

A STUDY ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF POSTMEN'S PERSONAL HANDSTAMPS

By
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We thank Mr Hadrian Wood for his continuous encouragement to publish this study and our brother in law, Mr D.J. Agius, for his help.

Since we started collecting Postmen's Personal handstamps we have decided to study deeply into this important section of postal history.

Our aim is to study each individual number separately, collecting information from every item that we come across, such as the addresses and the receiving dates together with the corresponding PPH. Then, we draw our conclusions. But the work is very taxing and time-consuming, both the items and the relative information are hard to acquire and we hope that one day we will be able to finish our work. Our final goal is to trace the postal delivery route of the PPH during the period of their use. As a prologue to our long assignment we thought we might as well publish a short study with some information we think is vital to the postal historian and collectors of PPH.

The Postmen's Personal Handstamps started to be used in 1889 and the last recorded item is dated 29th September, 1949. They were issued for security reasons, to avoid abuse and mishandling of letters and as a source of information for the addressee to know who was the postman who delivered his mail. Each recruit was issued with a personal handstamp to mark all mail and documents which he had to deliver. The postman's uniform bore the same number, worn on the neckband. Most often the postman retained the same number until he retired, but there are recorded cases when the same postman had three different handstamps during his service. In cases where postmen were transferred to another post office, they carried with them the same personal handstamps. Even so if their handstamps became worn due to use or got lost they were issued with the same number, maybe this time slightly different in shape and dimensions.

In this very short study it is not our intention to deal with each and every handstamp. There are seven types generally classified from Group A to Group F or Group 1 to Group 7. A good percentage of the numbers appear in different types since when they were replaced they were issued in a different form.

Probably, each set of handstamps was issued as one batch but there may be

cases when a postman claimed for his stamp to be changed due to wear or loss and his particular handstamp was ordered separately, maybe identical to or different from the last batch issued.

When the need to expand the system arose such as when the PPH's were introduced in the villages, or there was need for more postmen, a new batch with new numbers was issued, maybe including some old ones from the previous sets that were claimed to be nearly worn. Otherwise, when an individual handstamp had to be replaced, the new handstamp was either unique in style, (such as N° 63 or N° 12 – Fig.2– which although resembling type B – circular handstamps– it is somewhat different from all the others of its group) or identical in shape to the last set of handstamps.

Speaking of N° 12, was it possible that the handstamp, primarily type A (ovals with large numbers) was lost or worn out, then re-issued, this time the type of frame being circular, then lost again and further re-issued resembling again type A? (See figures 1, 2, and 3).

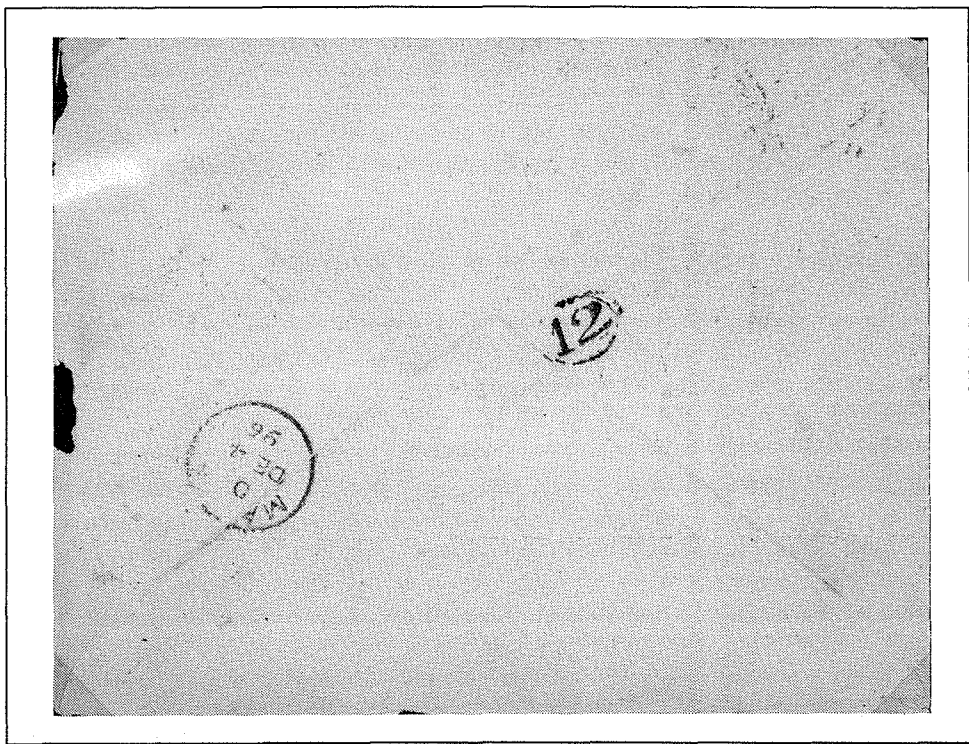


Fig. 1 PPH N° 12 type A 14 x 10.5mm dated 4th Dec 1896 envelope addressed to Strada Marina, Valletta

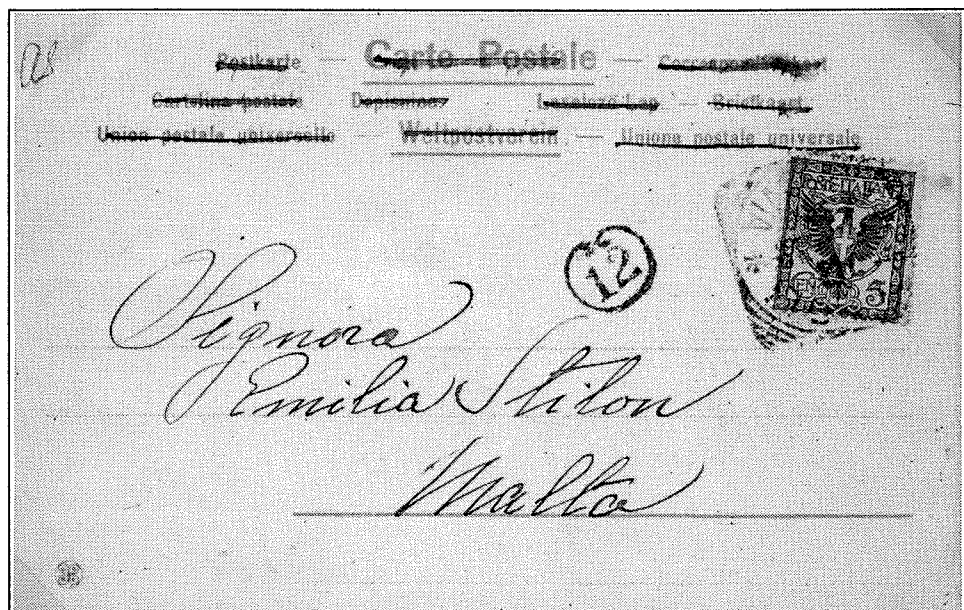
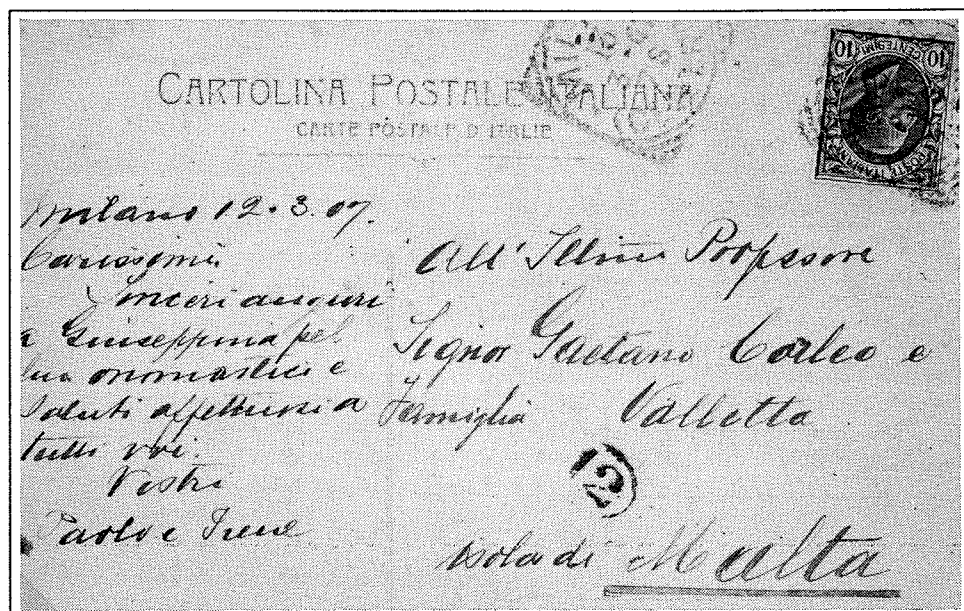


Fig. 2 PPH N° 12 (frame somewhat similar to type B) 12.5 x 11mm dated December 1903 postcard addressed to Valletta

Fig. 3 PPH N° 12 (type A) dated March 1907 postcard addressed to Valletta

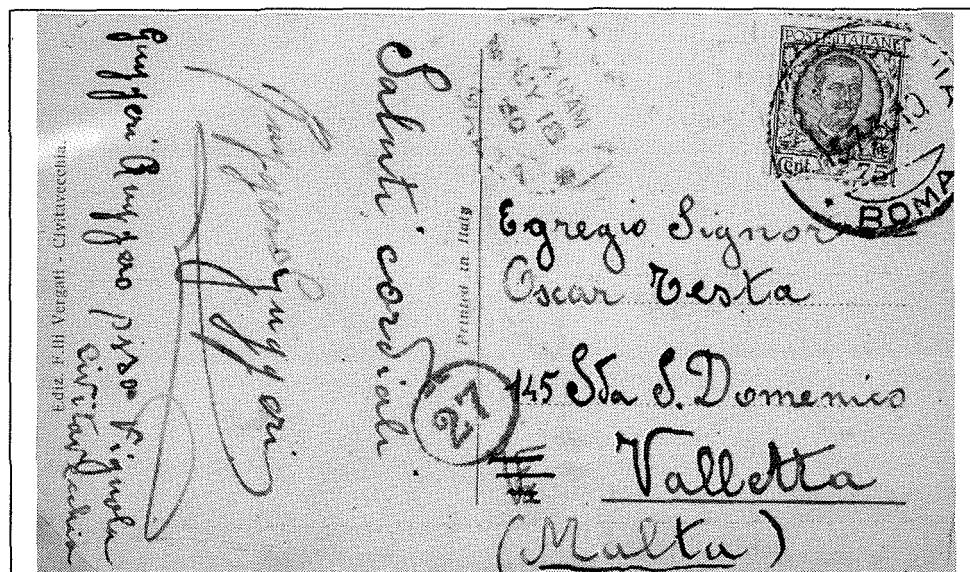


The PPH N° 27 was more straightforward. First, it was issued in the form of type B (circular handstamps), being the second set of handstamps issued, then type C, (elongated ovals with small numbers) and then type D (large ovals with large numbers). (See figures 4 and 5)



Fig.4 PPH N° 27 (type B)

Fig. 5 PPH N° 27 (type D)



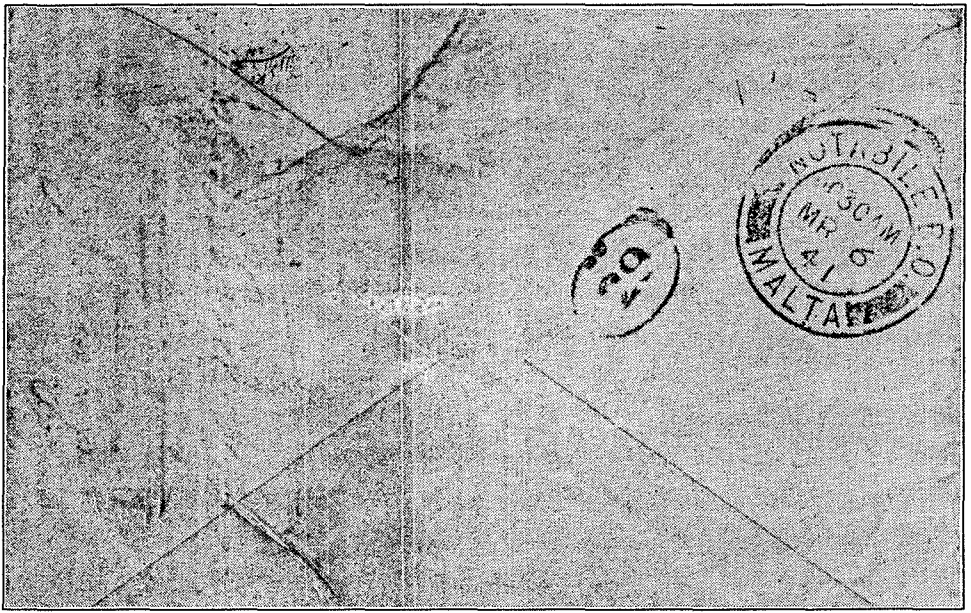


Fig. 6 At first we were convinced we had added PPH N° 29 type C (which is most scarce, if it ever existed) to our collection. Then after a closer look we found out that it is PPH N° 63 type G.

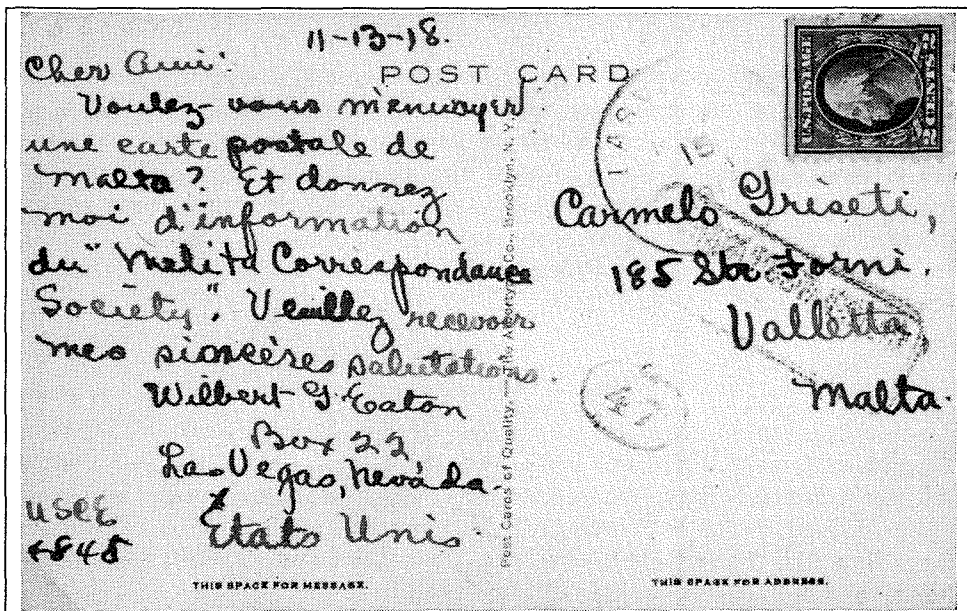
The drawing of conclusions whether a handstamp of the same type has been either withdrawn and re-issued or become different in shape due to use is sometimes difficult and controversial to decide. What follows with regards to PPH N° 47 and PPH N° 33 is an example. These handstamps were either changed or become different due to continuous use and when cleaned became slightly different in shape and size. Even the stamping and the density of the ink used by the postmen results in giving different impressions of size and shape of the same handstamp used in the same time.

Only one type of PPH N° 47 as far as we know is recorded. It is of type C. Yet, although N° 47 in all the three items depicted in figures 7, 8 and 9 is infact of type C, a close study of the handstamps will show that all three differ from each other. In figure 7, frame of PPH N° 47 is more eliptically-shaped than the frame shown in figure 8, which is flatter on all four sides. Even so the ends of the breaks are highly different, in figure 7 curling elegantly inwards while in figure 8 the breaks are in line with the outside border. Figure 9 shows another PPH N° 47 which differs from both shown in figure 7 and in figure 8.



Fig. 7 An early PPH No 47 (type C) 17 x 12.5mm dated 25 Oct 1912 postcard addressed to Strada Marina, Valletta

Fig. 8 PPH No 47 (type C) 16 x 11.5mm dated 1918 postcard addressed to Old Bakery Street, Valletta



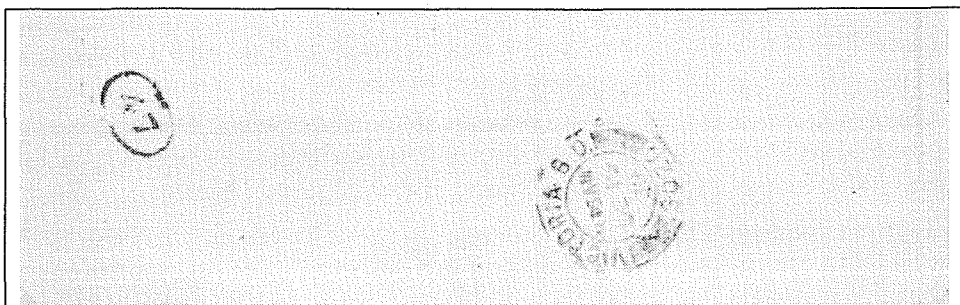


Fig. 9 PPH N° 47 (type C) 16 x 11.5mm dated 15 Dec 1939 cover addressed to St Ursola Sqr, Victoria, Gozo

One must be very careful when one tries to identify a new re-issue of a PPH of the same type, since due to continuous use the number tends to flatten and hence both shape and size tend to differ. Also when the handstamps used to be cleaned after continuous use, the filing of the surface would make the number slightly smaller, especially the first set (type A PPH N° 1 to 24) since they were of a conical shape.

Verso

Administration des Postes de Malte

Tirage du

Avis de réception

d'une lettre avec valeur déclarée de
d'un objet recommandé () (1) - Lettre - (1) (2) 98

de Valletta - Malta le 31^{re} Oct. 1923 sous le No. 98 (2)

expédié par M. Can-Francesco Moretti #1 Sda. Sta Margherita Cospicua

et adressé à M. Padre Federico Rousset, Priore di M.R.P.P.

(adresse complète) Carmelitan Sebzgi, Chiesa del Corpus Domini

La soussigné déclare (qu'une lettre avec valeur déclarée) à l'adresse Milano
(qu'un objet recommandé)

provenant de a été dûment livré le 192

Tirage du bureau destinataire

Signature (3)

du destinataire de l'Agent du bureau distributeur

Federico Rousset Priore di Carmelitan Sebzgi

(1) Nature de l'objet (lettre, échantillon, imprimé, etc.) (2) Bureau d'origine, date de dépôt à ce bureau. No. d'enregistrement au même bureau.
(3) Note. Cet avis doit être signé par le destinataire ou, si les règlements du pays de destination le comportent, par l'agent du bureau distributeur, et envoyé ensuite, par le premier courrier, directement à l'adresse indiquée au recto.

Fig.10 PPH N° 15 on AR card re-addressed to St Margaret Street, Cospicua dated 1923

Similar to the case of PPH N° 47 our study of PPH N° 33 is worth mentioning. Just as N° 47 there is only one type yet recorded of PPH N° 33 and it is also type C, that is small numbers in an elongated oval frame.

Our first item is dated 5 June 1913 (figure 11) posted to Rabat, Malta. The oval frame is larger (16 x 12mm) than the examples which followed, or could it be that these examples came from the handstamp in worn-out condition?

Figure 12 shows PPH N° 33 used in Valletta, Strait Street, dated 20 Feb 1925. It is 15.5 x 11.5mm (figure 12). Another example is dated 1926 posted to the editor of the newspaper *Il-Hmara* (Fig. 13) in Valletta. The handstamp used in 1927 and 1928 is even smaller. This time the oval being 15 x 10.5mm. An envelope with this type of handstamp is dated 22nd April 1927 posted to a resident in Strait Street, Valletta (fig. 14) and a postcard was delivered to Old Theatre Street, Valletta dated September 1931 (fig. 15). Furthermore later examples show further differences in the size of the oval frame now being 14 x 11mm; two of the items studied were delivered to the editor of *Il-Hmara* Valletta, dated July 1934 (fig 16) and to Old Theatre Street dated 30 May 1939 (fig. 17).

The postman with PPH N° 33 seems to have retained his route up to the 1940s as letters received in Strait Street, Valletta dated up to 7th Nov 1945 still showed the PPH N° 33, by this time the handstamp shows great signs of wear. Then in 1946 PPH N° 33 disappeared from mail posted to the same address. Maybe the number was withdrawn, never to be re-issued.

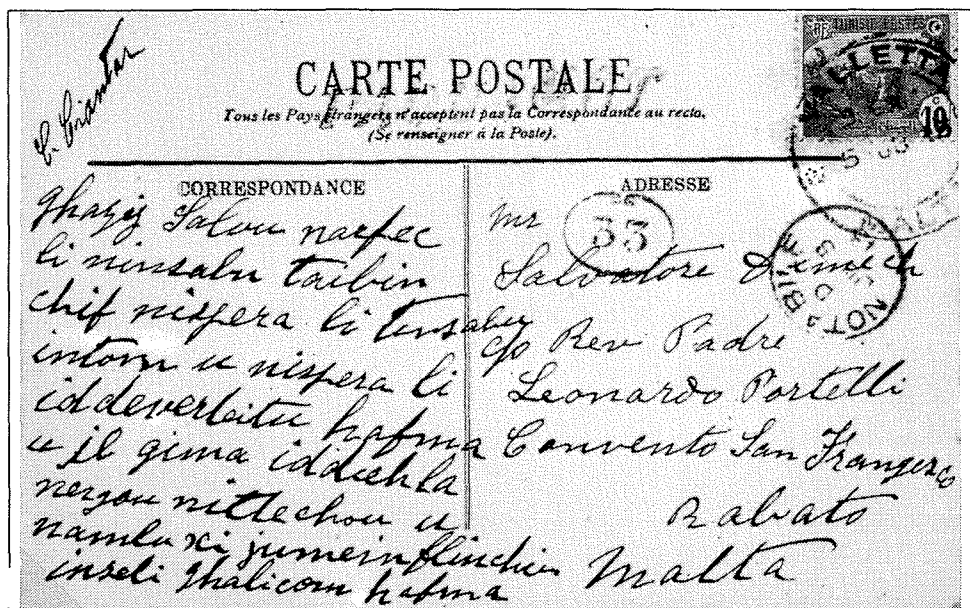


Fig.11 PPH N° 33 (type C) 16 x 12mm back-stamped on 15th June 1913 postcard addressed to Rabat, Malta

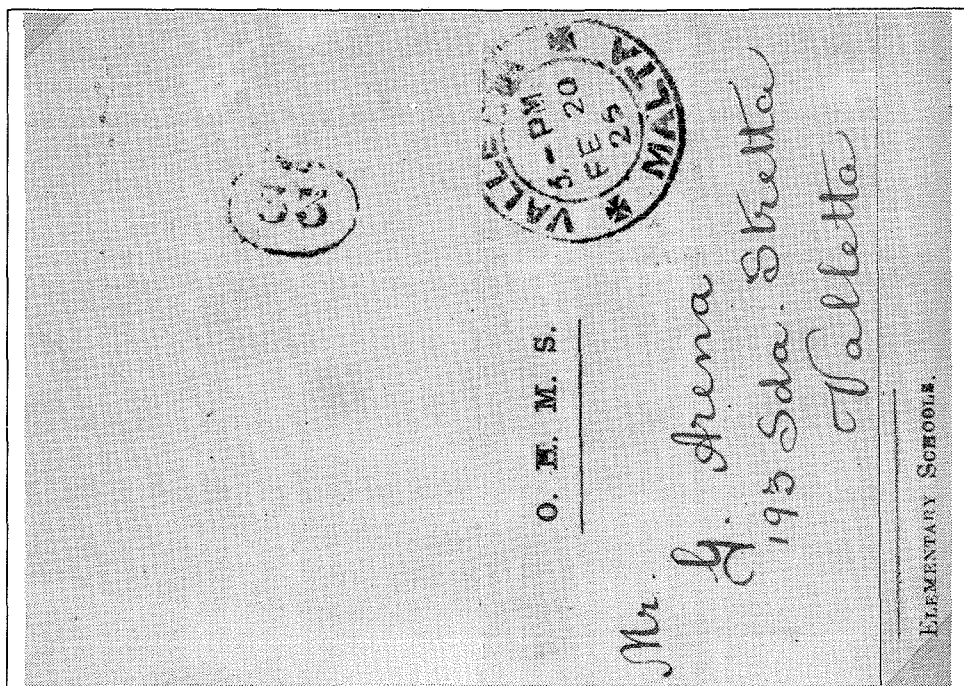
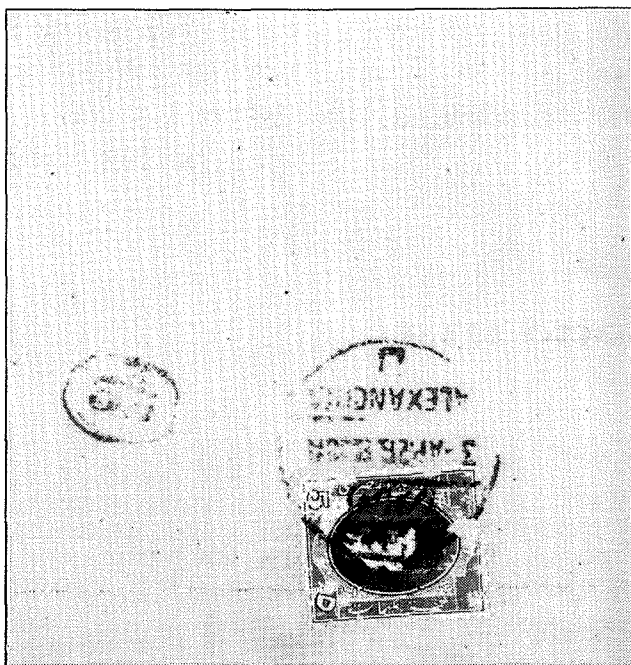


Fig.12 PPH N° 33 (type C)
15.5 x 11.5mm dated 20
Feb 1925 cover addressed
to Strait Street, Valletta

Fig.13 PPH N° 33 (type C)
dated April 1926 cover
addressed to the Editor of
the newspaper Il-Hmara
Valletta



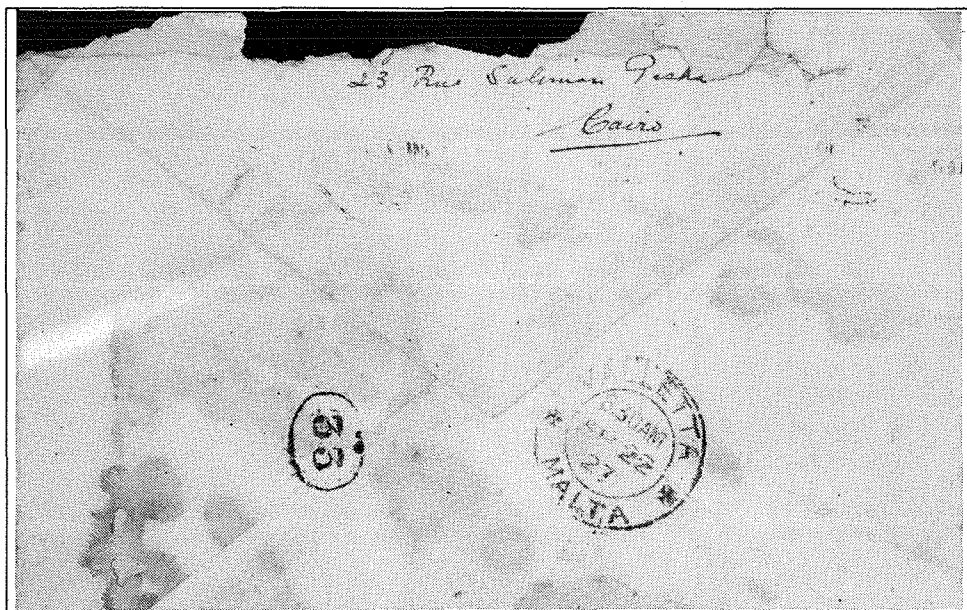
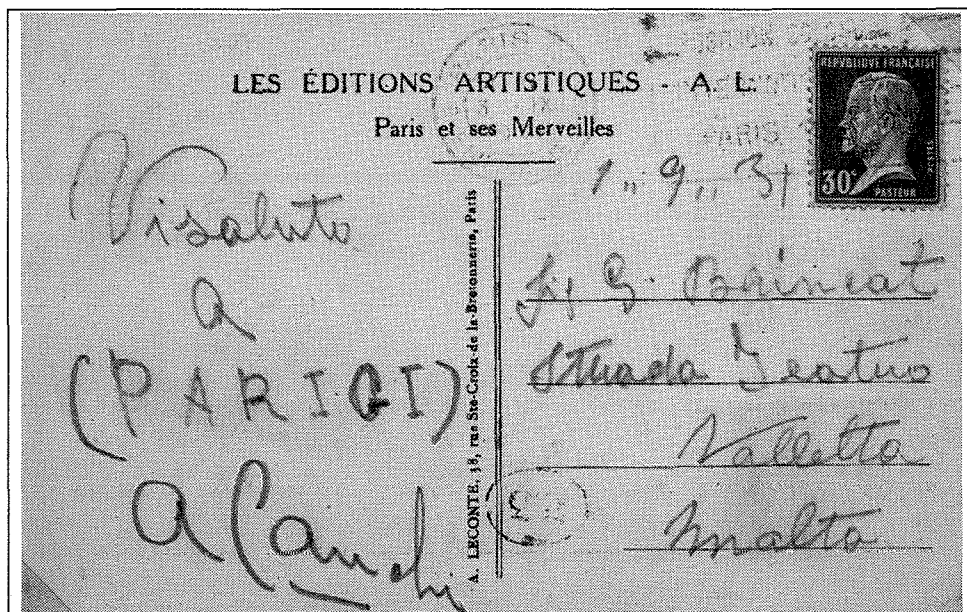


Fig. 14 PPH N° 33 (type C) 15 x 10.5mm dated 22 April 1927 envelope addressed to Strait Street, Valletta

Fig. 15 PPH N° 33 (type C) 15 x 10.5mm dated September 1931 postcard addressed to Old Theatre Street, Valletta



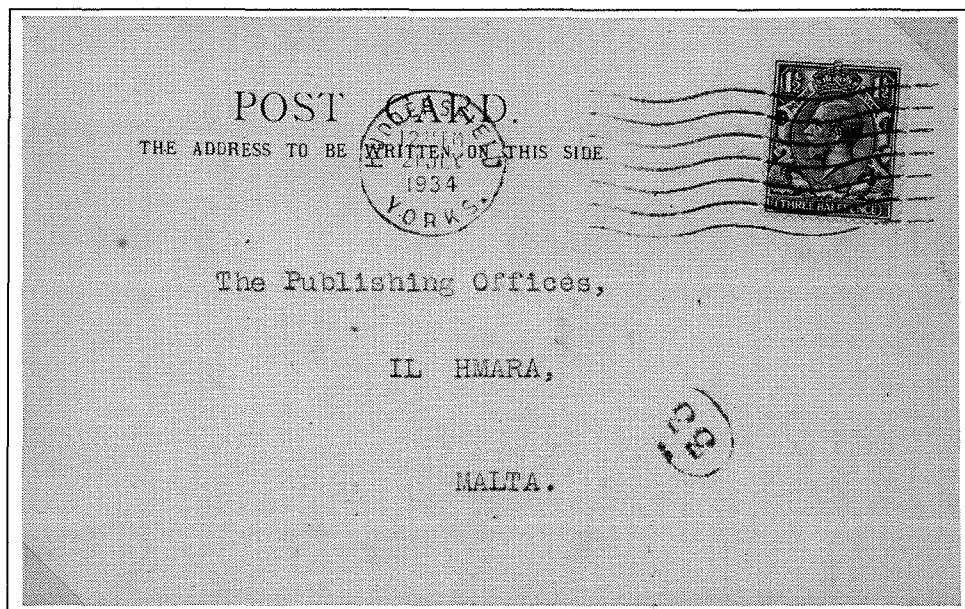
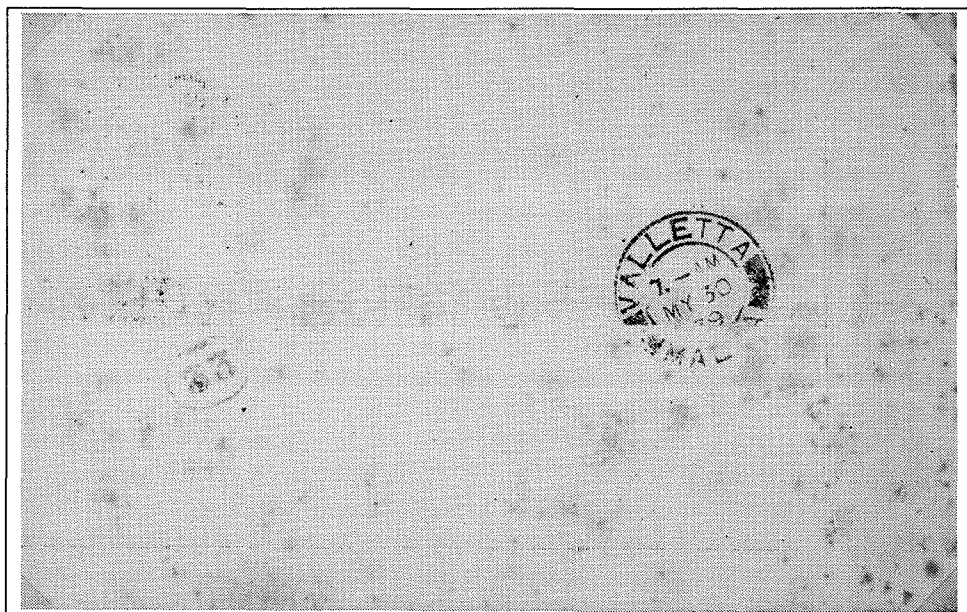


Fig.16 PPH N° 33 (type C) 14 x 11mm dated July 1934 postcard addressed to the Editor of Il-Hmara, Valletta

Fig.17 PPH N° 33 (type C) 14 x 11mm dated 30 May 1939 envelope addressed to Old Bakery Street, Valletta



This study of PPH 33 type C shows the possibility that the handstamp became gradually smaller in size since it originally appeared in 1913 owing to cleaning and filing of the surface.

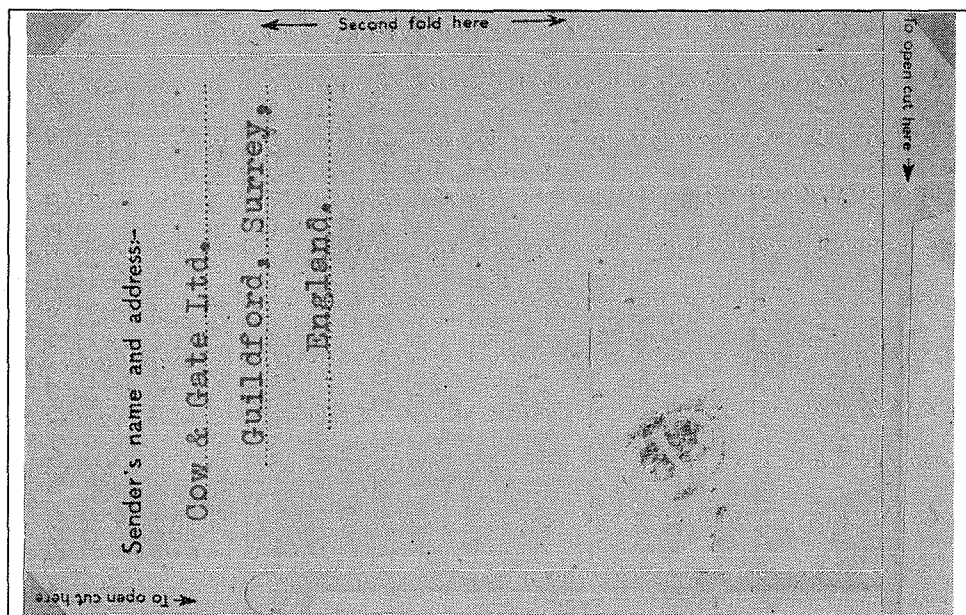


Fig.18 PPH N° 33 (type C). Airletter dated June 1945 addressed to Strait Street, Valletta.

As the study of the PPH is becoming more profound much more new material is coming to light. Type F (small oval with perpendicular breaks) was taken for granted to be straight forward from 64 to 74, being the latest group issued (with the exception of PPH N° 63, Type G, oval frame with a break at the bottom). It incorporates N° 64 to 74. Probably more numbers had to be added due to the increase in the recruiting of postmen. But then the discovery of PPH N° 52 of the same series, about ten years ago broke the continuous rhythm, giving the chance that other numbers of the same type could have been issued in replacement of worn or lost numbers.

Nothing is impossible. PPH N° 25 type E (oval with no break in the outer framework) has also been one of the latest discoveries. (fig. 20).

We know only one cover with PPH N° 51 in existence but one thing has remained unearthed. Where could PPH N° 67 have been used? All numbers, at least from one type or another have been recorded, with the exception of PPH N° 67. Could it be that PPH N° 67 was issued and never used? We have heard claims that one had discovered PPH N° 75, but this claim was quickly withdrawn. A weak impression of PPH N° 73 could be very easily mistaken for PPH N° 75.

The introduction of postmen to deliver and distribute letters to the villages in replacement of the noticeboard on the facade of the Police Station increased the need for more PPH. In some villages where mail was somewhat limited, such numbers are rather scarce but there are exceptions as in the case when PPH N° 2 (fig.20) was used at Nadur, Gozo.

Gozo, which we consider the least studied with regards to PPH due to scarcity of material which has yet to come to light, enjoyed only two Branch Post Offices at Mgarr and Victoria. The other villages, namely Xaghra, Nadur, Sannat, Gharb, Xewkija and Ghajnsielem only had Police Stations to collect mail to be distributed outside the respective village and receive mail from the related Branch Office to be collected by the addressee from the Notice Board.

A postcard worth noting is shown in figure 21 sent to Xaghra formerly known as Casal Caccia. It was backstamped at Victoria BO). on 22 August 1912 and delivered to Xaghra Police Station by the postman with PPH N° 21 (type A) may be later to be collected from the Notice Board.

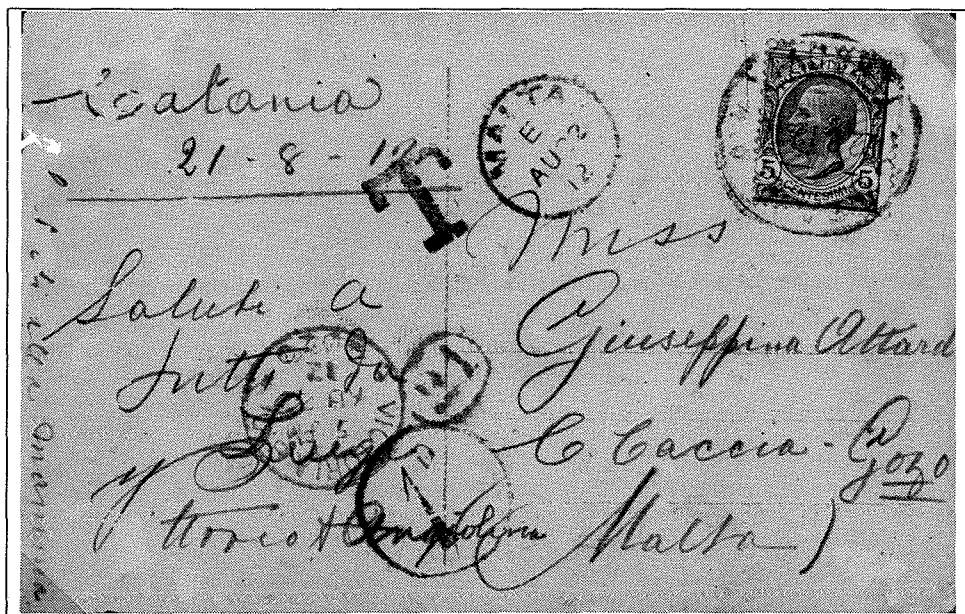


Fig.21 PPH N° 21 (type A) dated 22 August 1912, postcard addressed to Xaghra, Gozo

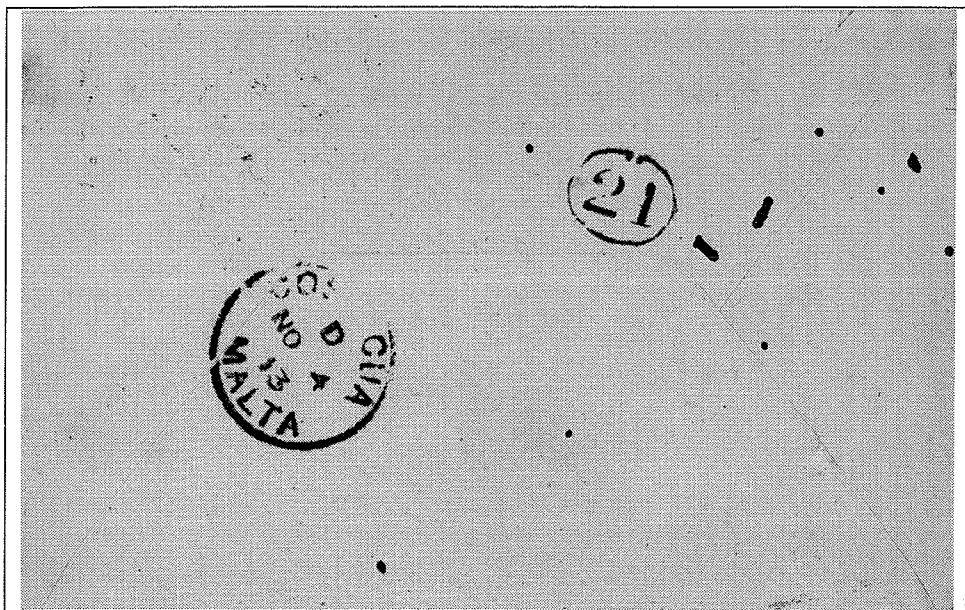


Fig.22 PPH N° 21 (type A) dated 4 Nov 1913 envelope addressed to Cospicua

It is also important to say the PPH N° 21 (type A) was withdrawn from Gozo and in 1913 PPH N° 21 is found to have been used by the postman distributing letters to Cospicua. (see fig. 22)

Needless to say we were overwhelmed with joy when we discovered what had remained concealed since the Postman Personal Handstamps started to be studied and collected, a cover with PPH N° 67 (type F) (see fig.23).

The cover is backstamped at Victoria B.O. and dated 16 August 1940. It was delivered to the addressee at Xaghra Gozo and the postman who carried the letter or telegram bore N° 67.

We decided to go to Xaghra Gozo and ask people there if they remembered the postman who used to deliver mail to their village during wartime. We went to various bars and restaurants at Xaghra and we were amused with the information that we obtained.

Yes, the old folk of Xaghra remember that in the late 1930s and during the 1940s the postman who used to deliver mail in their village used to wear a black uniform with two red stripes running down his trousers. Some remember that he wore a number in his collar. And they also remember his name. They used to call him "Cikku l-pustier".

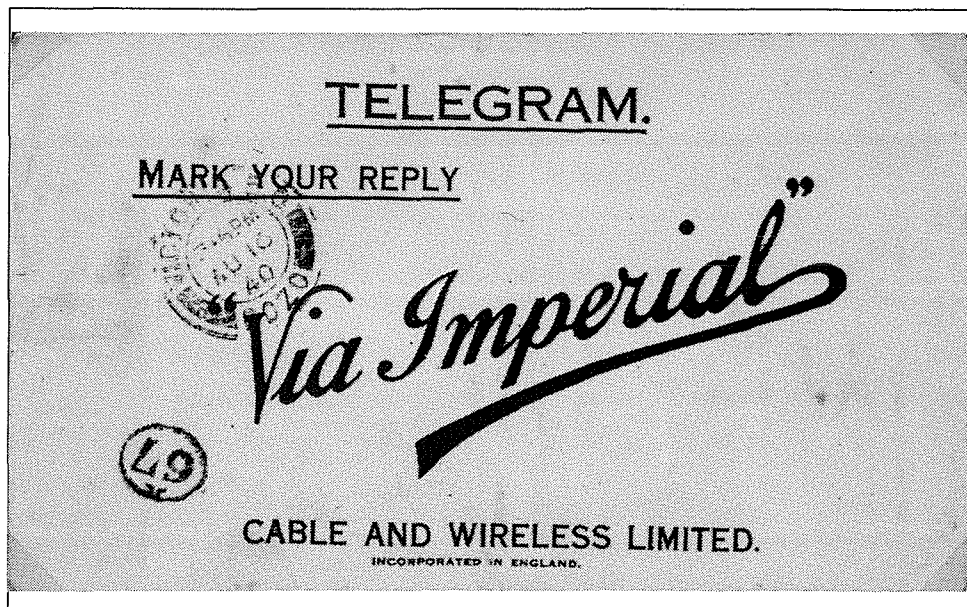


Fig.23 PPH N° 67 (type F) dated 16 August 1940 envelope addressed to Xaghra Gozo.
Some numbers in this series also appear in Red

“Of course we remember Cikku l-pustier” one old woman told us. “He used to come from Rabat on his red bicycle and distribute mail in our village”.

We were informed that the next postman who came after “Cikku l-pustier” no longer wore the same uniform.

We dedicate this study to our son Daniel

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