

# MSC MEMBERS' ORGANISED VISIT TO MALTA

(October 1998)

*by Hadrian Wood*

While on holiday in Malta last year (1997), Bryan Hobbs hinted at the possibility of an organised visit to the Island by U.K. members of the Malta Study Circle. Feelers put out in the MSC Newsletter produced a positive response, and Bryan immediately started working in earnest towards this goal.

Circle members in Italy, led by Lorenzo Mantegna, also initially showed an interest in joining the U.K. group, but this eventually fizzled out to just one person, Dr. Cruciani Luciano.



*Malta Study Circle members being shown around the Parcel Sorting Room during their visit to the Central Mail Room in Marsa*

The first organised MSC visit to the island had taken place during the first week of May in 1983. A second visit to mark the Centenary of the Malta Post Office followed two years later. Both visits were considered successful, so why had such a long period of time elapsed for a third visit to materialise? Something like this usually requires the initiative of one person and Bryan, who had taken part in both previous visits, provided the inspiration and started the ball rolling.

As soon as it became known that Circle members would be arriving during the third week of October, Philatelic Society members were quick to show their approval by offering to help in the preparations. An organising sub-committee made up of Dr. Alfred Bonnici, Dr. John Mercieca and myself was to work on Bryan's proposals and suggestions, and to be responsible for organising events. A five-day programme beginning on Thursday 15th was agreed on. This would include a joint meeting and display by Circle and Philatelic Society members, a visit to the Central Mail Room followed by a visit to the Maritime Museum, a celebration dinner for members and wives of both philatelic organisations, and a day's visit to Gozo.

The highlight of Thursday evening's 'joint meeting', which took place at Hotel Cavalieri in St. Julian's, was an interesting talk and outstanding display of Grand Masters' letters given by Dr. Bonnici. This was followed by displays from U.K. members showing a variety of unusual and interesting covers from their collections.

Friday began with a morning visit to the new Central Mail Room in Marsa. On arrival we were warmly welcomed by P.R.O. Tony Barbaro Sent who guided us around the building, treated us to drinks and presented each and every member with a Souvenir Post Office Year Pack containing all the stamps issued during 1997. We were later shown and allowed to examine old postal registers which bore impressions of early postal markings. Maltapost Chairman Alfred Sladden then addressed Circle members and made reference to the need of a Postal Museum, which Maltapost intended to open in the not too distant future. Members expressed their gratitude to Mr Sladden, Mr Barbaro Sent and other Maltapost officials for making their visit such an interesting and memorable one.

Lunch at the Marsa Sports Club, which followed the Central Mail Room visit, must have brought back nostalgic memories to one or two of the visitors who had done military duty on the island during their younger days. The rest of the afternoon was then dedicated to a visit to the Maritime Museum, where an exhibition commemorating the second centenary of the French Blockade was on view.

Once again Hotel Cavalieri became the venue for an excellent dinner given in honour of members and wives of both philatelic organisations. The highlight of this enjoyable Saturday evening must surely be the emotional welcoming speech given from the heart to the visiting Circle members by long serving Philatelic Society President Dr. Mercieca. This was followed by a witty and amusing speech by Graham Pound on behalf of the visitors, who also made reference to a return visit by Maltese Circle members to the U.K. in the year 2000.

Monday morning saw members boarding the coach to Cirkewwa for our day trip to Gozo. A bus journey to the church of Ta' Pinu was followed by visits to the Inland Sea in Dwejra, Xlendi Bay, Qbajjar in Marsalforn, and later to the village of Qala to enjoy a magnificent view of Comino Island.

It would be difficult to pinpoint which of these events our visitors enjoyed most, as everything seemed to go quite well. However, if I were to make a choice, I would pick the Gozo visit. Excellent weather, coupled by a relaxed lunch in pleasant surroundings by the sea, may sway Circle members to remember this day most favourably.



*Malta Study Circle members admiring a view of Comino Island from the village of Qala during their visit to Gozo*