

WISH YOU WERE HERE...

This year sees the centenary of the first Maltese picture postcard.

It was in 1869 that the first postcard was mailed. It was a plain piece of cardboard, with space for a message to be written and a stamp to be fixed. This was in Austria and soon after, postal authorities around Europe adopted the idea.

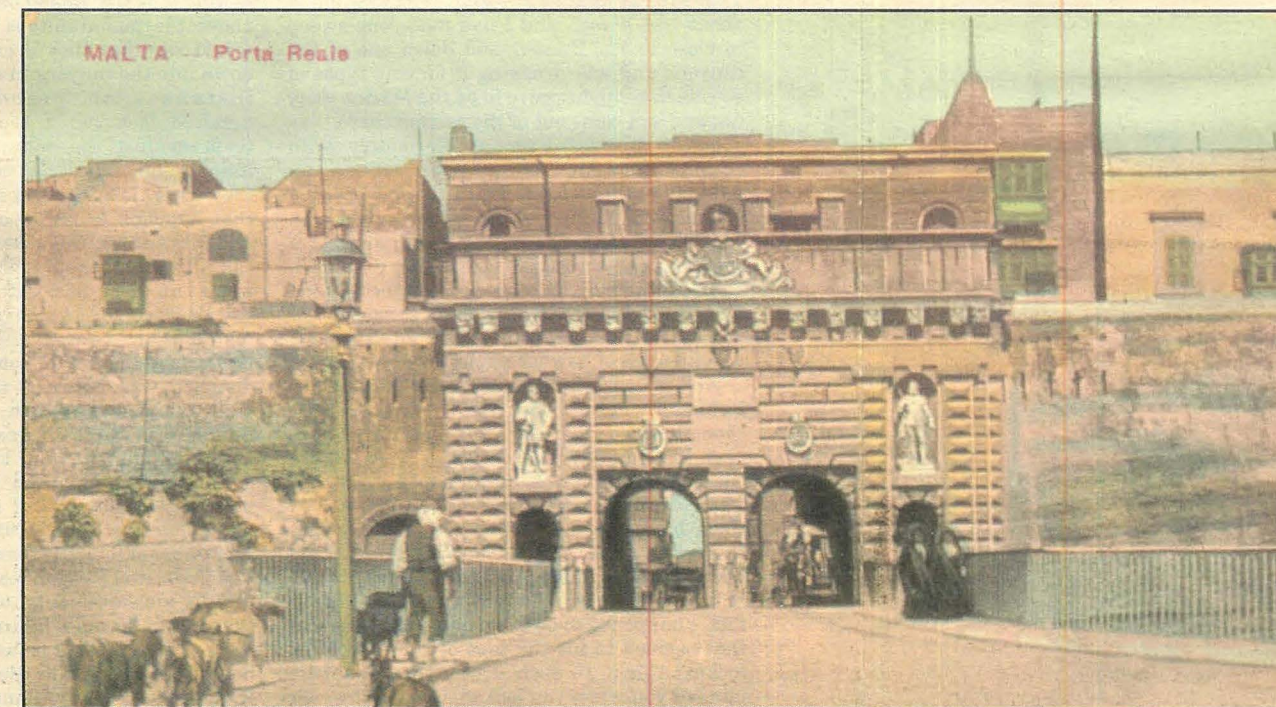
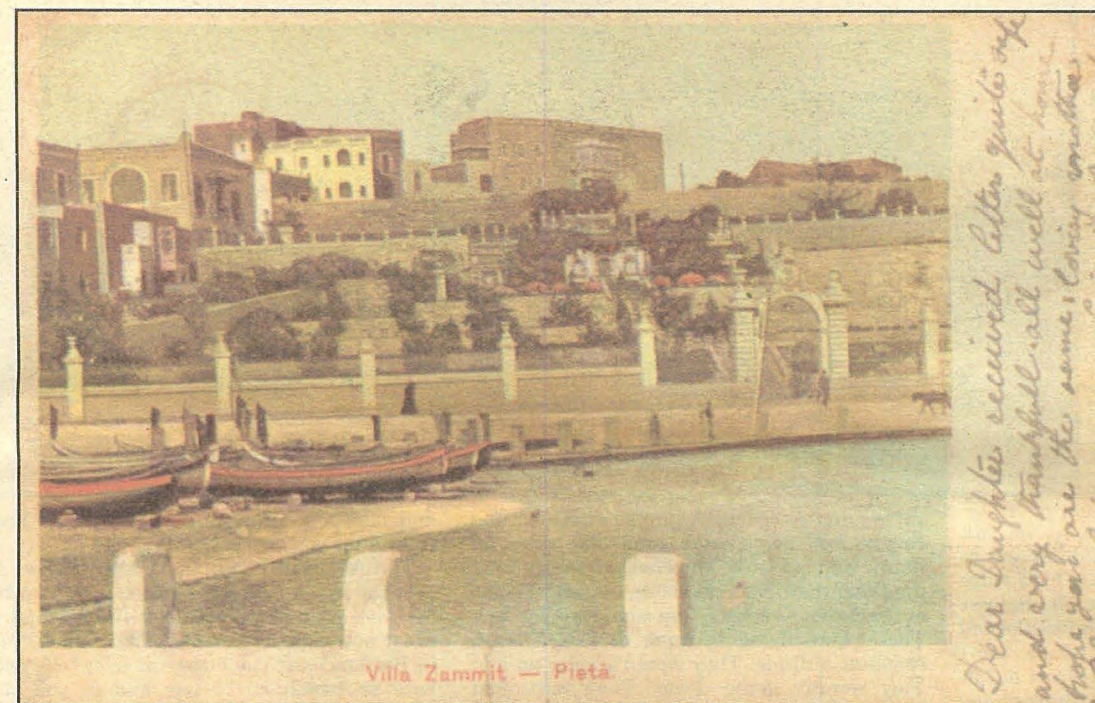
In 1889, when the Paris Exhibition was held, picture postcards had become popular and the exhibition itself led to a great increase in the use of cards. Most postcards then, either showed the Eiffel Tower or scenes of Paris from the tower.

Note the notes

It is interesting to note that with the introduction of postcards, man's inherent curiosity found further scope. Indeed one can hardly avoid the temptation of reading the messages written on them, some of which are quite intimate.

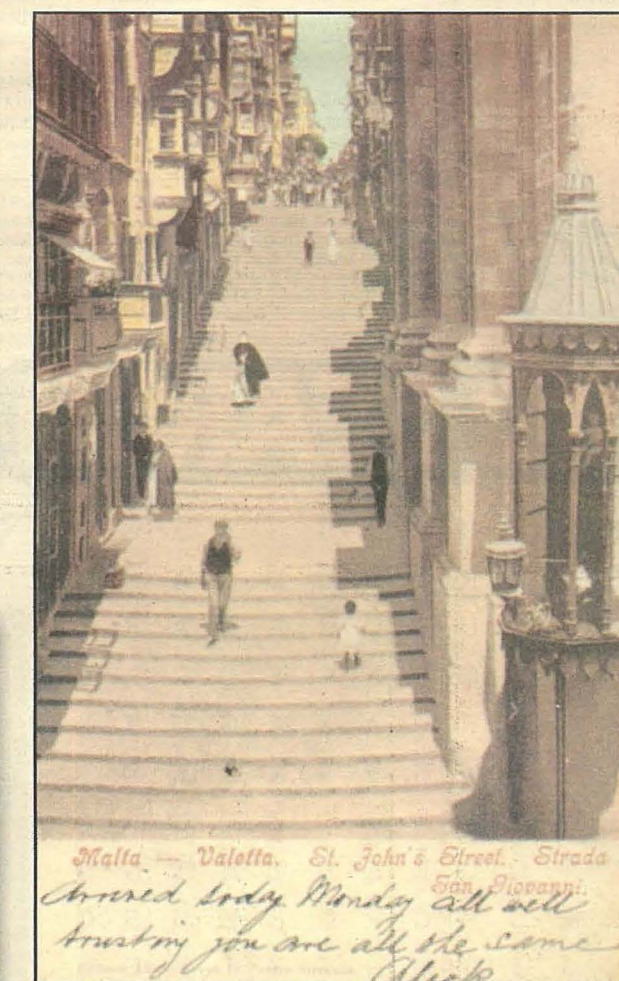
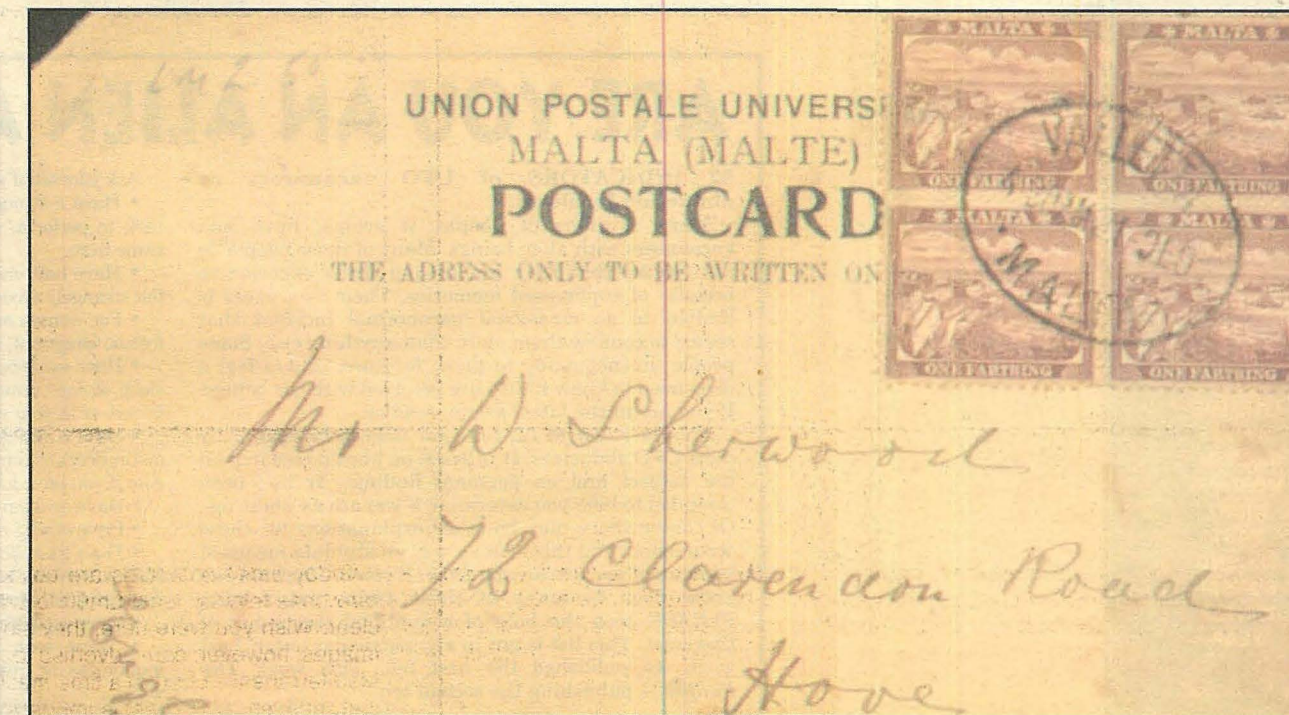
It is recorded that in France one woman used to read her friends the messages on some of the cards she got hold of. She was once caught reading an erotic message sent by a priest to his "friend". Arrested and tried, she was eventually found guilty and jailed for "reading aloud confidential and personal matters". But the writer was let free. He committed no crime in writing the erotic material.

How's that for censorship 100 years ago?!



First Maltese postcards

The first Maltese picture postcard went on sale in 1898. By now travelling was becoming more common, it was the dawn of the modern tourist, and as now, postcards were used to advertise countries, to show how they look. Maltese postcards were varied. Painted pictures of churches, fishmongers, street hawkers, Valletta streets, the Grand Harbour, Sliema, women wearing the ubiquitous ghoneila, boats and ships, goats in the street, the water seller and the lace makers, as well as other scenes which were once everyday sights in this corner of the world.



Collectors' items

Today these postcards are collectors' items and some rare ones fetch at least Lm60 to Lm80. Their message is clear. Wish you were here, they sing daintily. Their quaint images however can advertise our Malta, jewel of the Mediterranean. Short of a time machine, visiting that postcard heaven of the past is impossible!