handed to them and these were limited to 2 sheets only. Those handed directly at the Post Office were charged 10 Grani. These rates applied for the Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities area. "Let-

ters addressed to personnel on board ships, the Country or Gozo (to which Island they were transmitted "gratis") had to pay a fee of 1 tari and 10 grani. The Office of the Intendant of the Marine Police was responsible for the transmission of the Gozo Mails during the period. A minute issued by the authority of the Governor fixed the rates of postage on local letters, in English currency, at 1 penny per ounce, and 1 penny for each additional ounce or fraction of an ounce, these rates becoming effective as from 1st January, 1840.

A daily internal free post was established on June 10, 1853. The conditions and closing of mails at Valletta, the Three Cities, the Casals and the Island of Gozo were specified in a Post Office Notice dated 8 June, 1853. Glazed frames were installed at the Valletta Post Office, and at the respective Police Stations of the Three Cities, the various Casals and Gozo, as indicated in the same Notice, for the display of letters and Newspapers. Wooden letter boxes were also fitted underneath the glazed frames for the reception of letters. This novel service was an experiment and the Governor's intention for its establishment was first announced at the sitting of the Council of Government on March 31st, 1853 by the Chief secretary, who asked that a sum of £M42 be voted to defray the cost. Although the service was gratuitous, it was subjected to criticism mainly by newspaper editors who complained that their papers remained in the glazed frames

for two days and sometimes longer, and that was of course detrimental to their circulation. Both "The Malta Times" and "Il Portafoglio Maltese" suggested the introduction of postage stamps "as in England" for home delivery for those who wished it. Statistics published for the years 1855 and 1856 showed that almost 40 per cent of the mails passing through the Island Post Office comprised newspapers. The totals transmitted during those years were 44,309 and 49,710 respectively. That showed an increase of over 5,000 articles within one year.

The largest volume of mail emanated from the Three Cities and the larger villages. Figures for the smaller villages were tragic. For example.

	1855	1856
Attard	58	10
Chircop	4	4
Luca	26	28
Micabiba	17	15
Safi	8	2
St. Julian's	5	12

The Estimates under Head 12, namely "For the Conveyance of Mails", remained constant at £40 a year until 1858. Up till then, mails were delivered by mail contractors. On September 10, 1858 the newly formed Omnibus Company gained the contract for the conveyance of the country mails at an annual remuneration of £100. The mails for the Three Cities went by boat. The closing times of the mails had to be changed to coincide with the new

contractor's timetable. These times were specified in a Notice dated 1st September, 1858.

The free post was too good to last for long. A Government Notice published in "The Malta Government Gazette" No. 2061 dated 16th November, 1860 announced the issue of our classic $\frac{1}{2}$ d yellow local stamp which was to be used on letters, intended for internal post, weighing up to half ounce and $\frac{1}{2}$ d for every additional half ounce or fraction of a half ounce. Newspapers still were delivered free of any postal charge. The same Notice announced an innovation: the erection of eight Pillar and Wall Letter Boxes at strategic places specified in the same Notice. Otherwise the system of conveyance of mails and display of letters in the glazed frames of the various Police Stations remained unaltered.



This fascinating local stamp had a life span of 23 years during which period it was reprinted several times resulting in several shades of yellow, three different types of paper and perforation varieties. Three different types of cancellations were mainly used on this stamp—the "M" cancel used for a short while only on

the first print, and two duplex types of datestamps bearing Code letters from A to E and "A 25" killer bars.

In the Estimates for 1878, £130 were voted "For the Conveyance of the Country mails and a house to house delivery of letters in the Casals". The house deliveries were only done free in Valletta, the Three Cities, Pietà, Msida, Sliema and St. Julians, provided the letters were clearly addressed with house numbers, or the addresses were known to the letter carriers. If the house delivery was required in the Casals a fee of $\frac{1}{2}$ d had to be paid on each delivery of mail to a particular address. That fee of one $\frac{1}{2}$ d local stamp covered the delivery cost for one or more letters addressed to an individual and even other members of the same family residing in the same house. This arrangement was terminated on December 31st, 1884.

The Malta-Gozo mail service was frustrating and very unreliable particularly in winter as it depended so much on the weather. The Government tried to improve the service by transmitting the mail overland via Marfa and by boat from there to Migiarrò. The Director of Contracts inserted an advertisement in the Malta Government Gazette of 1880 asking for tenders for the "Conveyance of the Daily Mail between Malta and Gozo". The contract stipulated that a carriage, with four inside seats and one on the box by the driver, had to start daily from Valletta at 7 a.m., excepting Sundays

and Public Holidays, for Marfa, from 1st December, 1880 to 15th November, 1881. Passengers were to be charged 2s each from Valletta to Marfa. A Policeman on duty was to ride gratuitously and he would be in charge of the mail and government payroll.

The year 1885 was a momentous one with many important changes. The British Imperial Government relinquished its monopoly of the Malta Postal Service and control was handed over to the Maltese Government from 1st January, 1885. The establishment of our General Post Office, located at that time at 137 Merchants' Street, was ratified by Ordinance II of 1884. Roger Duke took charge of the General Post Office as postmaster and he was followed a year later by Ferdinand V. Inglott, C.M.G., our first Postmaster General. Sub-offices (not Branch Post Offices) were also established at Rabato and Migiarrò, Gozo. During



the same year, the first steam communication between Malta and Gozo was inaugurated with much pomp by S.S. Gleneagles on 1st July, 1885. This vessel was bought by Chev. Gollcher and was skippered by L. Aquilina. Sub-Offices were also intended to be opened at Balzan, Lia, Birchircara, Cospicua, Melleha, Nota-

bile and Sliema. However these did not materialise that year.

Another important event of this year was the issue on January 1st of our first Postage stamp series with values from ½d to 1/-. The shades had to conform with the U.P.U. colour scheme regulations, and consequently, the colour of the ½d yellow, which was meant for local use, had to change to green.

The G.P.O. started with two letter carriers and seven Auxiliaries. The latter did three deliveries per week, one at 2s 6d and the other six at 2s per delivery. For the Rural Service it had on its payroll, eight Detached Post Officers (termed Sub-Postmasters in the Estimates, similarly in the case of the two Detached Post Officers of Gozo). In 1889 the number of Letter Carriers or Postmen was increased to four first class, four second class and eight Auxiliaries. Allowances and remunerations to the eight Detached Post-Officers in Malta were discontinued and two extra Letter Carriers, under the head Suburban Postal Service, were added to serve the Three Cities. The following year the first Branch Post Office in Malta was opened at Cospicua on 1st August, 1890 to serve the



Cottonera District which at that time consisted of The Three Cities and Calcara (Kalkara). The Postmaster was Edgar L. Bonavia, assisted by

Giuseppe Testa and Carmelo Cristiano as postmen, and Giuseppe Malia as Messenger.

A special Committee was appointed by the Council of Government on the 21st December, 1892 to investigate various proposals for the improvement of the postal services. The outcome of this enquiry was to reclassify the letter carriers and Auxiliaries to eight first Class Postmen and eight Second Class Postmen, which with the two Postmen employed at the Cottonera Branch Post Office brought the permanent Postmen's staff up to eighteen in number. More improvements were to come the following year with the creation of a new Inland Postal Service and the division of Malta and Gozo into Postal Districts. The first two Postal Districts in Malta as specified in Government Notice No. 106 of July 10, 1894 consisted of: i. the Valetta District, which comprised the Valetta G.P.O., Floriana, Hamrun (including San Giuseppe and Marsa), Pietà and Msida; and ii. the Cottonera District, comprising Cospicua Branch Post Office, Vittoriosa and Calcara, Senglea, Zabbar and Marsascala, Zeitun, Marsascirocco, Delimara, San Luciano, San Leonardo, Tarxien and Paola. The same Notice stated that "In the case of the Cottonera District all Postal Services are to be centred in the Post Office at Cospicua".

The Inland Postal Service, which was controlled by the G.P.O., was formed by the employment of 16 Rural Postmen who served the fol-

lowing areas as from the 2nd July, 1894:

John Fletcher (Hamrun and San Giuseppe)	@ £12 p.a.
Carmelo Bajada (Hamrun and Marsa)	@ £12 p.a.
Carmelo Cauchi (Pietà and Msida)	@ £15 p.a.
Carmelo Cassar (Zabbar and Marsascala)	@ £12 p.a.
Francesco Valletta (Zeitun, and Marsaxlokk, Delimara, San Luciano and San Leonardo)	@ £12 p.a.
Filippo Agius (Asciak, Gudia and Birzebugia)	@ £12 p.a.
Salvatore Cassar (Tarxien, and Paola)	@ £18 p.a.
Giuseppe Galea (Notabile and Dingli)	@ £12 p.a.
Carmelo Zammit (Zebbug and Siggiewi)	@ £21 p.a.
Giuseppe Zammit (Birchirara)	@ £12 p.a.
Giuseppe Galea (Attard, Lia and Balzan)	@ £12 p.a.
Angelo Vella (Musta, Naxaro and Gargur)	@ £15 p.a.
Enrico Gauci(i) (Mellieha and St. Paul's Bay)	@ £54 p.a.
Angelo Bonnici (Curmi)	@ £12 p.a.
Giuseppe Azzopardi (Luca)	@ £9 p.a.
Carmelo Borg(ii) (Zurricco, Crendi, Micabiba, Chircop and Safi)	@ £18 p.a.

The following year, the Third District, Sliema was established by the opening of a Branch Post Office on 1st May, 1895 to serve Sliema, St. Julian's and St. George's Bay. The

Postmaster was Gaspard Grech, assisted by Postman Enrico Mallia and Temporary Postman John Fletcher.

Similarly Gozo was divided into two Postal Districts in March, 1895. The sub-Postmaster for the Victoria District was Enrico Caldarone who received a salary of £15 as Officer-in-Charge of the sub-Post Office, plus £30 as Keeper of Prisons and £10 per annum for clerical duties in the Police Office, Gozo. He was assisted by two postmen: Paolo Lanzon, who served Victoria, Sannat, Kercem, Zebbug and Marsalforn, and Gioacchino Aquilina, who served Garbo and San Lorenzo.

between Malta and Gozo, and an additional remuneration of £24 annually for the conveyance of the mails from Miggiarro to Vittoria and vice-versa.

On the 15th November, 1897 the fourth postal district was established at Notabile, created by the opening of a Branch Post Office at Rabato. R.E. Peralta was its first Postmaster assisted by an Office Keeper named Emmanueie Gambin. This Branch Post Office served Notabile, Rabato and Dingli, Zebbug and Siggiewi. The mails for this district arrived by train, the company being awarded a subsidy of £50 annually for this service. During the same year, two



The Miggiarro District Postmaster was Nicola Zammit, who received also £15 per annum as Officer-in-Charge of the Sub-Post Office and 4s 5d daily as First Class Sergeant Marine Police. He was assisted by one postman named Francesco Buttigieg, who served Miggiarro, Kala, Ghainsielem, Nadur, Caccia and Xeuchia.

The Mail Porter for Gozo since 1st August, 1885 was Giuseppe Hili. He was paid a salary of £40 per annum as Government Carrier, plus £9 for taking charge of money bet-

more postal districts were contemplated, one at Naxxaro and the other at Luca, but for some reason or other, the plans never materialized.

The Fifth District of Birchircara came into being on 1st March, 1898 to serve Birchircara, Balzan, Lia and Attard. The Postmaster was Giuseppe Gauci, who was assisted by an Office Keeper named Giovanni Schembri. Unfortunately this office closed the following year on 30th April, 1899 because of lack of business.

The first Branch Post Office for Gozo was opened at the Government Buildings, Victoria on 1st May, 1900

to serve the Victoria District. The Chief Sorter and Supervisor of Postmen of the G.P.O. was installed as the first Postmaster on a temporary basis, Giovanni Zammit, assisted by Paolo Lanzon who served Victoria, Sannat, Kerzem, Munxiar and Xlendi, and Postman Giuseppe Cachia who did Xaghra, Marsalforn, Zebbug, Garbo and San Lorenzo.

The following year as from the 21st December, 1901 an additional afternoon mail was despatched on weekdays only from the G.P.O.

Another short-term Postal District was that of Melleha where a Branch Post Office was opened on the 29th March, 1902 to serve that area. It only lasted just over a year, like Birchicara, closing its doors on 10th April, 1903. The Postmaster of this Branch Office was Joseph Gatt Rutter who was assisted by an Office Keeper, Angelo Fenech. The average daily volume of mail handled by the Melleha Office was approximately 18 letters incoming and 15 despatched, while newspapers averaged about three daily in and out while registered letters less than one daily both ways. For interest's sake, it is appropriate to note that from this office originated the 1d rose bisect of Queen Victoria. A story was spread around that the Office at Melleha ran out of the ½d stamps because of the proximity of the nearby military camp. However, the bisect stamp is definitely of philatelic vintage. In recent years, Codes B, C and D also mysteriously came to light from this office.

The Datestamps themselves are amply covered in Said's catalogue and the Malta Study Circle Paper No. 25. Briefly, Rabato (Gozo) gave us our first Village postmark reputedly on 1st December, 1885. Its name was changed to Victoria and it was officially declared a city on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, by Government Notice No. 75 of June 10, 1887. After these two handstamps, we had Migiarro, Cospicua, Sliema, Notabile and Birchircara consecutively, all issued before 1900.

The main batch of twenty-seven datestamps of the new series intended for use at the various Village Police Stations was despatched from the G.P.O. London on the 10th July, 1900. These were put into use in early September of the same year.

The datestamps of Attard, Chircop and Safi went out of use early, all before 1910. Likewise those of Gozo were retired early. Only Caccia seems to have survived up to 1921 when all the Village postmarks were withdrawn. Two late comers in this series, were Balzan and Marsa, both of which made their appearance in 1918 and remained in use until the end of 1921. There remains only one solitary Village mark yet to be discovered postally used, and that is Sannat — Gozo. There is an impression of this cancellor in a local collection, but unfortunately it is clearly of philatelic vintage. It is applied on a 1d King George V stamp and dated 1920, long after all the other Gozo datestamps, excepting Caccia as already stated, were withdrawn.

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- (i) Enrico Gauci's salary comprised an allowance for the conveyance of the mails from the G.P.O. to Birchicara, Naxaro, St. Paul's Bay and Melleha and vice-versa.
- (ii) Carmelo Borg's salary was for the conveyance of the mails to Hamrun, Curmi, Luca and Zurrigo and vice-versa.

References. Malta Government Gazette
"Il Portafoglio Maltese"
"The Malta Times"
Various Annual Estimates
"Il Mediterraneo"
Borszelin, p. 320, Vol. I.