

BRITISH COLONIAL AND PROTECTORATE STAMPS

PART 19: MALTA

By Noel Davenhill

Noel Davenhill continues series on British Colonial and Protectorate stamps with a focus on key Maltese issues from the Victorian era to independence. Topics discussed include the use of contemporary British stamps from 1855 to 1884 cancelled by the distinctive 'M' cancellation, the first stamps to be inscribed 'Malta' from 1860, the 1902 surcharges and Malta's most expensive stamp – the 1919 Shipwreck of St Paul issue.

The Republic of Malta (whose capital is Valletta) in the Mediterranean Sea between Sicily and North Africa includes the smaller island of Gozo and, located between them, the tiny islet of Comino. Malta's history of foreign domination, prior to a period of colonial settlement, commenced in the 16th century when it became the stronghold of the wealthy Knights of St John after they had been forced to flee the island of Rhodes. Despite widespread opposition, they eventually resettled in Malta, where they remained from 1590–1790.

Antagonism against the Knights' occupation abated when these skilled artisans demonstrated their prowess in building construction and similar activities. The Knights military power during the Great Siege of 1565 helped to repel invasion by the Ottoman Empire by defeating the marauding Turks after months of fierce fighting. The event preceded four turbulent centuries during which the island fortress became a British Crown colony in 1814. A brief period of self-government, introduced in 1921 after major unrest, was subsequently suspended. It was reinstated in 1947 as a reward for endurance during months of German and Italian aerial bombardment in World War II. Independence was attained in 1964.

First stamp usage

From 1855 to 1884, all overseas mail required the use of contemporary Great Britain stamps. These are readily identified by the wavy line obliterator in use between 1855 and 1856, the distinctive 'M' cancellation introduced in 1857 and the A25 obliterator in use from 1859 (*Fig 1* and *Fig 2*). Malta's first stamp in 1860, on unwatermarked paper, was printed by De La Rue, who provided



Fig 1 The distinctive 'M' cancellation was used on overseas mail franked with contemporary British stamps

Fig 2 An A25 obliterator was introduced in Malta from 1859 (reduced)



Fig 3 Malta's first stamp, for use with inland letters, was a 1/2d. value issued in 1860



Fig 4 When the British GPO relinquished control over Malta's overseas post, a new set of definitives was issued in 1885

all the colony's stamps until 1926. Local delivery of printed material remained free of charge, whereas a 1/2d. denomination, portraying Queen Victoria, was issued for inland letters (*Fig 3*). Remarkably, this low rate remained

until 1947. The value was reissued in 1863 on Crown CC paper and in 1882 on Crown CC paper. There are 28 recorded variations in the 1/2d. stamp; including numerous unplanned shades ranging from yellow-buff to yellow and even orange.

In 1885, Universal Postal Union regulations required a new printing of the 1/2d. denomination in green (20). British stamps were simultaneously replaced by newly designed 1d., 2 1/2d., 4d. and 1s. denominations for use on overseas mail (*Fig 4*). A larger format 5s. was added in 1886. Designs of these and most subsequent issues incorporate



Fig 5 An attractive set of five engraved pictorials were put on sale in 1899

the Maltese Cross, emblem of the Knights of St John.

An innovative series of exceptionally fine ¼d., 4½d., 5d., 2s.6d. and 10s. engraved pictorials was placed on sale between 1899 and 1901 (Fig 5). The ¼d. denomination, required for inland posting of printed paper, depicts a splendid view of Valletta's Grand Harbour. Other values show images of a Gozo fishing boat, an ancient galley and the allegorical figure of 'Melita' derived from the ancient fortress town Melite (now Mdina). The 10s. features a striking painting of St Paul's shipwreck off Malta.

A temporary shortage caused by reductions in overseas postal tariffs in 1902 was met by 'One Penny' surcharges on 2½d. stamps. Until 1948, this and subsequent overprints were undertaken by Government Printing Office. Several typesetting flaws included 'One Pnney', row 9/2 (36b, 37a) (Fig 6). Several positional blocks of the apparently pre-arranged 'error' were sold under the counter by Valletta's postmaster.

King Edward VII

The frame of Malta's first stamp was adapted for seven King Edward VII portraits from ½d. to 1s. issued in 1903–4 (Fig 7). Several were soon reprinted with Multiple Crown CA watermarks; in other amendments from 1904, single colours were introduced for 1d., 2d., 2½d. and 1s. values, along with new printings of the acclaimed ¼d., 4½d. and 5d. pictorials. Subsequently, 4½d. (58) and 5d. (59) values were issued in changed colours. In 1911, the larger format Victorian 5s. was replaced with the Edwardian portrait.

To introduce King George V, De La Rue's stock design on contemporary stamps of British Honduras, British Solomon Islands, Grenada and St Lucia was repeated from 1914–20 on the majority of new ¼d. to 1s. definitive (Fig 8); a long overdue replacement for the Edwardian 3d. denomination was added in 1920.

Acclaimed 1899–1901 pictorial images were retained for 4d. and 2s.6d. denominations, whereas additional 2s. and 5s. stamps were adapted from the large type 'Nyasaland' key plate.

As for most British colonies a wartime levy was introduced in 1917–18 with 'WAR TAX' overprints on sheets of current ½d. and 3d. stamps by De La Rue (Fig 9). King Edward VII 3d. stamps astonishingly continued in use until 1920.

The 1899 'Shipwreck of St Paul' design was modified in 1919 for a new 10s. (96), claimed to be Malta's most



Fig 6 The 1902 'One Penny' surcharge on the 2½d. value included several typesetting flaws, such as the 'One Pnney' flaw



Fig 7 A set of seven values featuring a portrait of King Edward VII set inside the same frame used for Malta's first stamp was issued from 1903



Fig 8 King George V definitives printed by De La Rue appeared from 1914



Fig 9 'WAR TAX' overprints were introduced in 1917



Fig 10 A modified version of the 1899 'Shipwreck of St Paul' design was issued in 1919 and is considered to be Malta's most expensive stamp. This 1922 version, overprinted 'Self-Government', is worth much less

expensive stamp (listed by Stanley Gibbons at £3250, £4750) (Fig 10). It was reprinted in 1922 on Multiple Script CA watermarked paper along with new printings of ¼d., ½d., 1d., 2½d., 6d. and 2s. stamps. The 1921 2d. (100) was issued with a redesigned frame.

The year 1922 is notable for several issues marking constitutional changes following years of post-war unrest largely due to unemployment. The failure of local artists Dingli and Vella to fulfil a contract to deliver acceptable designs led to local 'SELF-GOVERNMENT' overprints on available stamps (Fig 11). Included were ½d., 2½d., 6d. and 2s. denominations with both single and multiple CA watermarks. A shortage of 10s. stamps was alleviated by overprinting leftover sheets from the 1899 printing (35). Insufficient supplies of overprinted stamps prompted an emergency 'One Farthing' surcharge on the 2d. value (122) (Fig 12).

Later in the year, the short-lived overprints were replaced by Dingli and Vella's two very different images of Melita – the personification of Malta (Fig 13). Higher denominations from 1s. to £1 symbolically depict the continuation of Malta's dependence on Britain. An engraved £1 superbly complemented the typographic ¼d. to 10s. denominations. A revision of postal tariffs led to 1d. and 3d. colour changes and an additional 1½d. stamp.



Fig 11 'SELF-GOVERNMENT' overprints were applied in 1922 following constitutional changes in Malta

Fig 12 An emergency 'One Farthing' surcharge on the 2d. value appeared on 15 April 1922



Fig 13 The overprints were replaced later in 1922 by two different designs featuring Melita, the personification of Malta

Reduced postal tariffs in 1925 led to a 'Two pence halfpenny' surcharge on different 3d. stamps (141/42) while awaiting a replacement 2½d. (129) (Fig 14).

A decision in 1926 terminating the dual role to include revenue usage resulted in 'POSTAGE' overprints on the current 'patriotic' series, excluding the £1 value (Fig 15). There was little justification for the overprints because imaginative designs inscribed postage were already on hand when some higher provisional denominations were withdrawn after just one week.

Waterlow issues

De La Rue's monopoly ended with new stamps printed by Waterlow issued in 1926 (Fig 16). Lower letterpress denominations from ¼d. to 6d. depict the King's portrait above a featureless shield; the series is completed with larger format 1s. to 10s. engraved pictorials featuring historic images. An 'AIR MAIL' overprint on the 6d. stamp (173) marked the inauguration of Imperial Airways Cairo-Baghdad-India service via Malta on 1 April 1928, indicating the additional cost of air-mailing standard letters (Fig 17).

Within two years of banning fiscal usage, another policy change saw the current series (157/72) placed on sale in October 1928 amended to read 'POSTAGE AND REVENUE' (Fig 18). Yet another rate change in December required reversed colours on 1d. and 1½d. stamps. In October 1930, the Waterlow pictorials were replaced with 'Postage (& Revenue)' versions (193/209) (Fig 19). Continuing on-and-off again 'revenue/postage' changes clearly earned significant gains from philatelic sales.

Crown Agents omnibus Silver Jubilee and Coronation issues were succeeded in 1938 with 15 King George VI pictorials from ¼d. to 10s. printed by Waterlow (Fig 20 and Fig 21). Several plate flaws are illustrated in the Stanley Gibbons catalogue. Whereas new images include the ancient underground burial chambers (1½d.) and a Maltese woman in traditional dress (1s.), several themes were repeated from earlier pictorial definitives. Included is an updated 1901 ¼d. Grand Harbour, modified to incorporate the GVR cypher. Images repeated from 1926 definitives include the Megalithic ruins of Mnajdra Temple (4½d.) and statues of St Publius, Neptune and the Apostle Paul, who was believed to have introduced Christianity to Malta after his dramatic shipwreck in the year 60AD. The title HMS was added to the ancient fortress of St Angelo (½d.) when it was temporarily placed under Royal Navy control in 1933. Post-war deprivations led to higher postal charges in 1943 prompting colour changes for ½d. to 3d. denominations to meet UPU regulations.



Fig 14 Reduced postal tariffs led to a 'Two pence halfpenny' surcharge on 3d. values in 1925



Fig 15 A 'POSTAGE' overprint was applied in 1926 after the decision was taken to exclude revenue usage on stamps. The 3d. value can be found with the overprint inverted



Fig 16 New pictorials printed by Waterlow were issued in 1926



Fig 17 An 'AIR MAIL' overprint was applied to the 6d. value after the inauguration of the Imperial Airways Cairo-Baghdad-India service via Malta on 1 April 1928



Fig 18 Fiscal use was introduced in 1928, leading to 'POSTAGE AND REVENUE' overprints on the current definitives



Fig 19 The Waterlow pictorials were reprinted in 1930 with a 'Postage & Revenue' inscription



Fig 20 Omnibus issues were released for the Silver Jubilee in 1935 and the Coronation in 1937



Fig 21 New definitives in 1938 included a modified version of the 1904 ¼d. with a new GVR cypher and repeats of several of the 1926 designs



The staunch resistance of Malta's citizens during 18 months of bombing during World War II was recognised in April 1942 by the unprecedented award of the George Cross by King George VI. The prestigious medal was proudly incorporated into the design of 1946 Victory stamps, other omnibus issues and many more in the years to come (Fig 22).

Malta's staunch resilience was also rewarded by restoring local responsibility, which had been withdrawn in 1933. 'SELF-GOVERNMENT 1947' overprints were applied to all definitives in 1948 (Fig 23). Flaws on the overprint showing the 'NT' joined can be found on the ½d., 1½d., 3d. and 5s. stamps. A markedly larger 'NT' (unlisted) occurs on some denominations. The expected short-term overprints astonished collectors in 1953 when six denominations from 1d. to 4½d. were issued in changed colours. At least one part sheet of an albino 1½d. green overprint (237ba) was delivered to Malta and used locally; a handful of postmarked copies retrieved from envelopes and old collections are priced at a colossal £18,000. There are no recorded mint examples.

Post-war commemoratives

As for all other colonies, Malta's 1948 omnibus Silver Wedding stamps were released months after the anniversary was forgotten, in this instance January 1949 (Fig 24). Another omnibus series to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Universal Postal Union was issued appropriately on 10 October 1949. Three stamps in 1950 marked several visits by HRH Princess Elizabeth to join her new husband Prince Philip who was based in Malta with the Royal Navy (Fig 25). Although superbly printed, the quality of engraving by Bradbury, Wilkinson failed to realistically portray our future Queen.

Many collectors fail to understand the significance of 1d., 1½d. and 1s. stamps issued in 1951 to commemorate 700 years since the presentation of the Scapular to St Simon Stock (Fig 26). A similar series in 1954 for the Centenary of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception emphasises the importance of such anniversaries to Malta's predominant Roman Catholic population.

Queen Elizabeth II

The 1½d. omnibus Queen Elizabeth II Coronation stamp in 1953 was followed in May 1954 with an adaptation of the 3d. St John's Co-Cathedral definitive to mark the Queen's visit during her Commonwealth tour (Fig 27 and Fig 28).

Waterlow and Bradbury, Wilkinson shared the printing of new definitives from ½d. to £1 released intermittently from 1956–58 to finally replace the long-lasting



Fig 22 Victory stamps released in 1946 included a depiction of the George Cross awarded to Malta for its resistance during World War II



Fig 23 'SELF-GOVERNMENT 1947' overprints were applied to all definitives in 1948. Flaws showing the 'NT' joined can be found on the ½d., 1½d., 3d. and 5s. stamps



Fig 24 The Royal Silver Wedding and the 75th anniversary of Universal Postal Union were marked with omnibus issues in 1948 and 1949



Fig 25 Three values with the same design marked HRH Princess Elizabeth's visits in 1950 to see her new husband, Prince Philip, who was based in Malta with the Royal Navy



Fig 26 Stamps were issued in 1951 and 1954 to mark religious anniversaries



Fig 27 An omnibus issue for the Coronation was issued in 1953



Fig 28 The royal visit in 1954 was marked by a modified 3d. definitive



Fig 29 The 1956 definitives included a number of stamps depicting Malta's historic landmarks

Self-Government overprints (Fig 29). Designs were dominated by historical landmarks, including statues of Christ (2s. and 5s.) (especially relevant to the largely Catholic community), the monument of the Great Siege with its symbolic figures representing

faith, fortitude and civilization (¼d.), and *Les Gavroches* (1s.6d.), representing the street urchins of Paris in the French Revolution. Stamps depict the World War II memorial (1½d.), the King's Scroll presented in a handwritten letter to Malta's Governor in April 1942 to award the George Cross medal (3d.) and a similar citation delivered by US President Franklin D Roosevelt in 1943 (4½d.). In 1963–64, 1d. and 2d. denominations were reprinted with Block CA watermarks (314/15).

Malta's last recess printed stamps were 1½d., 3d. and 6d. denominations produced by Bradbury, Wilkinson for release in December 1960 marking the centenary of the colony's first stamp (Fig 30).

Harrison and Sons' contract to print subsequent stamps in photogravure commenced with 1½d., 3d. and 1s. denominations in 1957 to celebrate the 15th anniversary since the George Cross was awarded (Fig 31). Annual issues on the same subject until 1960 depict graphic images relating to aerial bombardment created by acclaimed local artist Emvin Cremona, whose unique style immediately identifies most of Malta's stamp output for 20 years. Cremona's issues include themes outlining developments in Technical Education, the 19th centenary of St Paul's shipwreck and the Great Siege of 1565 when Turkish invaders were repelled by the military power of 3000 Knights of St John and similar numbers of Maltese fighters (Fig 32). Subsequent issues prior to independence marked congresses held in Valletta for Anti-Brucellosis and Catholic Doctors.

Two final Crown Agents omnibus issues, Freedom from Hunger and Red Cross stamps, were issued in 1963 (Fig 33).

Post Independence

Whereas this review excludes prolific post-independence issues, the striking 1965 definitives recalling significant episodes in Malta's history from the Neolithic period to independence are worthy of comment (Fig 34). This magnificent series of 21 stamps from ½d. to £1 (5d. and 10d. values were added in 1970) was again unmistakably the work of Emvin Cremona. Harrison's complicated incorporation of gold and silver metallic inks inevitably led to excessive missing colours and other striking flaws.

Short-term postage due labels from ½d. to 1s.6d. issued in April 1925 were locally typeset in unperforated sheets containing a proportion of *tête-bêche* horizontal pairs. Conventional stamps in July 1925, printed by Bradbury, Wilkinson, feature an attractive Maltese Cross design that continued in use with colour, watermark and perforation changes until 1973.

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Fig 30 The last recess-printed stamps were issued in 1960 to mark the centenary of the colony's first stamp



Fig 31 Annual issues from 1957–60 marked the anniversaries of Malta being awarded the George Cross



Fig 32 Three examples of stamps designed in the unique style of Emvin Cremona



Fig 33 Omnibus issues for Freedom from Hunger and the Red Cross were issued in 1963

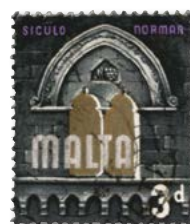


Fig 34 21 striking definitives designed by Emvin Cremona were issued in 1965 following independence

