



Self Portrait of Edward Caruana Dingli reproduced by courtesy of the Director
National Museum of Fine Arts Valletta

Edward Caruana Dingli's MELITA Stamps

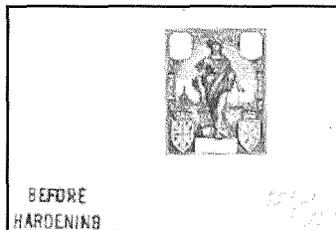
by Anthony Fenech

A few months after the granting of Self-Government in 1921, the Malta Postal Administration decided to issue a new Definitive Set of postage stamps. A Stamp Design Competition was announced and from the designs submitted, those chosen were Edward Caruana Dingli's allegorical figure of "Melita" for the ¼d to 6d and the £1 values and Gianni Vella's symbolic design of "Melita and Britannia embracing" for the 1/- to the 10/- values.

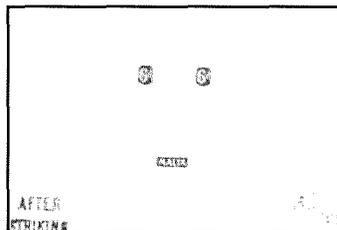
On the 15th July 1921, Edward Caruana Dingli received a formal letter from the Lieutenant-Governor's Office in Malta informing him that "With reference to your letter of the 19th April 1921, I have the honour to inform you that you have been awarded the first prize of £20 for your design for Postage and Revenue stamps of Malta illustrative of the institution of Self-Government in these Islands. A draft on the Crown Agents for the colonies for the above amount is enclosed."

Caruana Dingli's design depicted "Melita", an emblematic figure representing Malta, supporting a rudder with her right hand, and a seascape background with a Gozo boat on the right and the protruding St. Elmo Lighthouse (reproduced on one of the stamps issued by Maltapost last month) on the other side of the figure.

All the values were printed by De La Rue & Co. by the typographic process on chalk surfaced paper (except for the £1), watermarked Multiple Script CA (sideways for lower values, sideways and upright for the £1 value). The undenominated Die Proofs of the key plate with blank name and value tablets indicate that the printing of the stamps was a double operation with the duty plates, as well as the name plate being added afterwards.



Undenominated Melita Die Proof of Key Plate for lower values in black on white glazed card with blank value tablets cleared, marked "Before Hardening" and dated in pencil 22/5/22.



Die Proof of the name and 6d Duty Plate endorsed "After Striking" and dated in pencil 3/7/22.

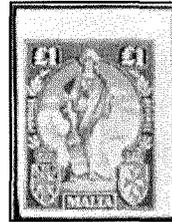


Two of the low values of the melita stamp issue, as issued.

Specialised collections of the “Melita” Issues are enhanced by the inclusion of the different Die Proofs and Colour Trials that were produced by the Printers before the stamps were issued.



Colour Trial.
£1 Imperforate in blue and green.



Colour Trial
£1 Imperforate in blue and brown.



£1 Imperforate Colour Trial in blue and green overprinted “SPECIMEN”.



£1 Imperforate Colour Trial pair in blue and green overprinted “SPECIMEN” diagonally at top left corners.



£1 Imperforate Colour Trial in blue and brown handstamped “SPECIMEN” in tall sans serifs type diagonally.

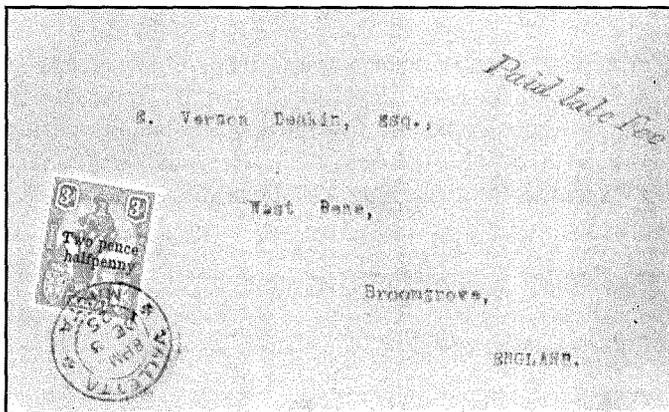
Not all the stamps in the set were issued on the same date. The $\frac{1}{2}$ d, 1d, 6d, 1/- and 2/- values were issued on 1st August 1922. The remaining values were issued as and when the corresponding values of the preceding issue ran off sale. The £1 was put on sale probably on 28th August 1922.

In August 1922 some “rather adverse remarks” were made in the “Popolo di Malta” regarding the postage stamps that had just been issued. Edward Caruana Dingli who was dissatisfied with the engraving of his design, expressed in a letter, in The Malta Chronicle that the printing “in many respects does not tally artistically with the original and the result falls short of my expectations.” The artist could not but endorse the remarks made by the writer in the “Popolo di Malta”, as the printers were not faithful to his original artwork and their execution left much to be desired. Edward Caruana Dingli very much regretted that he had not been consulted as regards the size and colouring of the stamps.

In December 1925, the foreign letter rate fell from 3d to $2\frac{1}{2}$ d and this necessitated a $2\frac{1}{2}$ d denomination. The 3d stamp which existed in shades of cobalt or ultramarine was surcharged “Two pence halfpenny” in two lines at the Government Printing Office, Valletta. A $2\frac{1}{2}$ d value in ultramarine was issued in February 1926 when a new 3d stamp, black on yellow paper replaced the 3d cobalt or 3d ultramarine stock of stamps that had been overprinted.

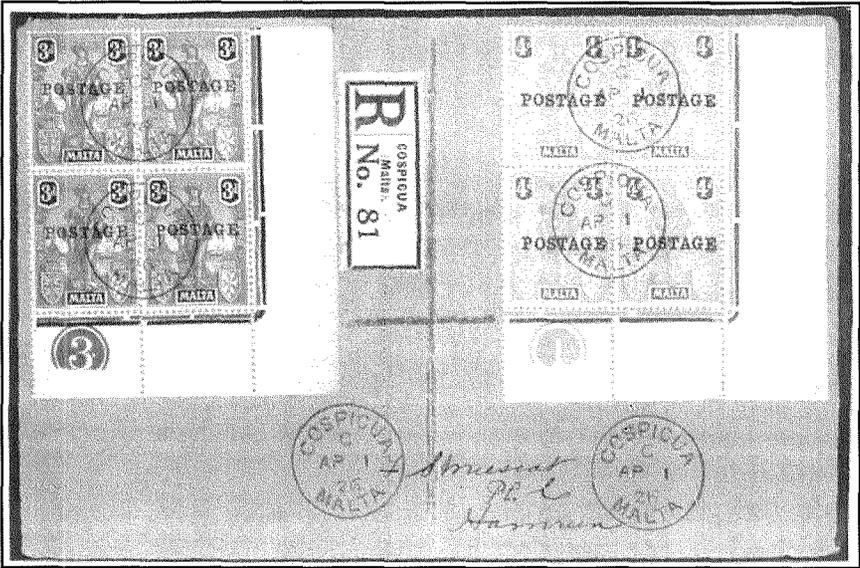


£1 Die Proof in the near issued colours on thin wove card (38 x 48mm).



The “3d” Melita stamp overprinted “Two pence halfpenny” was issued on 3 December 1925. A First Day of Issue Cover of the 3d ultramarine overprinted “Two pence halfpenny”.

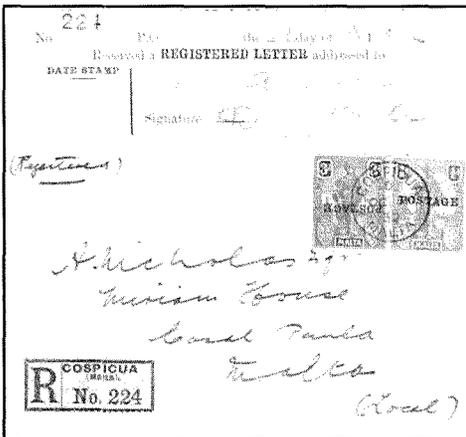
On the 1st April 1926 the Melita stamps were released overprinted “POSTAGE”. The overprinting was carried out at the Government Printing Office in Valletta. Before this date Maltese stamps were valid for both postage and revenue purposes. The issue of the “POSTAGE” overprints which were meant to be used solely for postage ran concurrently with a special revenue set of stamps ranging from $\frac{1}{2}$ d to £5 which had just been issued for fiscal purposes only.



1926 (1st April)-

Two values from the collection of the set of Blocks of four from the lower right corners of sheets with Plate Numbers, of the Melita overprinted "POSTAGE", all neatly cancelled on Registered Cover by Cospicua "C" First Day of Issue Cancellations.

The stock of the £1 Melita stamps were also overprinted "POSTAGE" but when it was found how few there were, it was decided to destroy them. This would avoid speculation. A major variety is the 3d with inverted "POSTAGE" overprint. It is believed that only two sheets of 160 stamps exist with "POSTAGE" inverted. Examples of this variety used genuinely on cover also exist. However, special forgeries of the 3d with inverted "POSTAGE" are offered on the stamp market and one should seek advice before one is lured into buying it.

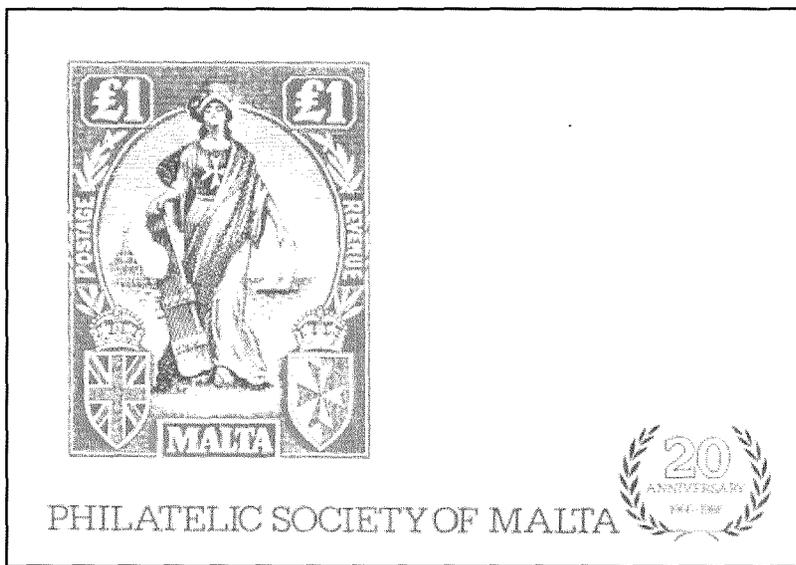


1932 (31st October)-

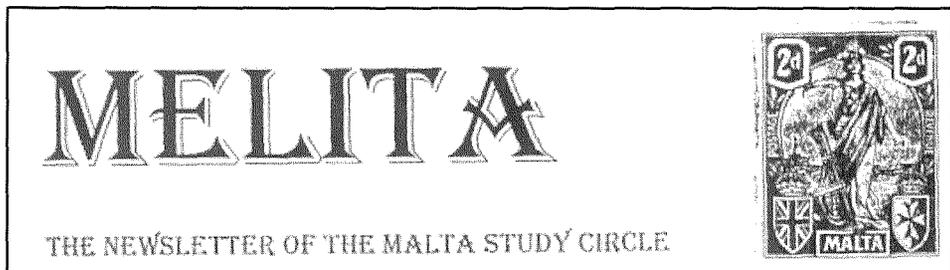
Melita 3d "POSTAGE" inverted and 1/2d "POSTAGE" tied to a Registered Cover by Cospicua "D" cds addressed to Casal Paula.

3d Inverted overprint stamp accepted as genuine by the Malta Postal Authorities. Registration slip No. 224 as issued by the clerk at the Cospicua B.O.

The issue of Edward Caruana Dingli's folklore stamps is a tribute to the artist who created the helmeted allegorical figure of Malta - the much cherished "MELITA". Philatelically, Edward Caruana Dingli will be immortalized through his creation much endeared by the avid collector of the ever popular Malta stamps.



The Melita "£1" Stamp adopted by the Philatelic Society of Malta for its 20th Anniversary Commemorative Card.



The Malta Study Circle of London Newsletter is named after Edward Caruana Dingli's MELITA.

Acknowledgements:

Ms Lotty Mallia

Mr Gordon Caruana Dingli MD, LRCP & S(E & G), FRCS (E), FRCS (G).

James A. Mackay - The Story of Malta and her Stamps.

The Malta Study Circle - Malta, The Stamps and Postal History (1576-1960).

Popolo di Malta - August 1922.

The Malta Chronicle - August 1922.

Robson Lowe International Ltd. - Major Clifford Cole Sale Catalogue Basle (4-7 April 1978).

Phillips London - The Dr Gordon Latto Sale Catalogue (Thursday 28 October 1993).

Harmers of London - Dr R.K. Clough Collection Catalogue of Sale (January 16, 1990).

Harmers of London - the Col. Lloyd - Lowies Sale Catalogue (January 24/25, 1978).