

Finding a Treasure Trove of Information

by Paul and Barbara Kayfetz

CONTENTS

Introduction	
Background	
Details of Plates & Related Preparatory Items	
The 1899 – 1922 Pictorials	
King George V Definitives 1914 – 1922	
Melita Issues 1922 – 1926	
£1 Melita	
The 1926 – 1930 George V Definitive	
Coronation 1937 Commemorative	
George V Revenue Stamps	
Postal Stationery	
Why are the Plates and Dies in Malta	
General Implications	
The Future of the Plates and Dies	
To be done	

INTRODUCTION

Many philatelists, the authors included, spend countless hours indirectly piecing together bits of information about the printing plates and processes which were used for various stamp issues. The process is painstaking and slow. It involves the assembly of stamps into larger units which, along with marginal bits, allow inferences to be drawn about the plates. Sometimes preparatory items, such as essays, die proofs, colour trials, plate proofs, or printer's record items provide additional clues. Those of us who savour digging into dusty archives find correspondence and invoices which provide additional data.

The results of this indirect research, when compiled in one work, can be impressive. The *Malta Study Circle Handbook* is an example. It is considered a model of philatelic writing regarding a single country.

BACKGROUND

The authors, luckily, have been afforded the chance-of-a-lifetime opportunity to explore an original resource. This was a storage attic containing most of the printing plates, artists' original engraved dies, and transfer rollers for the Malta stamps printed between 1899 and 1937.

During a stay in Malta in 1985 the authors investigated a sentence in the *Handbook* mentioning that the printing plate for one of the Melita stamps was in the possession of the Malta National Museum.

Initial Visit

Malta Study Circle members Frank Gray steered us to the Malta Archeological Museum in Valletta. This museum occupies the magnificent old Auberge de Provence of the Knights of Malta. There the Director of Museums, Father Marius J. Zerafa, confirmed that there were several boxes "of old copper plates" in a storage attic. Unfortunately, the attic was not accessible because the key was no longer available.

Father Zerafa was most cordial. We discussed his pleasant visit as a student to our home area of San Francisco. We explained the potential significance of original printing plates to the philatelic world. Father Zerafa consented to one of his art restorer's forcing the attic door lock for us.

We ducked through the curved doorway, wound up four turns in a pitch-dark, cramped circular staircase, went through another locked door, and entered a dark storeroom. Opening wooden shutters in the two-foot thick walls revealed a storeroom lined with pottery and artifact-filled wooden shelves. In one corner were sixteen boxes filled with philatelic hardware.



Paul at work

Interim Efforts

We sent copies of our hurried photos to Frank Gray in London for him to share with members of the Malta Study Circle. During the next two years we urged local philatelists in Malta to examine and "write up" the material in the attic. Dr. Alfred Bonnici did not receive any response to his written inquiries to the government minister then-in-charge.

We then initiated our own arrangements to spend two weeks in Malta, with large-format photographic equipment, to systematically record and describe the items in the attic. Father Zerafa was extremely accommodating; Dr. Bonnici provided advice and encouragement.

Enroute to Malta we met with Mr. Robson Lowe in London. He spent considerable time providing advice, some obtained directly from technical people at De La Rue regarding the proper handling and cleaning of printing plates and dies.

Second Visit

When we arrived in Malta Father Zerafa provided full and gracious cooperation. The lock at the bottom of the stairs was again forced. We were offered working space in the Directors' Conference Room, but decided to do the photography and measuring in the storage attic by window light. This avoided carrying of hundreds of pounds of delicate plates up and down several sets of stairs.

Seven days were spent organizing, logging, cleaning, photographing, measuring and describing the materials. Dr. Bonnici provided hospitality, encouragement and information. Mr. Godwin Said provided daily encouragement, good coffee, information, and assistance in contacting members of the postal administration.

All philatelic items in the attic were listed and photographed. The description that follows is an attempt to share the information gleaned. Not all of the photographs are reproduced here. Any needed by philatelists will be made available at cost upon request.

The opportunity to examine the actual printing plates and dies allowed information to be obtained which is impossible to glean from the normal philatelic study of the printed stamps. Where such information supplements that contained in the *Malta Study Circle Handbook*, it is set out in italics in the following section.

DETAILS OF PLATES AND RELATED PREPARATORY ITEMS

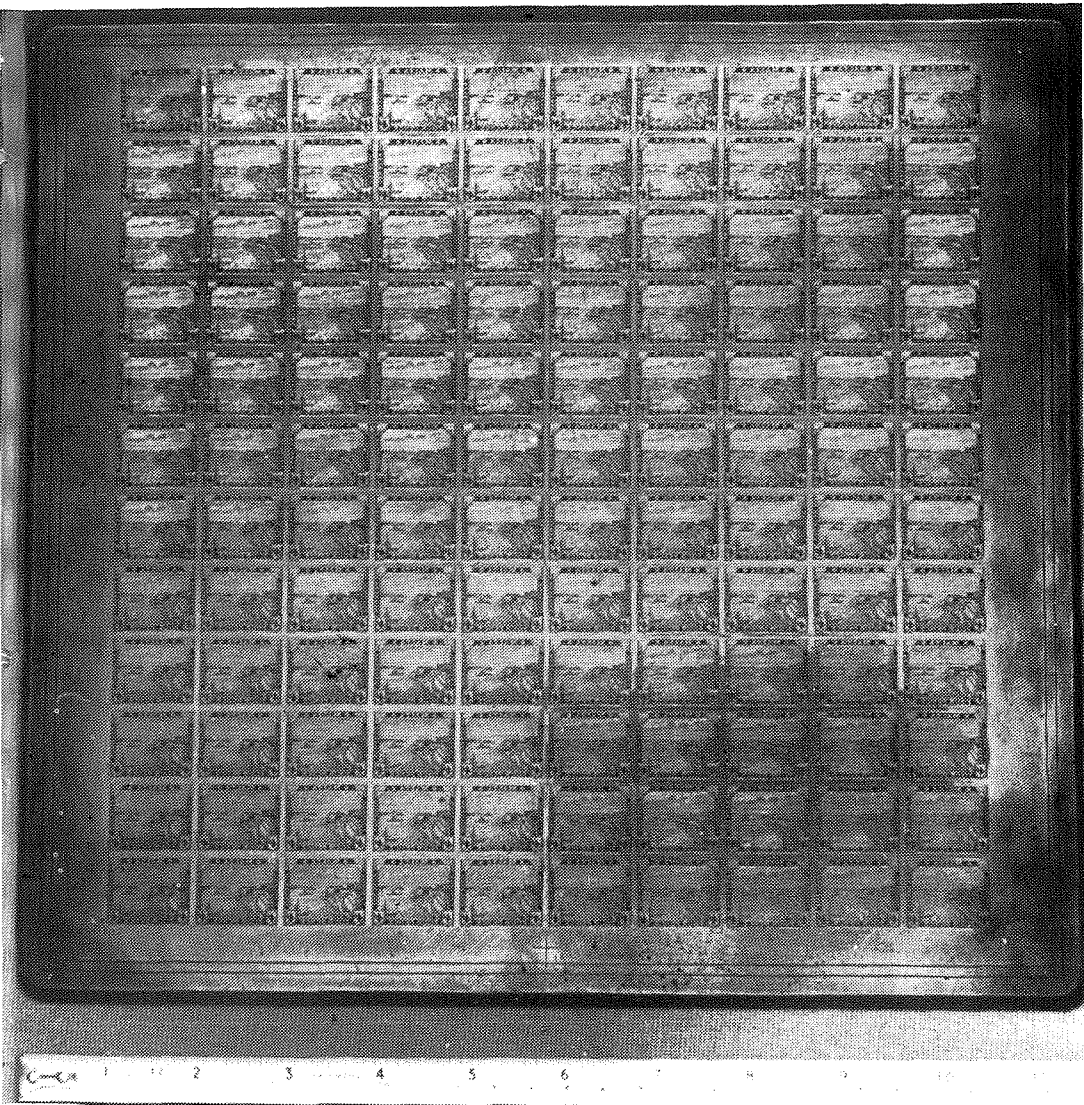
Printing plates contain an image which is reversed left-to-right from the finished sheet of stamps. All descriptions of positions and measurements herein are in terms of the printed sheets rather than the plates.



Barbara at work

THE 1899 – 1922 PICTORIALS

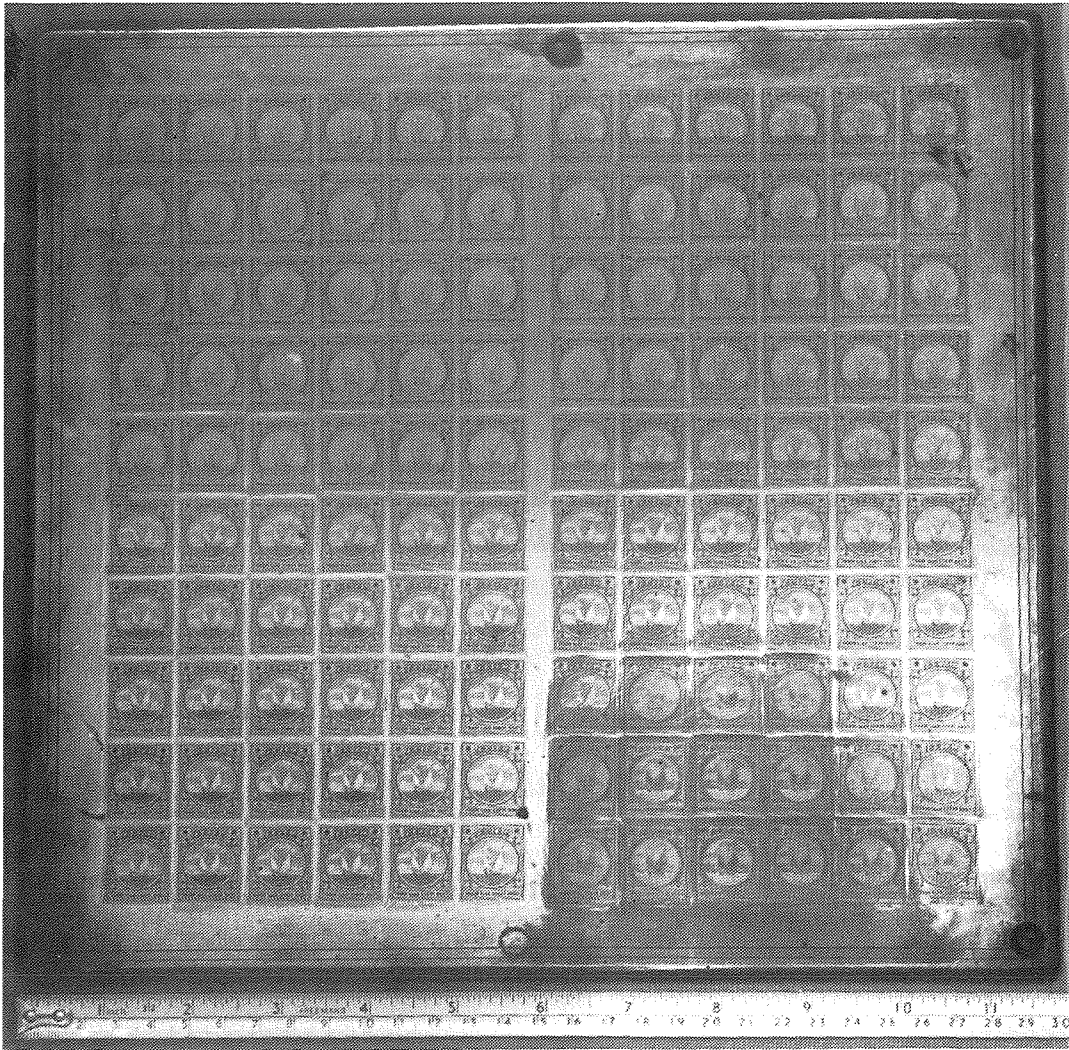
Each of these plates contains the entire design since the stamps were printed in one color. They are of the recess (also termed engraved or intaglio) method, in which ink is pressed into grooves of varying depths. The ink is wiped off the surface and moist paper pressed against the plate. Each is described below.



4d (Photo No. 1) – The tagboard cover sheet for this plate is labeled: “Malta/4d/120 set/Single Working”. The plate consists of a single sheet of 120 stamps in 12 horizontal rows of 10 stamps each. There is no separation into panes.

The plate is steel which has been coated with copper. The plate is 5mm thick, 295mm wide, and 287mm high. The corners are rounded with an approximate radius of 5mm and the edges on the face side of the plate are uniformly, smoothly rounded.

Two continuous lines 3mm apart surround the sheet. The distance from the nearest of these to the stamp image is 7mm at the top, 15.5mm at the sides, and 10mm at the bottom. There are registration crosses at the mid-points of top,



bottom and sides with the crossbar 6mm from the stamp image. The upright portion of the registration cross overlaps the continuous border lines at the top and crosses the inner border line at the bottom of the sheet.

The Malta Study Circle Handbook at page 133 states that this issue was presumably printed in two panes of sixty stamps, one pane above the other. The plate, however, contains an unbroken sheet of 120 stamps rather than two panes of sixty.

4-½d (Photo No. 2) – The coverboard for this plate has noted on it in blue crayon: “Malta/4-½d/120 Set”. The plate contains two panes of 60 stamps each, side-by-side, each pane containing 10 rows of 6 stamps.

The plate is of copper-coated steel similar to the 4d plate. However, the thickness and dimensions are different. The thickness is 2.5mm; the width is 300mm and the height 290mm. The corners are rounded and the edges bevelled similarly to the 4d plate.

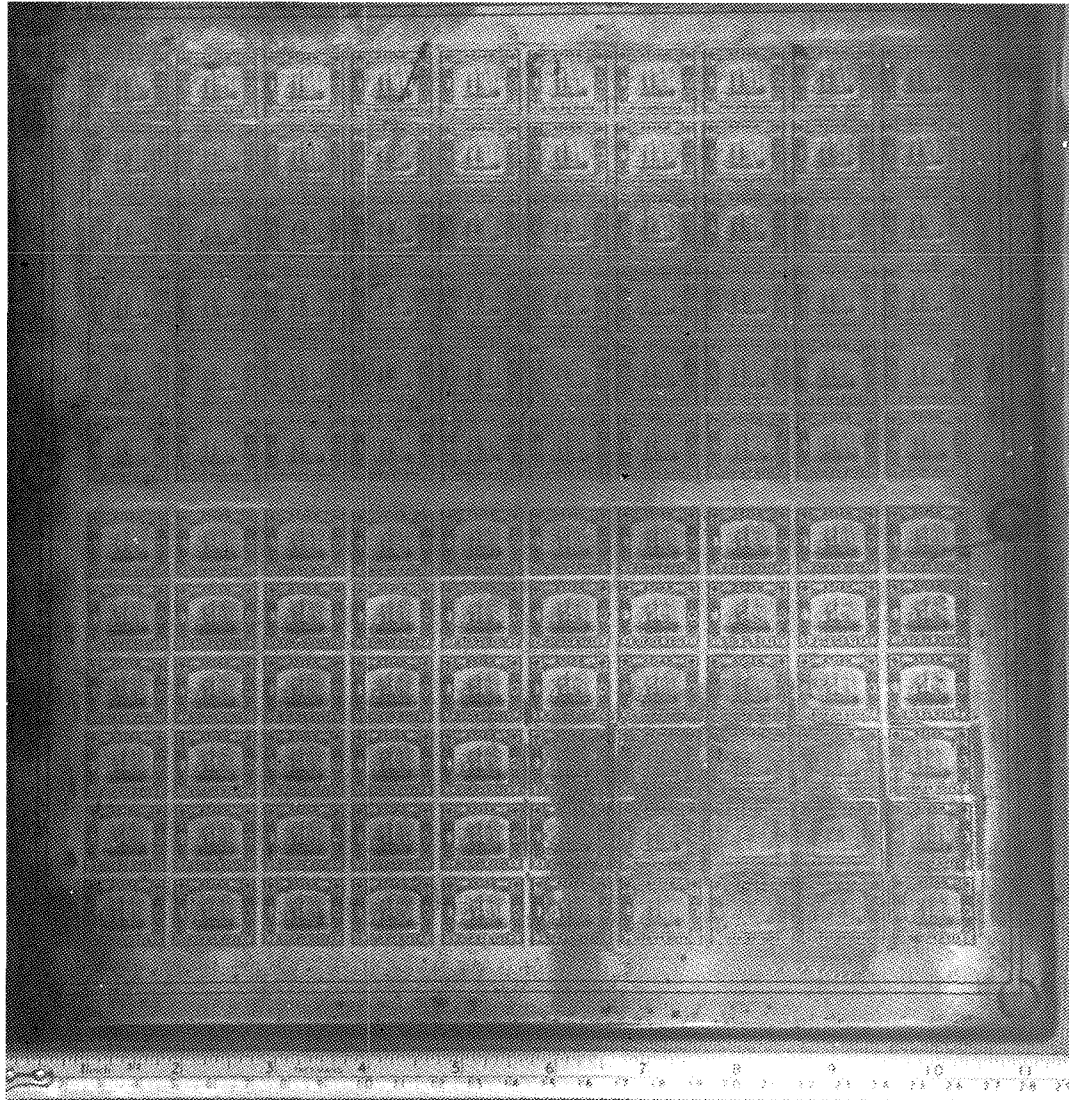
There is a continuous double rule 3mm apart around the sheet of two panes. The distance between the image and the nearest rule is 14mm on all sides. The width of the vertical gutter between the panes is 8mm.

There is a single registration T in the top margin located above the first stamp in the right-hand pane. The T is inverted with the horizontal bar 6mm above this stamp and with the vertical stem of the inverted T 5mm to the right of an imaginary extension of the left-hand edge of this stamp. Similar registration marks are at the mid-point down the outer sides of each pane with the horizontal bar also 6mm from the image of the stamps. At the bottom there is a single registration T in a position below the first stamp in the bottom row of the right-hand pane with spacing corresponding to that of the mark in the top margin.

The Malta Study Circle Handbook at page 134 discusses “signs of a rivet” in the extreme left-hand corner of a block of this issue. There are no rivets or holes for rivets. Rather, there are three circles, each 8mm in diameter, that appear in both the top and bottom margins of this plate. These appear to be from holes that were bored in the original steel plate, and then filled with some material before the plate was given its final smoothing. The plugs appear to be of steel of the same type as the plate itself. The copper coating on the steel appears to have been applied after these plugs were inserted and smoothed along with the plate. The plugs can be seen because of a hairline crack in the copper plating which has developed corrosion. The plug near the upper left corner is centered 14mm to the left of the upper left-hand stamp on the sheet of 12mm above the top of this stamp. It overlaps the corner of the continuous pair of border lines. The center plug in the top margin is the same distance above the top row of stamps and is above the right-hand upper corner stamp in the left-hand pane with its center 4mm in from the right-hand edge of that stamp. The upper right-hand plug is in a position which corresponds to that of the upper left-hand plug. In the bottom margin, the two corner plugs are in positions that correspond to those in the top margin. The center plug in the bottom margin is below the first stamp in the bottom row of the right-hand pane at the same distance below the stamp as the other plugs and with its center 4mm to the right of the left-hand edge of that stamp.

5d (Photo No. 3) – This plate is identical in nature and dimensions to the 4-½d plate described above.

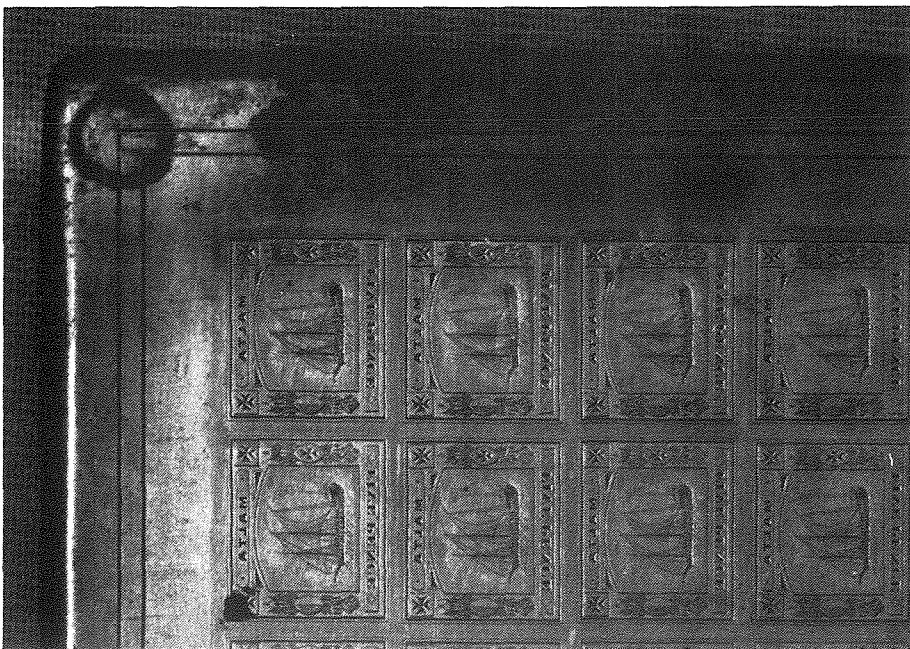
However, since this design has a horizontal format whereas the 4-½d is vertical the layout results in two panes of 60, with one above the other, each consisting of six rows of 10 stamps. When the plate is rotated 90-degrees (to the same orientation as the 4-½d plate) there are plugs in the same positions. However, in relation to the design of the 5d, these are now in the side margins.



3

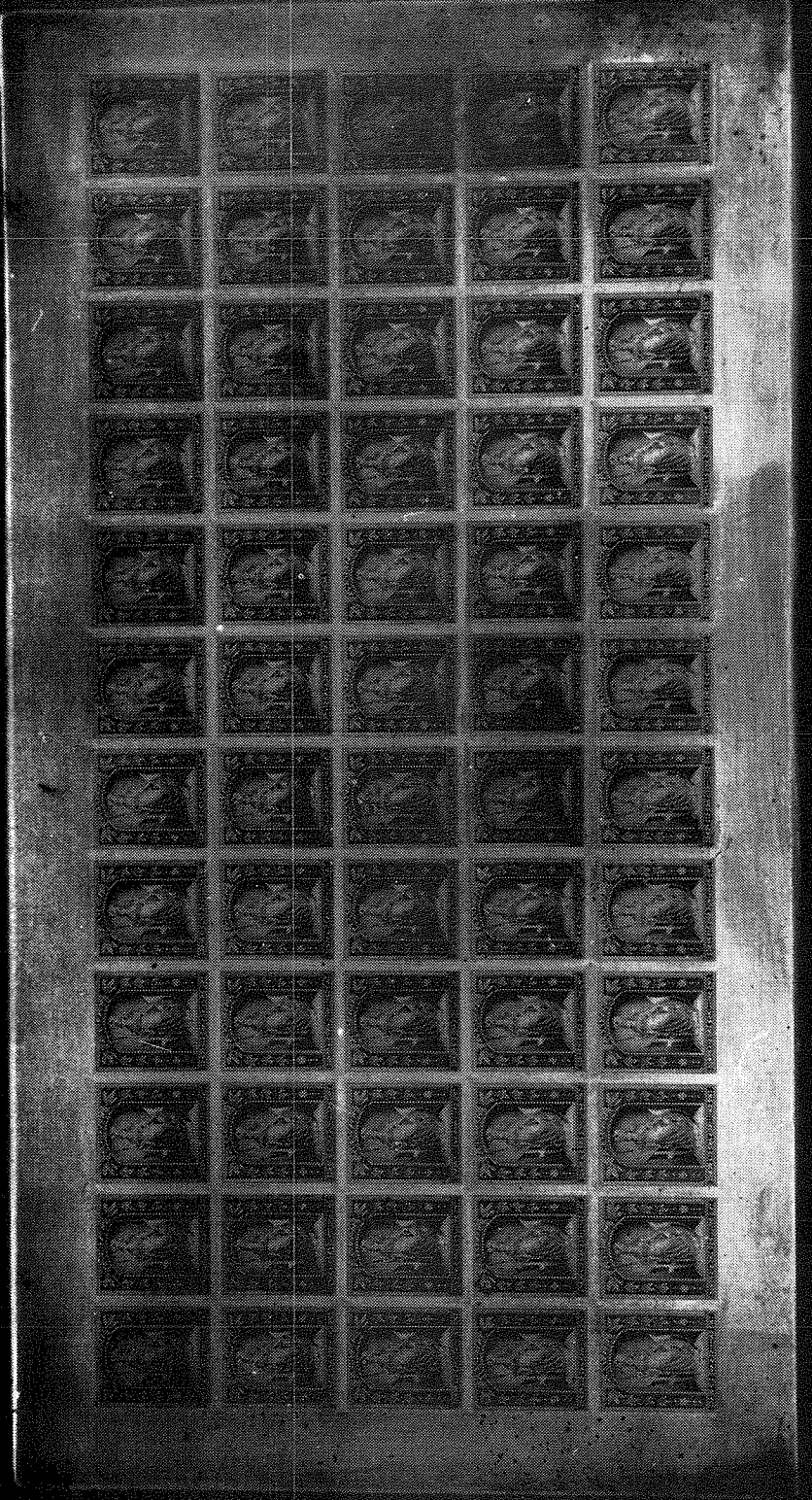
These plugs are larger than on the $4 - \frac{1}{2}d$ plate; they are 10mm in diameter (rather than 8mm). Again, the 90-degree rotation of the stamp design results in registration marks centered above the middle of the top row in the upper pane and the middle of the bottom row in the lower pane. The side registration marks are on the outside of the end stamps in the bottom row of the top pane. They are the same distance from the edges of the stamps and above the edge of the stamp atop the gutter margin as described for the $4 - \frac{1}{2}d$ value. The double rule, however, is only 10mm from the outer stamps.

The plugged holes, according to Mr. Robson Lowe, may have been where screws held the plates down to a mounting surface. These holes were gradually, becoming larger, and sometimes were plugged before redrilling. These circles may be plugs which are a different size on the $4 - \frac{1}{2}d$ and 5d plates because the 5d had been redrilled larger due to greater wear. (See Photos 2A and 3A for some magnifications enlargements of the two plate corners.)



2/6 (Photo No. 4) – The coverboard for this plate reads: “Malta 2/6/60 Set”. (The back of this protective board contains handwritten notes regarding details of specimens of a St. Kitts P&R with requisition number 1245, a signature of E.M. Sanders (?), the date 17/6/00 and the notification that one specimen is for DLR.)

This plate contains 60 images in five horizontal rows of 12 stamps. The plate is the same copper-coated steel as those described above. It is 3mm in thickness, measuring 392mm wide and 215mm high.



The Malta Study Circle Handbook at page 16 indicates that there are no reports of any marginal markings on the plate. That is correct except that there are registration "T" devices centered on each side of the sheet. These marks are 6mm from the crossbar of the T to the image of the stamps. At top and bottom the marks are centred between the sixth and seventh stamps in the respective rows, and at each side they are centered along side the end stamps in the third row.

10/- "Postage" (Photo No. 5) – The coverboard for this plate reads: "Malta/10/- Postage/60 Set/Single Working".

(It is interesting to note that the back of the coverboard accompanying this plate contains a sticker which reads:

_____ Reqn. _____ Stamps
_____ Sheets of _____ Set.
Duty _____

Crown Agents' Inspector

Date _____

This confirms the fact that the dark blue markings on these cover sheets came from the printer.)

Implicit in the repetition of the word "Malta" on the coverboards is their London source; were they not in proximity to plates of other countries this labelling would be unnecessary.

This plate is identical in size, layout, and markings to the 2/6 plate described above.

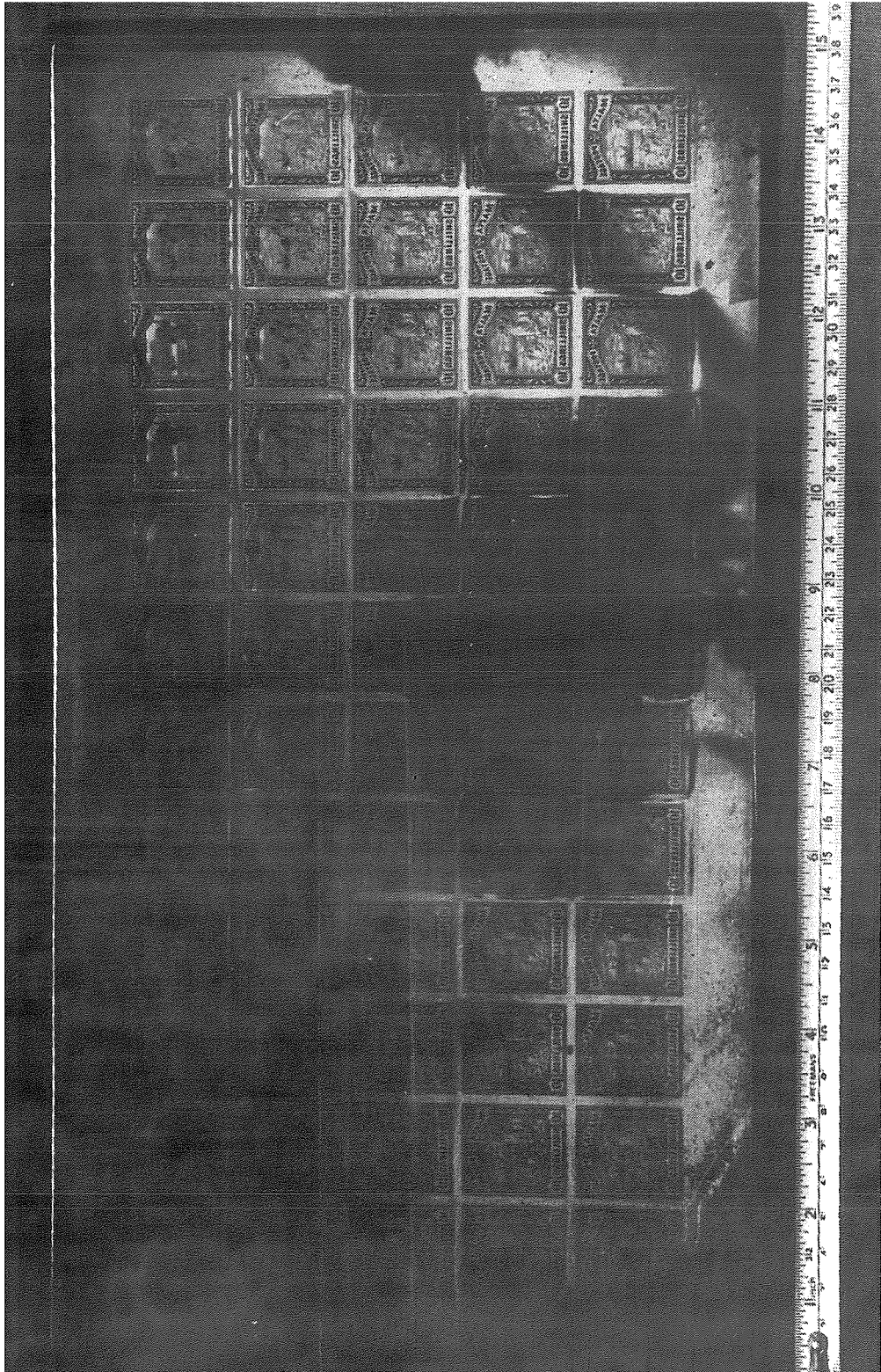
The Malta Study Circle Handbook at page 137 indicates that it is not known whether any markings appear other than a registration cross in the top margin. This plate, with crosses centered in each border, confirms an observation (earlier made by the author of this article from individual marginal copies of this issue) that there are registration marks in all four margins.

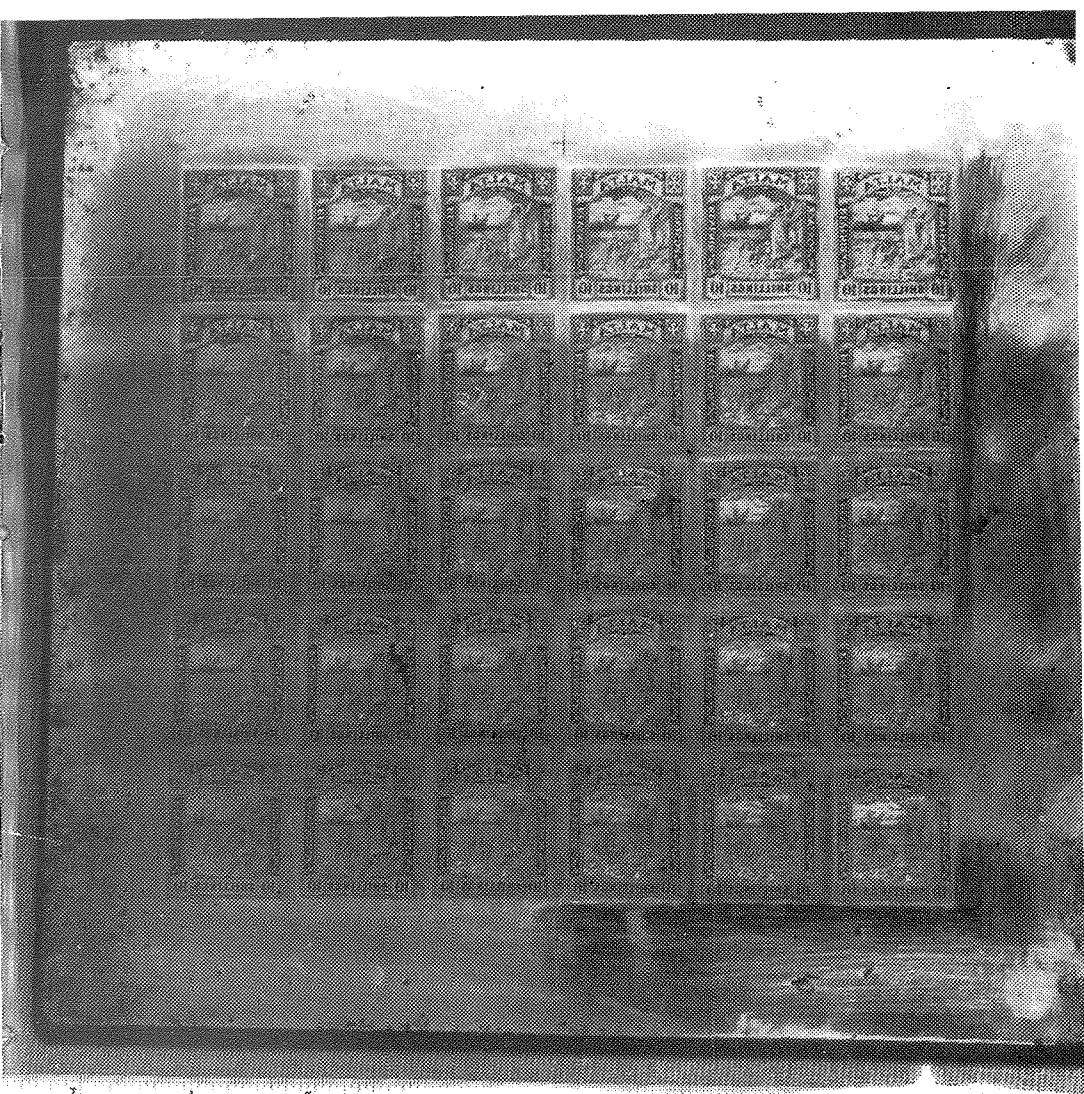
10/- "Postage & Revenue" (Photo No. 6) – The coverboard reads, "Malta/10/- Postage & Revenue/30 Set".

Thirty stamps are arranged in five rows of six on this plate. The plate is steel with a silver-grey nickel plating on the image surface.

The plate is 5mm thick and 232 × 232mms in height and width.

The Malta Study Circle Handbook at page 137 surmises it is possible that registration crosses exist in the bottom and right-hand margins in addition to those that were known to be centered at the top and left-hand margin. This plate confirms that this is a correct assumption. The only marginal markings are registration crosses centered with the bar parallel to the stamp at a distance of 6mm from the nearest image. The registration crosses are between the third and fourth stamps in the respective top and bottom rows and centered opposite the end stamps in the third row. A fine hairline continues the component of the registration cross that is perpendicular to the edge of the plate all the way out to the edge of the plate on each side.

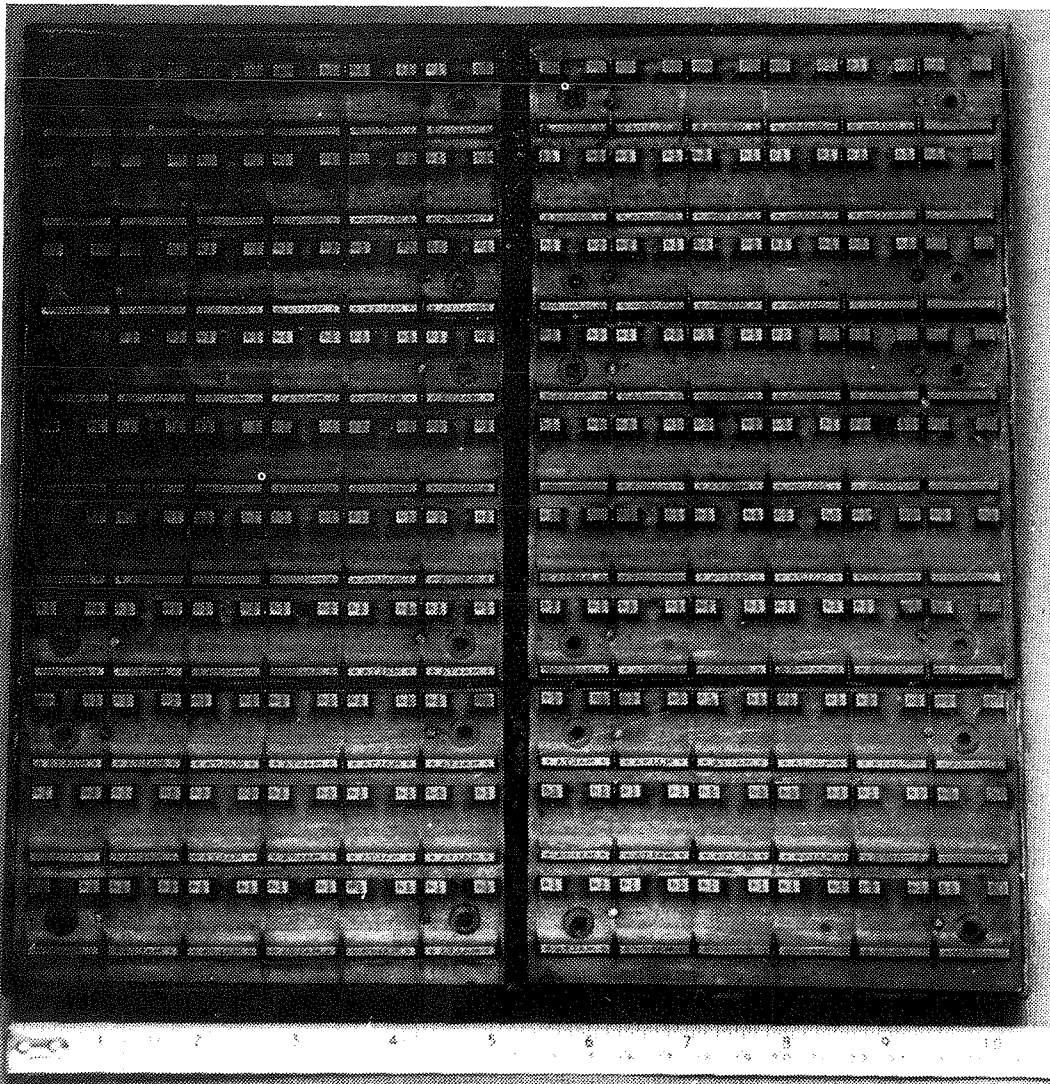




KING GEORGE DEFINITIVES 1914 – 1922

The plates for ¼d through 1/- values are duty plates with the country name and values only. The new 1921 2d is the complete stamp. The 2/- and 5/- are the frame with country name and value since the vignettes was used for many countries. These plates are of the relief (also termed typographic) method of printing in which the ink is carried on raised portions of the plate. Paper is pressed against the inked plate, transferring the image wherever the plate was raised and containing uncoloured areas elsewhere. The raised areas are of uniform height so that normally an even depth of ink is transferred. This is

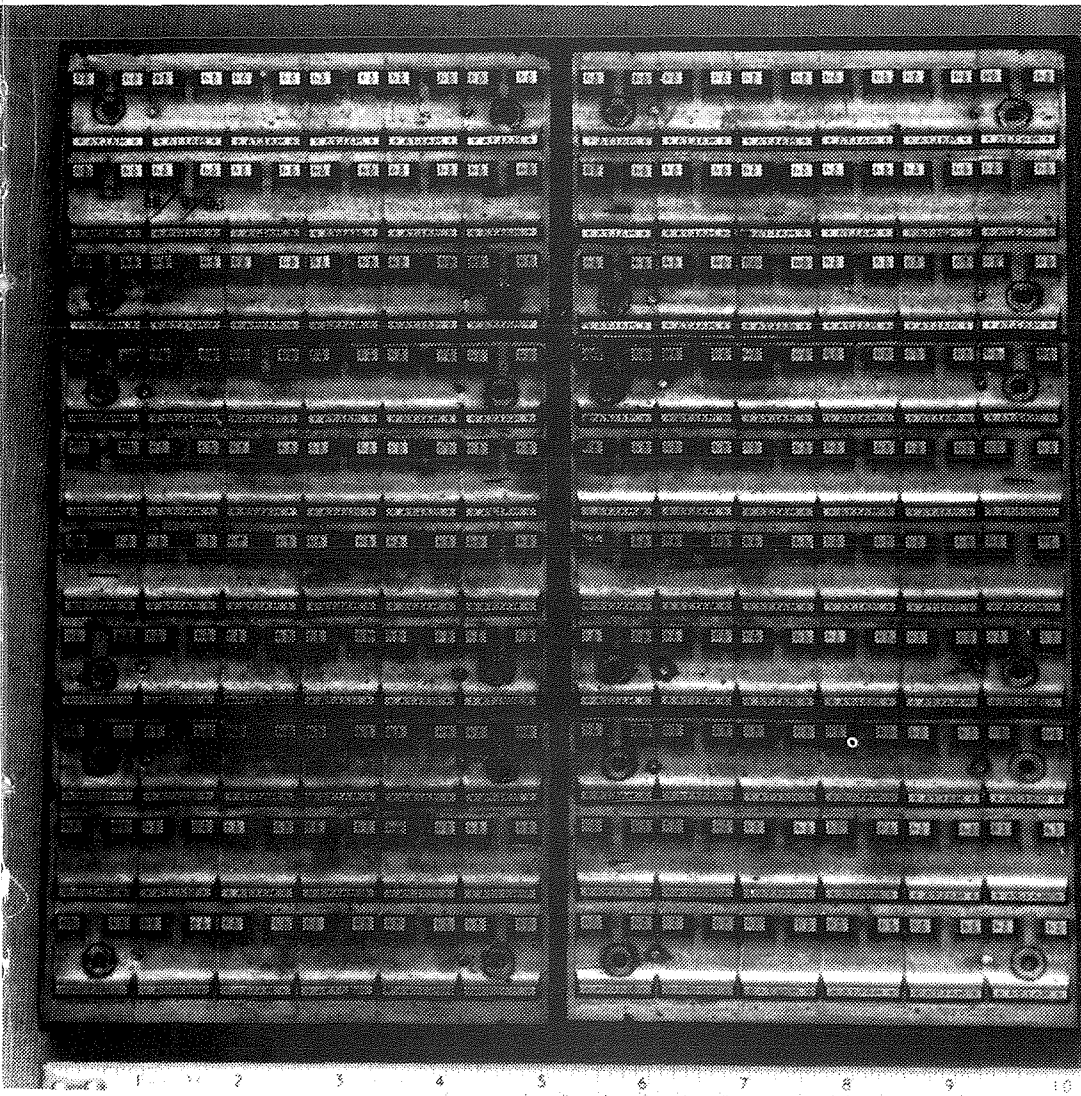
distinguished from the recess process of the previous issues, in which the depth of the plate grooves vary, enabling more intense colour to be deposited where desired by increasing the depth of the corresponding part of the engraved image.



7

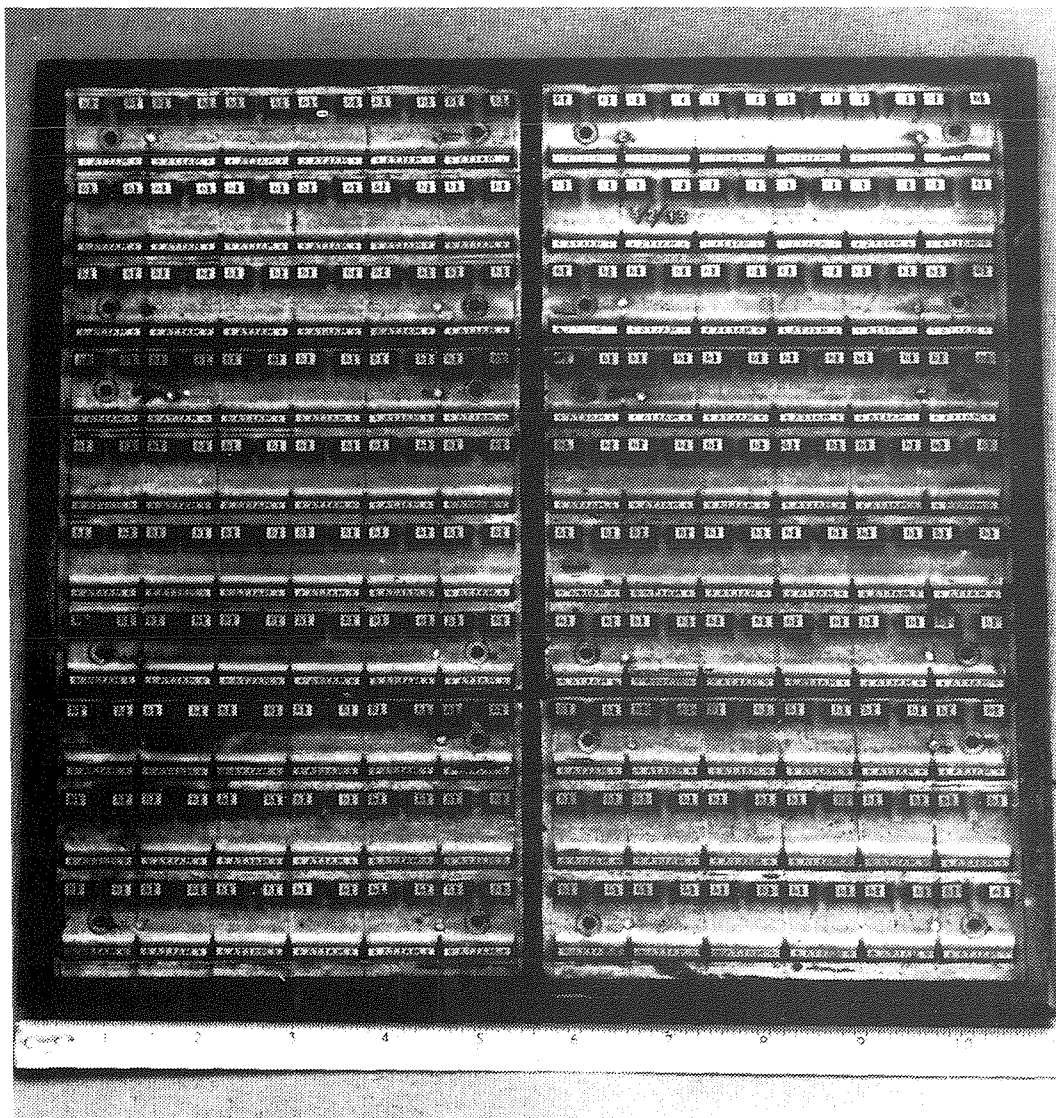
¼d (Photo No. 7) – This duty plate is molded relief plate of copper with a base approximately 2 to 3mm in thickness and with the type protruding an additional 2 to 3mm above this base. There are 120 images in two panes of 60 each. Each pane consists of 10 rows of 6 stamps. The panes are side-by-side. The plate is formed of six pieces of molded copper (containing variously 18 or 24 images) attached to an 18mm thick mahogany board. The plate is 257mm

wide overall and 252mm high. The mahogany border extends 2 to 3mm beyond the edges of the plate. The edge of the mahogany board contains the inscription: "Cyprus 4 Piastres". One of the pieces of type contains the date "22/2/13" in raised numerals from hand-punching of the mold. (This implies the six blocks of type came from separate molds.)



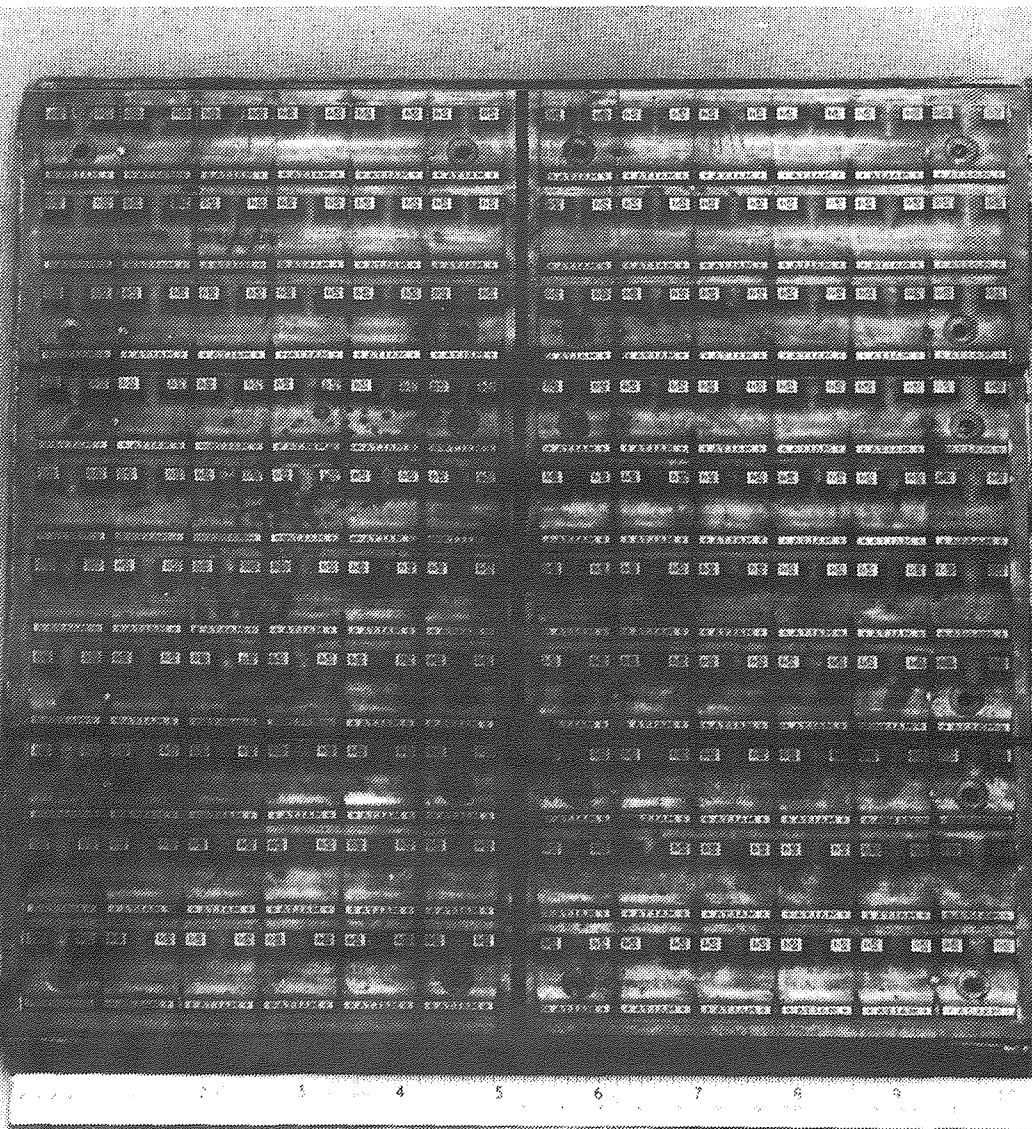
8

½d (Photo No. 8) – This plate is generally similar to the ¼d described above. It contains a date molded in positive relief in one of the segments of cast type; this reads: "12/1/13". The edge of the mahogany board contains the inscription: "3s Gambia".



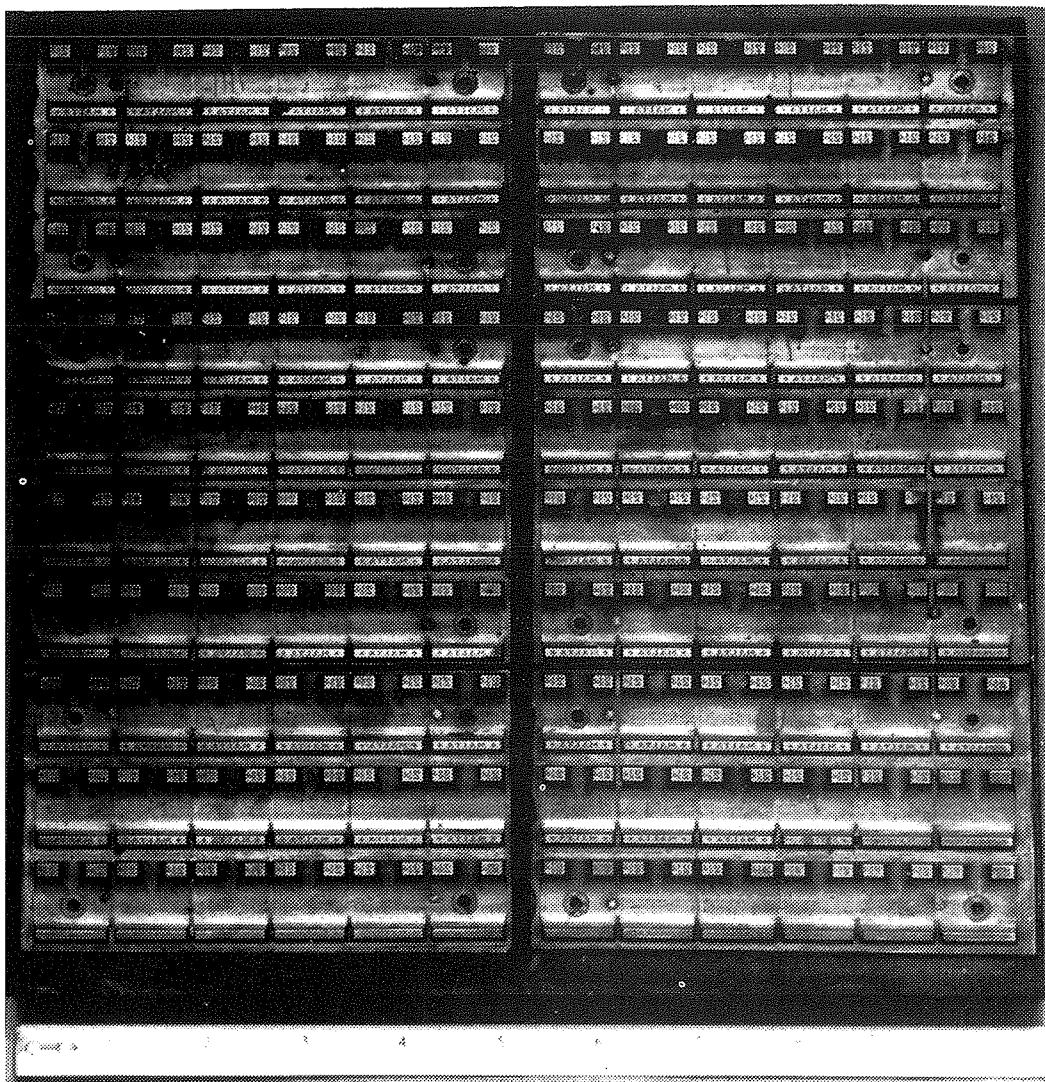
9

1d (Photo No. 9) – This is similar to the 1/2d, and contains the date “3/2/13” molded into one of its segments. The board contains the inscription: “Cayman Ilds 1/2d”.



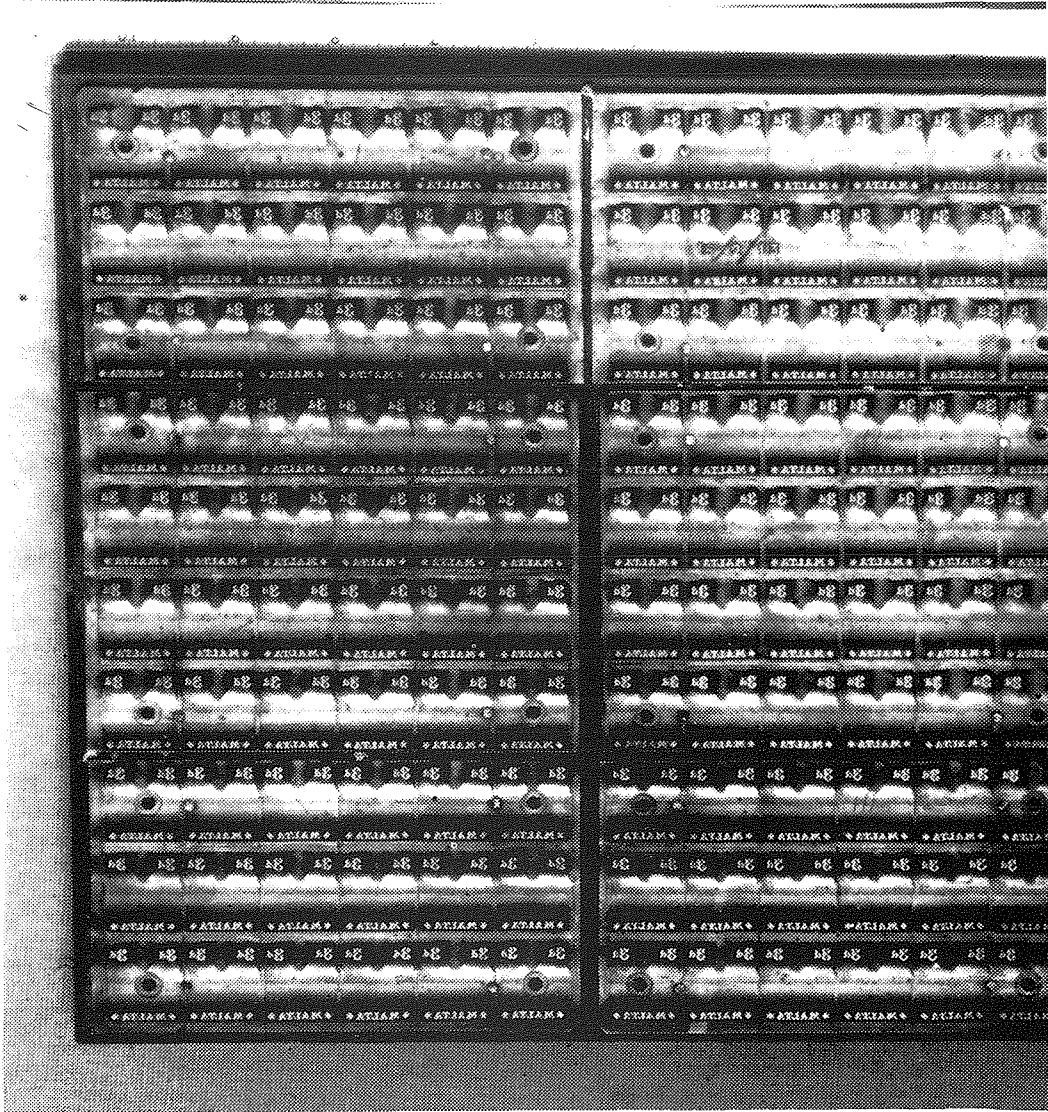
10

2d (Photo No. 10) – This plate is similar to the ½d & 1d. The date moulded in positive relief is “22/2/13”. The board on which it is mounted contains the inscription: “2d Cayman Islands”.



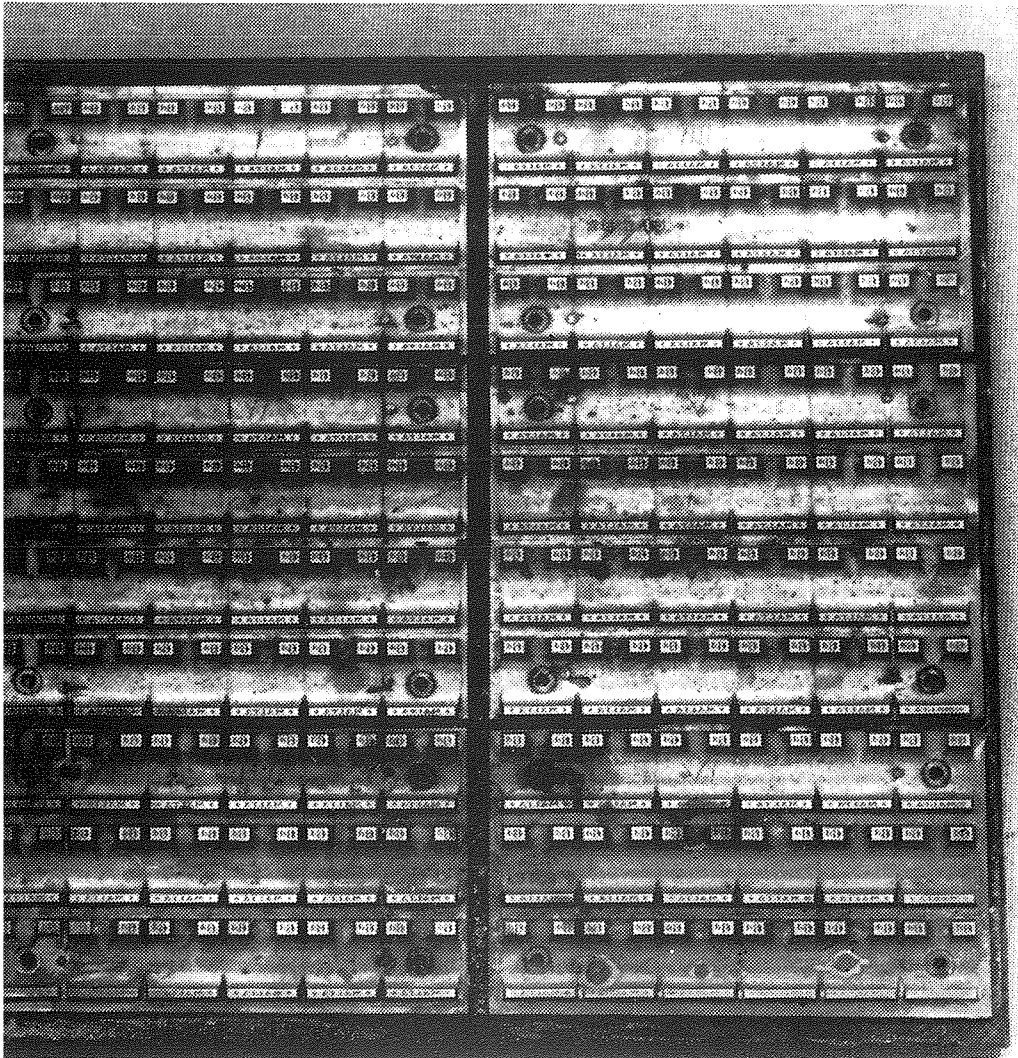
11

2-½d (Photo No. 11) – This plate contains the date: “4/2/13”. The mounting board reads: “2s Gambia”.



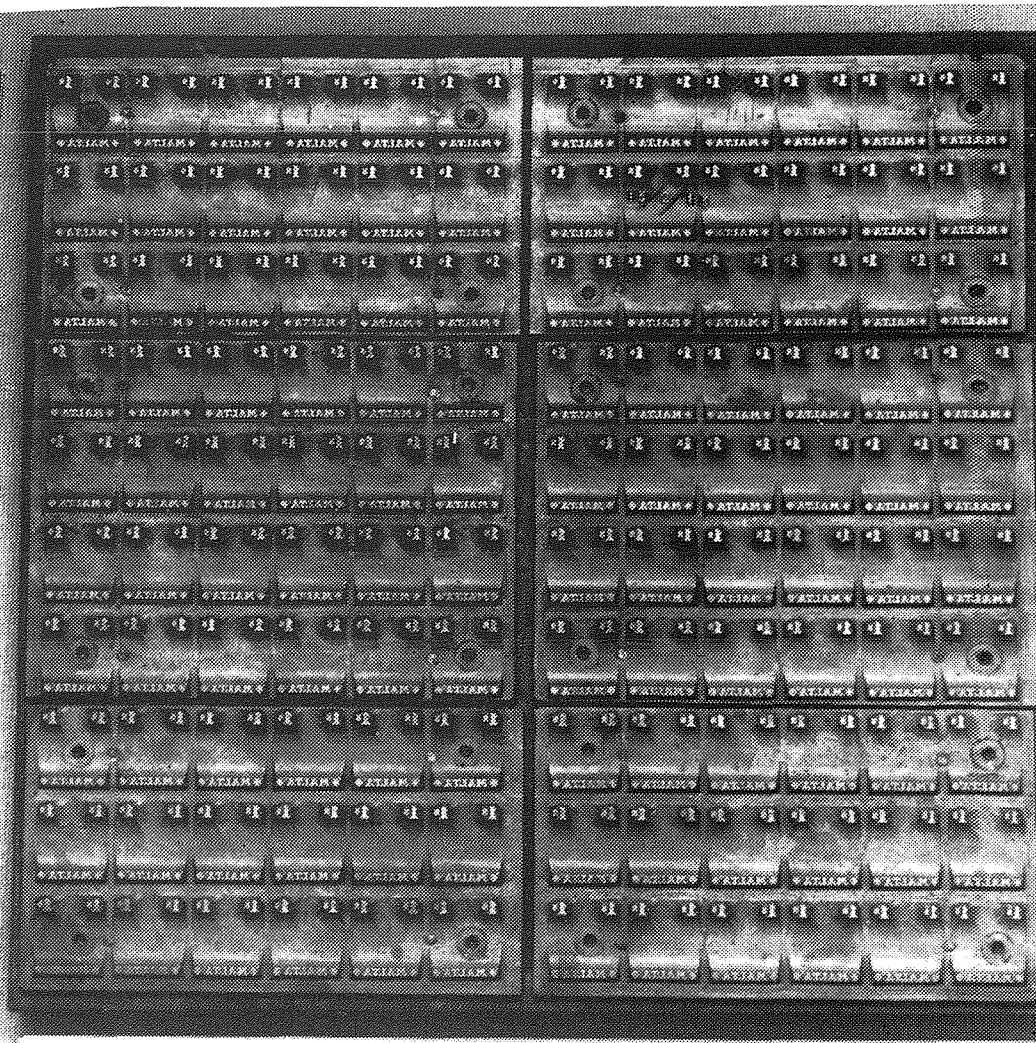
12

3d (Photo No. 12) – This plate contains the date: “18/2/13”. Its mounting board reads: “Cayman Ilds 60”.



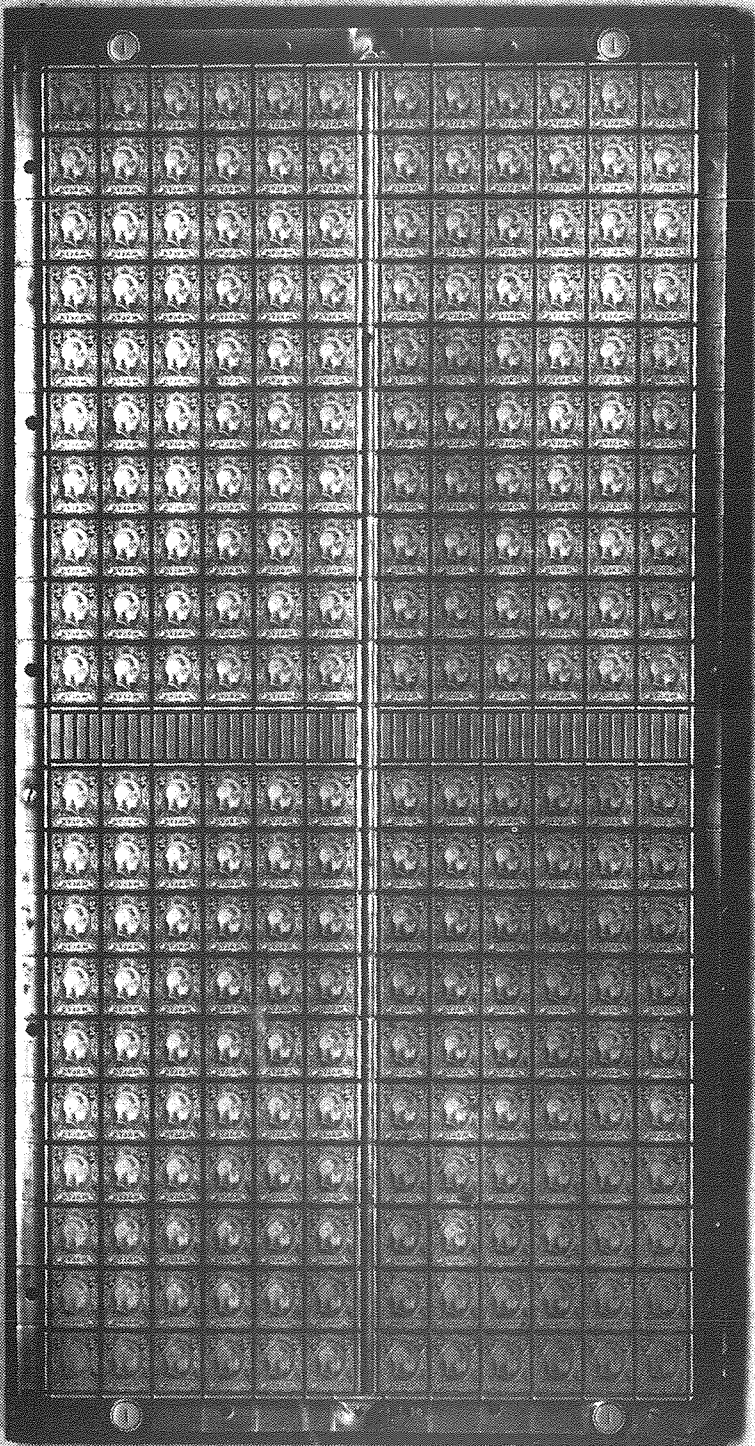
13

6d (Photo No. 13) – This plate contains the date: “28/2/13”. Its board reads: “4d Gambia”.



1/- (Photo No. 14) – This plate contains the date “13/2/13”. Its board reads: “1s 6d Gambia”.

It is noted that all these forms are made of pieces of molded type containing 18 stamps at the top and bottom of each pane, with 24 in the middle. It would be interesting to look for repeating varieties with this pattern.



2d (1921 new design – (Photo No. 15) – This relief plate contains 240 images in four panes of 60 each. Each pane has ten rows of six stamps. The vertical gutter is 10.5mm from stamp image to stamp image. The horizontal gutter is 25.5mm high from stamp image to stamp image. The plate number “1” appears centered above the second stamp in from the corner at each end of top and bottom margins.

There are pillars, which are four vertical stripes in each stamp size space in the horizontal gutter margin. The pillars serve to prevent paper sag in a large open area. Such sag can cause slurred image. A secondary benefit is the elimination of blank areas which might have been used improperly.

There is a Jubilee Line around each pane. (The name reflects the first appearance of this device during the 1887 year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee on a printing of the Great Britain 1d of 1881.)

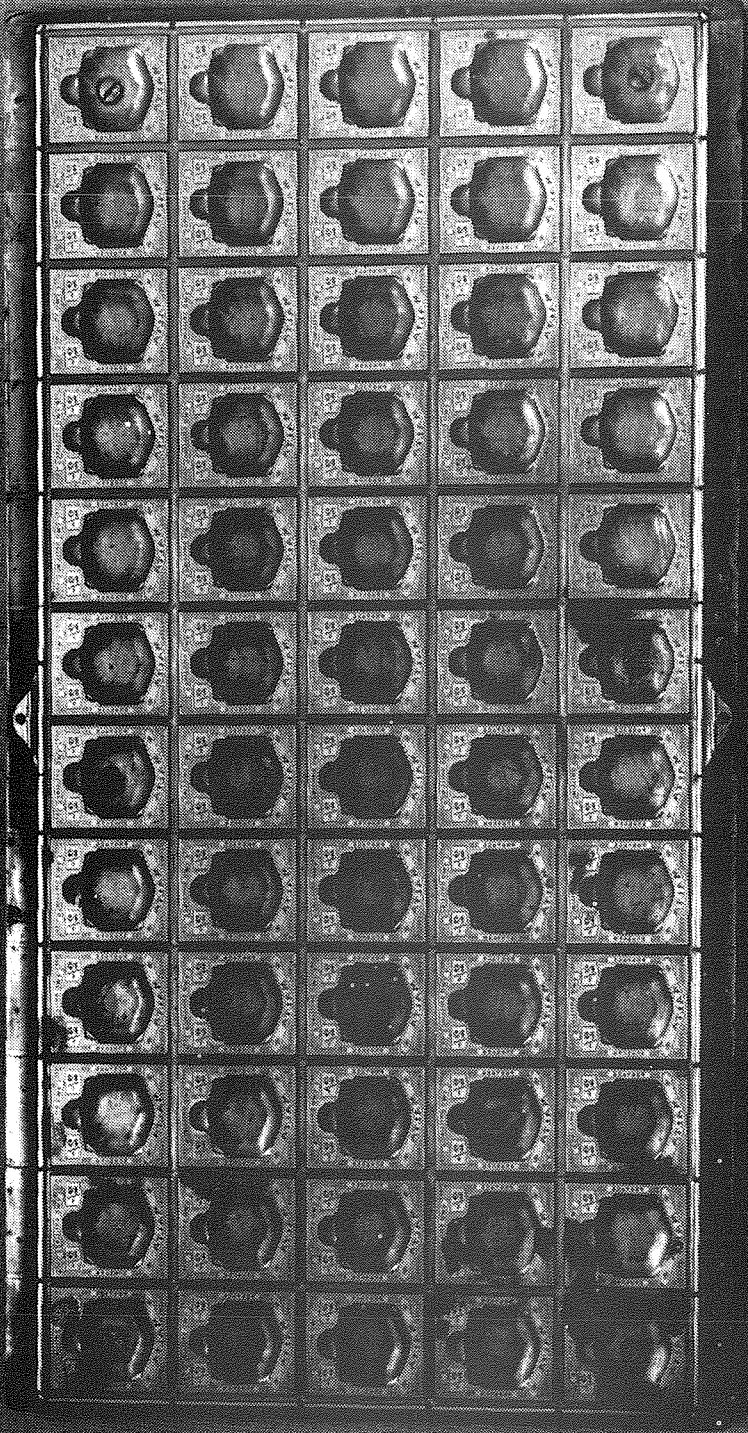
The Jubilee Lines are broken into lengths coextensive with the sides of adjoining stamps. These segments, which are of irregular and occasionally changing lengths on issues of some countries, are sometimes described as pieces of type variously inserted into a printing form. This is not the case with these Malta plates. Rather, the line is a continuous ridge cast completely around each pane. The breaks have been created one-by-one through the handsawing of gaps in the cast line.

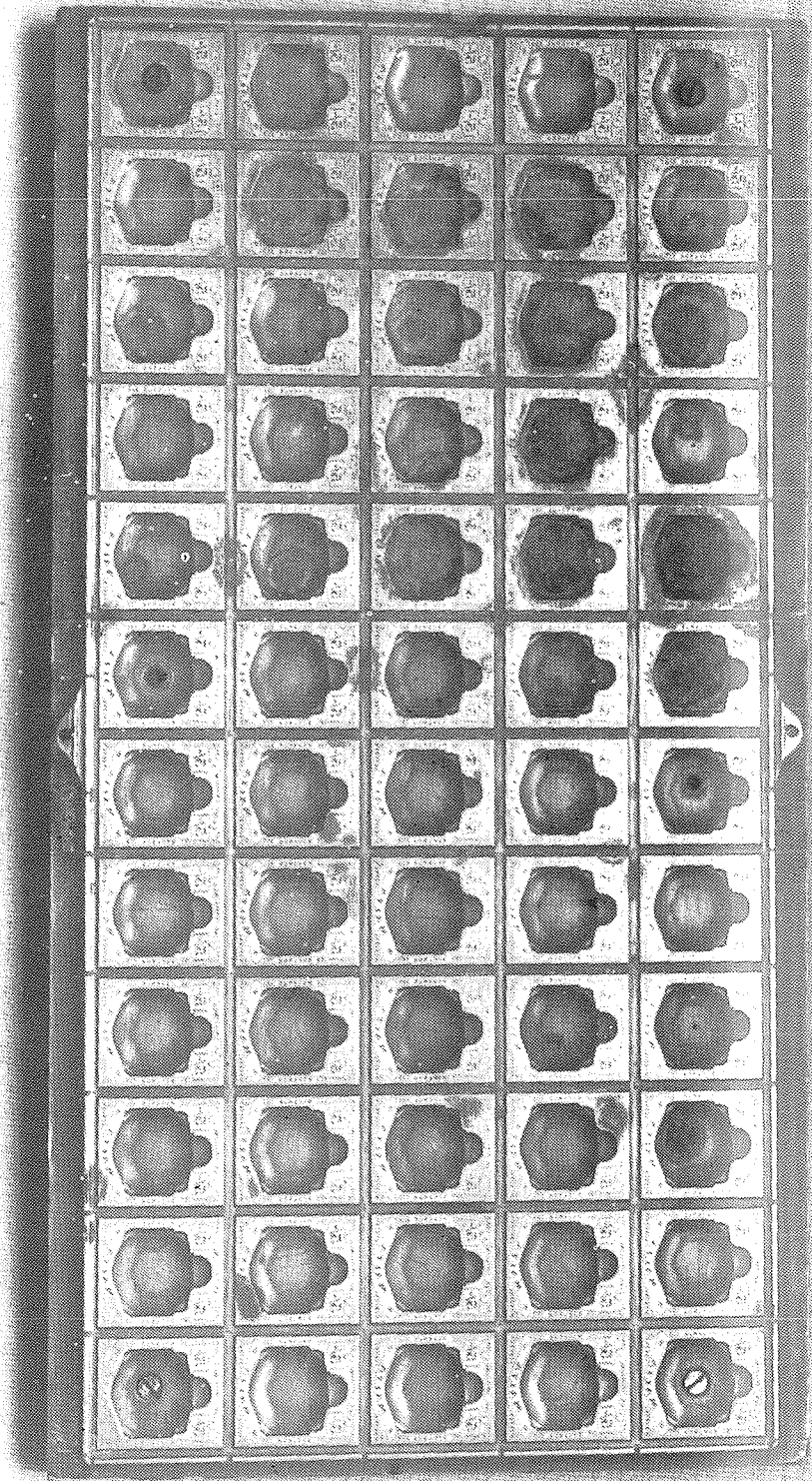
The primary purpose served by the lines was an improvement in the quality of the printed image. Slur, caused by movement between paper and the plate, was reduced at the edges of the pane. An additional benefit was the reduction of plate wear at the edge of the pane where the inking roller first rode up onto the image. The Jubilee Lines absorbed this impact. To some degree the lines filled blank paper otherwise available to forgers.

The breaks in the lines allowed trapped air to escape. Otherwise, cockling and fluttering of the paper caused image slurring.

The thin plate is a copper casing with a thin flange around it. The thickness of the portion containing the type is 4 to 5mm. At the edges the flange is reduced to 1 to 2mm in thickness. From the outer edge of the Jubilee Line at each side the flange is 11mm wide. At top and bottom it extends 14mm from the Jubilee Line. The plate is mounted on a mahogany board 18mm thick and 4mm wider than the plate at the sides, and 7 and 5mm wider than the plate at top and bottom respectively. There are holes in the flange at approximately 50 to 100mm random intervals with screws near each corner and near the centers of each side holding the copper plate onto the mahogany. There is a date cast as part of the flange (from numbers hand-punched into the mold) which reads “23/11/20”. It can be seen that this is struck over an earlier date which had been punched in the mold; the earlier date read “23/2/20”.

The Malta Study Circle Handbook at page 167 indicates that there is a horizontal line with a dot beneath it in the bottom margin below the vertical gutter margin. It goes on to indicate that the dot is punctured by a small hole. There is a horizontal line below the Jubilee Line which would be to the right of the vertical gutter in the printed image. The dot below it consists of a molded shape which has a hole drilled all the way through it the full thickness of the plate. There is a similar configuration at the top of the plate over the other Jubilee Line bordering the vertical gutter margin.





2/- (Photo No. 16) – This plate contains 60 images in five horizontal rows of 12. The border plate is available, but not the vignette portrait plate, which was common to several countries. The border plate contains the value and the word “Malta”.

The plate’s physical configuration and description is generally the same as that given above for the 2d value. The registration line with tiny central dot is cast so that it is centered between the sixth and seventh stamps in the top and bottom rows with the line 3mm from the Jubilee Line. The hole drilled below the registration line is in metal which is less high than that of the 2d and therefore might not leave an impression on the finished stamp. The flanges are less wide than on the 2d, having 3mm of width at the sides and 9mm at top and bottom. Therefore, the plate is affixed to its 18mm thick mahogany backing with screws through the hollowed vignette area in each corner stamp of the sheet. The mahogany conforms precisely to the size of the copper plate. The date cast in the flange at the bottom of the plate is “3/3/13”.

5/- (Photo No. 17) – This plate is identical in virtually all respects to the 2/- plate described above. The only difference is that the date cast into the flange reads “4/3/13”.