

## **PRINCESS ELIZABETH STAYS IN MALTA: MALTA'S 1950 "ROYAL VISIT" ISSUE**

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

#### **Malta:**

Malta consists of three inhabited (and two uninhabited) islands (316 sq km), in the centre of the Mediterranean, 93 kms south-east of Sicily. It has a long and complex known history dating back 8,000 years; and has cultural connections to Europe, northern Africa, and the Middle East. It became a British colony in 1814. Its geographical location became strategically important during and after the construction of the Suez Canal. British forces prevented the occupation of Malta during WWII, and used Malta as the staging ground for campaigns in North Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Malta remained a colony until independence in 1964.

#### **Princess Elizabeth:**

The arrival of Princess Elizabeth in 1949, for the first of four stays, provided welcome relief and distraction from post-war rebuilding efforts. The Maltese were captivated by the young Princess, and her activities were chronicled frequently in local newspapers and periodicals, and covered by news services abroad. She alone or with her husband began participating in official engagements outside the watchful eye of her immediate family and palace courtiers.

#### **Importance of Postal Services:**

In 1950 the population of Malta was about 300,000. Over 10,000 Maltese had emigrated to Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, between 1918 and 1920. A further 90,000, almost 30% of the population, headed for the same destinations between 1948-1967. From WWI until Independence in 1964, Malta was the home of large numbers of British military and government personnel, who were prior or current residents of Great Britain. Due to the massive rebuilding required, new services, such as international telephone services, were slow to be introduced. Postal services were the main conduit of communication with the outside world; and were crucial to keeping the government functioning and in allowing its residents to stay in touch with family and friends overseas.

#### **Significance of this issue:**

King George V, "The Philatelist King", believed that the sole purpose of postage stamps was to be functional and pay postage costs. He saw no need for commemorative stamps. Postage stamps were issued under the auspices of the Crown Agents in Great Britain, and their attitudes towards stamps had been greatly influenced by the king. His son, King George VI, shared his father's views, coupled with post-war austerity the only commemorative stamps issued by many colonies, including Malta, from 1937-1949 were four omnibus issues. So, to a population to whom international postal services were an important part of daily lives, the news that Malta would issue a stand alone commemorative set of stamps celebrating the Princess's time on the island garnered considerable interest and excitement.

#### **Exhibitor's interest in Malta and the Princess Elizabeth issue:**

The exhibitor's spouse grew up in Malta from 1929-1943, and recounted stories of life on the island before and during WWII. The Princess privately visited an aunt's florist shop in Sliema, and two uncles in the RN met her at naval social functions.

## **THE EXHIBIT:**

### **Treatment:**

The exhibit focuses on one set of stamps, and covers five aspects of the issue. The first part of the exhibit is about the stamps themselves, it explains the backstory of the issue, illustrates the stamps, and states the specifications. The second part summarizes information on the post offices and cancellation devices, and instructional markings, in use at the time of the issue. The third part shows a small sampling of First Day Covers (FDCs) with examples of cachets and other first day usages. The fourth part of the exhibit covers other postal / commercial usages. In this section some rates and possible routings are also presented. In the last section an example of revenue use is shown. Importance has been covered in the above background information.

### **Personal study and research:**

The original portrait the stamps are based on has never been identified or reported. It has now been found, illustrated and referenced. An unreported plate block number of one of the stamps has been found. Information has also been researched on some of the addressees and senders, rates and routings. Sorting out rates has been a challenge, there were both a uniform surface mail rates and 19 zonal air mail rates in effect when the stamps were released. Air mail rates were then increased during the three month availability period.

### **Philatelic and Subject Knowledge:**

The Malta Study Circle has published a number of research papers and a comprehensive handbook. All of these have been consulted and have provided information about the stamps, post offices, post marks, instructional markings, rates, and possible mail routings. The other major reference concentrates on postal history, but there are many major discrepancies between the three main references. The identifying, naming and usage dates of the obliterator date stamps do not agree from reference to reference, nor do rates and their effective periods. The material has been chosen to try and illustrate the interest and importance of the issue, and to demonstrate knowledge of postal services (post offices, postmarks, instructional marks, rates, routings) available at the time. As much information as possible for each item has been included.

### **Rarity and condition:**

The material available reflects both the small size of the island and population demographics, the short period of time the stamps were available for purchase, and the postal usage. Single mint and used stamps are readily available, but imprint / plate blocks are less common. First Day Covers sent to inland and overseas destinations are widely available. The "Cordelia's Emporium" First Day cachets are common, and the only commercial cachets produced. Two examples of privately produced cachets have been found. There is very little commercial material from inland use available. The item exhibited is the only one found. Commercial mail to GB, and from expatriates, is common. Some mail is thought to have been duo-purpose, serving both commercial and philatelic purposes. Over franked covers with a complete set of stamps are common. Import and export agents used postal services, which is reflected in overseas destinations. Commercial covers are not as common on correspondence to continental Europe, and none has been seen sent to the Near or Far East, Asia, or Africa (except 1 item to Gibraltar). There are also examples of late usage available, two examples are shown. One revenue use has been found, to pay the notary fee for a legal document, filed with the court during the 3 month stamp availability period. This 3 month period is referred to as "in period" in the exhibit.

Though considered “modern” material, the stamps were issued 74 years ago, and both stamps and most covers are 60-74 years old. Malta has a subtropical climate and high relative humidity, so preservation of paper products is problematic unless special measures are taken. As a result toning and wear are common on most material.

#### **PRIMARY REFERENCES:**

Martin, R.E. (Editor), 1980. Malta: The postal history and postage stamps, 1576-1960.

Robson Lowe Ltd., London, UK, 411 p. (PDF file available from the exhibitor).

Pound, G., and Lockyer, R., 2010. King George VI: postage stamps and postal services of Malta, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Malta Study Circle Study Paper No. 33, Malta Study Circle, Watford, UK, 97 p.

Proud, E.B., 1999. The postal history of Malta. Proud-Bailey Co. Ltd, Heathfield, UK, 320 p.

#### **SECONDARY REFERENCES:**

**Post office hand stamps have been identified / differentiated using illustrations and charts in the following specialized study papers. (PDF files of all are available from the exhibitor.)**

Lander, J.G.C. (Editor), 1963. Sliema, its Post Offices and their marks. Malta Study Circle Study Paper No. 13, Malta Study Circle, Watford, UK, 15 p.

Lander, J.G.C. (Editor), 1972. The Postal History and Markings of Cospicua, Paola, Zejtun, Zurrieq. Malta Study Circle Study Paper No. 26, Malta Study Circle, Watford, UK, 19 p.

Lander, J.G.C. (Editor), 1973. Post Offices in the North. Malta Study Circle Study Paper No. 14, Malta Study Circle, Ipswich, UK, 26 p.

Lander, J.G.C. (Editor), 1990. Valletta G.P.O. Letter mail 1987-1980, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Malta Study Circle Study Paper No. 16, Malta Study Circle, Watford, UK, 14 p.