

A productive and practical governor

In his final feature on Malta's *Vanity Fair* Governors, **Christopher Grech** writes about Sir Henry Storks's governorship.



Evelyn Baring, an aide-de-camp to Sir Henry Storks. PHOTO: F. A. FREEMAN

Sir Henry Storks was one of the most effective and, therefore, popular governors of Malta. A sceptic might think that this was due to the brevity of his governorship: out of the total duration of 30 months, he spent 12 months in Jamaica where he was sent to replace and investigate the actions of Governor Edward John Eyre for his overreaction to a local rebellion.

Storks was a consummate administrator and diplomat. In his early career he served as adjutant-general to the British troops in Cape Colony; for five years he acted as assistant military secretary in Mauritius, and during the Crimean War he was in charge of all the British establishments in Turkey. At the end of the latter war, he oversaw the withdrawal of the British troops from Turkey. In 1859 Storks became the last Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands until the islands were united with Greece in 1864.

By the time he arrived in Malta, Storks was a fearless but impartial executive who won respect for these qualities. Furthermore, he was accustomed to doing business in the Mediterranean: he had served in the Ionian Islands with his regiment in the 1840s and while there he married the daughter of Cavaliere Giuseppe Nizzoli of Milan in 1841. His wife helped him gain proficiency in Italian, but unfortunately, she died in 1848.



A portrait of Sir Henry Storks by an unknown artist.

Sir Henry won himself over to the Maltese soon after his arrival by announcing that every Tuesday he would be available to anyone who wished to meet and discuss pressing issues with him. It was a breath of fresh air to have a governor who was so readily accessible.

Consequently, he was bold in taking action on his own initiative, only later reporting back

to the Secretary of State. His decisions were rarely interfered with. This was a remarkable feat since, during his short tenure, much social legislature was enacted.

The Governor was also keen to give the elected members an effective role to play in Council. All the government's proposals were first passed through select committees which were composed of a majority of elected members.

As a skilful administrator, Storks possessed the ability to spot talent and surround himself with the best minds he could find. Two of his aides-de-camp in Malta went on to hold significant positions in the colonies.

George Strahan, who briefly held the position of chief secretary to the government of Malta (1868-69), was subsequently elected Governor of the Gold Coast, 1874-76; Governor-in-chief of the Windward Islands, 1876-80; and Governor of Tasmania from 1880-86.

Another of Storks's aides-de-camp in Corfu and briefly in Malta was Evelyn Baring, later 1st Earl of Cromer. Baring, a scion of the eponymous banking family, eventually held the prestigious and highly influential position of British Consul-General of Egypt.

Since Egypt was virtually a British protectorate, Baring acted as *de facto* ruler of Egypt, dragging the country into the modern world and putting its finances on a surer footing

than had been the case under the Khedives. It was not coincidental that the consul-general was given the nickname of 'Over-Baring'.

While in Corfu, Baring developed a close friendship with artist and nonsense writer Edward Lear. Their correspondence reveals that Lear was not merely a frequent visitor to the Lord High Commissioner's palace but that Lear was often seated beside Storks at dinner. Lear dedicated his *Views in the Seven Ionian Islands*, published in 1863, to Storks.

Sir Henry was summoned to Jamaica unexpectedly and left suddenly on December 7, 1865, just over a year after his arrival in Malta. He returned to Malta on December 22, 1866, to a rapturous reception of parades, illuminations and, of course, effusive speeches, which the diplomatic Governor replied with patience and brevity.

On the very day of his arrival he attended the newly-completed Opera House. On entering the premises he was presented with a bouquet of artificial flowers and, when he appeared in the royal box, he was greeted by hearty applause

and a hymn composed by Gian Anton Vassallo set to music by the theatre's impresario Signor Malfiggiani. Storks was adulated by Maltese theatre-goers as he was a generous benefactor who donated one of the busts adorning the then-new Opera House.

Accomplished composer Antonio Nani fashioned a special *Welcome Waltz* in honour of the Governor's return to Malta. This, as the title page announces, was intended for a grand ball most likely held at the Palace on January 10, 1867 – the first ball after Storks's return from Jamaica. The piece was dedicated to Lady Paget, wife of admiral Lord Clarence Paget, commander-in-chief, Mediterranean Fleet, who assumed the role of First Lady since Storks was still a widower.

Only a few days after his arrival in Malta, the British press started to speculate that Storks would soon be returning to England as he had tired of foreign service and was seeking a more important engagement with the government at home. The rumours held some truth as Storks stepped down and left Malta a couple



The title page of the *Welcome Waltz* composed by Antonio Nani.

of months later, on April 17, 1867, and returned to England. The accompanying portrait is based on a photograph by John and Charles Watkins of 34, Parliament Street, London. The painting was most probably painted in Malta; however, the artist is not known.

Storks's caricature appeared in *Vanity Fair* on December 24, 1870. It was drawn by Ape (Carlo Pellegrini). By this time, Storks held the post of surveyor-general of the Ordnance and Under-Secretary at the War Office.



A caricature of Sir Henry Storks that appeared on *Vanity Fair*, 1870.

Here he worked closely with Lord Cardwell on the controversial, painful but much needed military reforms.

The caption to Storks's caricature runs: "He is a living paradox; no one is less subject to control, no one a greater slave of control." These words sum up Storks's administrative approach in Malta where he acted as his own master and carried out his mission with propriety and precision. The result was that he was a productive, practical and much appreciated Governor.