

The Delivery Charge Marks, 1816 – 1849

by Dr. Giovanni Bonello

Mail from overseas was, during the earlier period of British rule, either unmarked, or had carefully written manuscript instructions indicating what charge was to be levied on delivery. Hand stamped charges were later introduced.

This article contributes new information about the Delivery Charge straight line markings. A. How many types? B. When did they originate and how long were they in use? C. How were they stamped? D. The unrecorded ones.

A. HOW MANY TYPES?

This was illustrated in my article in “A new type of Delivery Charge Marks” in the December 1985 issue of the PSM Magazine, page 10. The Malta Study Circle Handbook lists two types of Delivery Charge Marks¹. I believe it may now be stated that there are *three* types:

(1) *Maltese currency*: The earliest charge marks were in the traditional Maltese currency – *Tari* and *grani*. These were used up to late 1825, (latest recorded: Oct. 30, 1825) and were indicated by a capital “T” followed by the sum due.

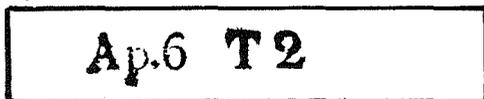
(2) *Intermediate type*: When the charges were converted to sterling currency, the amount due was indicated in pence – but instead of the standard sterling notation, the postal authorities first used a capital “P” for pence. This was only in use for a short transitional period, early in 1826²

3. *Sterling currency*: From 1826 to the end of use, the charge marks were indicated in sterling notation – “d” for pence, and, where applicable, “s” for shillings.

B. When did they originate and how long were they in use?

First day of use

Figure 1:



I believe I can say with reasonable accuracy that the Delivery Charge Marks were first used on April 6, 1816. This pushes back by eight years the first date recorded in the M.S.C. Handbook.

I have examined the Correspondence-Books kept by a foreign merchant active in Malta in the second decade of the 19th century. No letter before the 6th April, 1816 bears any delivery charge handstamp, while most of the letters after that date are stamped with the Delivery Charge Mark. This proves fairly conclusively that April 6, 1816 was the first day of use.

How long were they used?

From 1816, the Delivery Charges Marks had a long lease of life. The M.S.C. Handbook records the latest use as December 11, 1847.

I have seen later ones, including a 2d. handstamp dated January 2, 1849. Thirty three years of interrupted use!

C. How were the handstamps put together?

Every marking shows the date (the month, usually abbreviated) and the day, followed by the charge to be exacted.

It is obvious that the whole was assembled from single moveable type slugs, assembled and held together in some sort of holder.

From an examination of the imprints (all those in Maltese currency, all those of the intermediate type, and the sterling currency ones *up to 1831* (I am virtually certain that the type font is identical to that used in the Grand Masters' old printing press.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the Postal Authorities "borrowed" some of the moveable lead type from the Government Printing Press, and used it to produce the makeshift handstamps which could be altered according to need.

After 1831, the uniform, fairly large type Font was discarded, and various other faces, of different sizes, were employed. I cannot say whether the type used in those later handstamps also originated from the Government Printing Press. This possibility needs further investigation.

The stamp was applied with considerable pressure, as in several cases the imprint embosses two or more sheets under the surface sheet. This would seem to indicate that something more than mere manual pressure was applied – was the stamp pressed with a levered device?

D. The unrecorded marks

The M.S.C. Handbook (1980) records the following denominations: T.2; T.2.10; T.4; T.4.10; T.9.

The first Supplement, published in 1985, added T.3; T.5.10; and T.6.

I am pleased to add nine unrecorded values – eight in maltese currency and one in sterling.

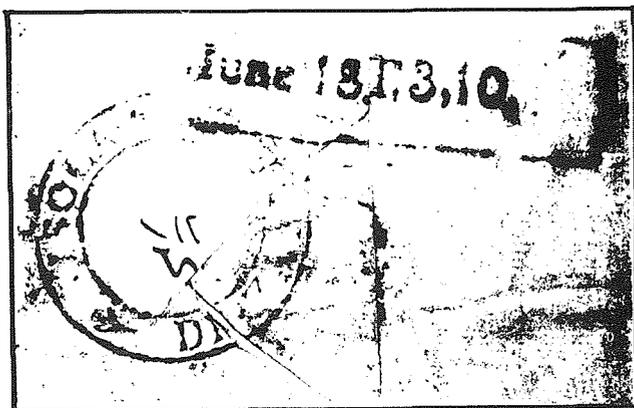
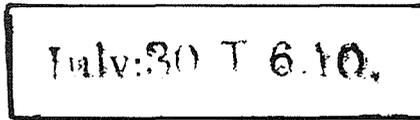


Figure 2a

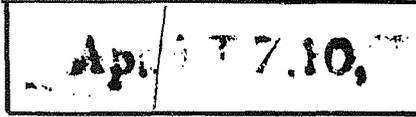
T.3.10: A letter in Greek from Zante to Malta, handstamped June, 18 (1822). The Delivery Charge Mark in this, and all the others, is in black; the letter also has a circular "Isola di Zante" handstamp in red and an embossed disinfection wafer with a fouled anchor (Figure 2a).

Figure 2b



T.6.10. A letter in English, dated June 22, 1824, from Alexandria and handstamped on July 30 (1824). The traces of an oval embossed disinfection wafer are visible (Figure 2b).

Figure 2c



T.7.10. A letter in Italian, dated February 22, 1825, addressed to Sig. Michele Agius, Valletta, Strada Saluto. It is handstamped April 6, (1825) and bears a faint impression of an oval disinfection wafer (Figure 2c).

Figure 2d



T.8. A letter in Greek, handstamped November 20 (1816). On the front is a large circular stamp "Isole Ionie(?)" (Figure 2d).

Figure 2e



T.8.10. A letter in Italian from Alexandria dated November 6, 1819, and handstamped December 3, 1819. Besides the owner's seal is the oval disinfection embossed wafer (Figure 2e).

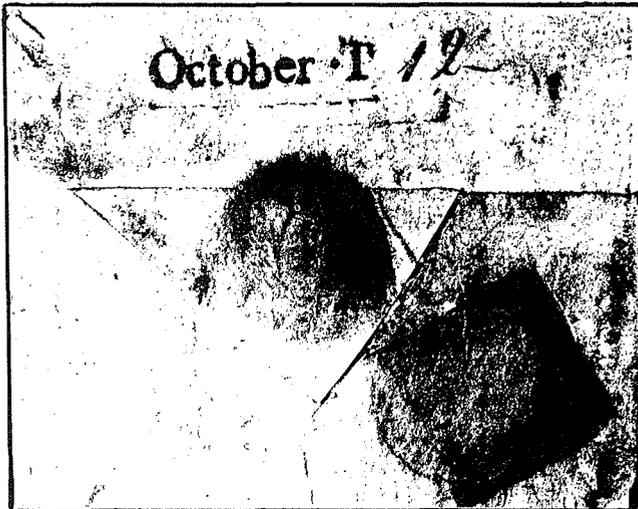


Figure 3a

T.12. An 1816 letter in Greek postmarked October (without day). The month and the "T" are handstamped and the "12" is added in manuscript. The letter has a circular handstamp "Isole Ionie" on the front, the sender's seal and the oval disinfection wafer seal on the back (Figure 3a).

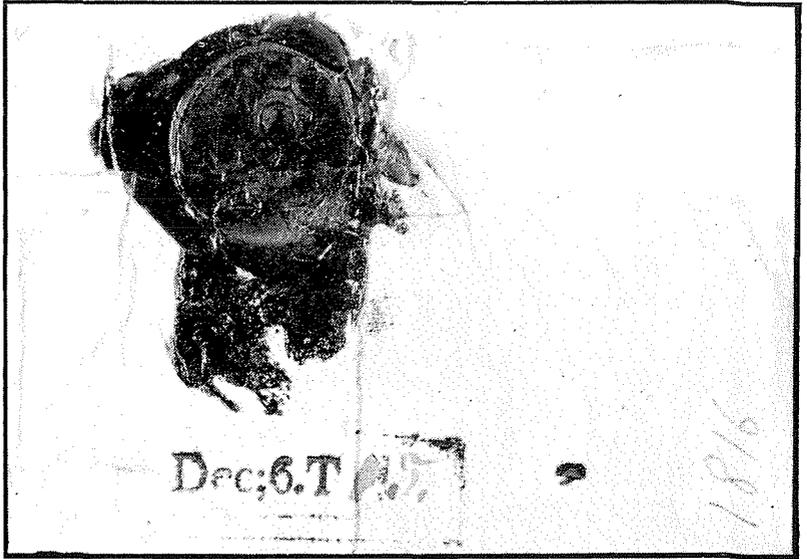


Figure 3b

T.15. A letter in Greek, originally with bulky enclosures, postmarked December 6 (1816). The date and the “T” are handstamped, and the “15” is added in manuscript. The letter has a perfect oval red wax seal “La Sanita di Malta” with a fouled anchor (Figure 3b).



Figure 3c

T.17. A bulky letter in Greek, once containing enclosures, postmarked May 2, (1816). The month and the “T” are handstamped, and the 17 is manuscript. There is a brownish circular handstamp on the Front: “Isole Ionie”; the sender’s personal seal and the oval disinfection wafer seal are on the back (Figure 3c).

It would seem from the above that the Maltese-currency handstamps now recorded are the following:

A. Date and charge fully stamped:

T.2	T.5.10
T.2.10	T.6
T.3	T.6.10
T.3.10	T.7.10
T.4	T.8
T.4.10	T.8.10
	T.9

Not recorded T.5; T.7; t.9.10.

B. Date and T stamped, change in manuscript:

T.12
T.15
T.17.

NOTIFICAZIONE.

La Tariffa de' dritti di Posta ora in forza per l'Ufficio della Posta di Malta, cesserà di aver vigore li 25 corrente, dalla quale data si agirà dietro la riformata Tariffa, pubblicata qui appresso.

Tariffa dei dritti di Posta esigibili dal Governo sopra tutte le lettere ricevute nell' Ufficio della Posta di Malta, o jda questa inviate per l'estero.

<i>Sulle Lettere inviate all'estero o qui ricevute.</i>	S	T	<i>Sulle Lettere Profumate nell' Ufficio di Quarantina.</i>	S.	T.	G.
Ogni lettera singola . . .	0	2	Ogni lettera singola . . .	0	2	10
Ogni altra Lettera sotto il peso di un' Oncia . . .	0	3	Ogni altra lettera sotto il peso di un' oncia . . .	0	4	10
Un'oncia e meno di due onc.	0	6	Un'oncia e meno di due onc.	0	9	0
Due oncie	1	0	Due oncie	1	6	0
Al di sopra di due oncie, sei tari per oncia, o per qua- lunque parte di essa . . .			Al di sopra di due oncie, tari otto per oncia, o per qua- lunque parte di essa . . .			
a' di 20 Maggio 1819.						

Figure 4: Government Notice of May 20, 1819, showing the extra 10 grani levied for disinfection.

Why the additional 10 grani levy?

A perusal of the Government notice of the 20th May, 1819 shows that the fractional 10 grani were levied “sulle lettere profumate nell’Ufficio di Quarantina” (Figure 4).

This does not, however, seem to be the invariable rule. A few letters – admittedly before 1819 – were definitely disinfected, but do not have the additional 10 grani disinfection tax. This is evident on the higher postage rates. While all the letters taxed with the additional 10 grani are disinfected, not all disinfected mail carries the additional 10 grani levy.

A New Sterling Currency handstamp



Figure 5: The unrecorded charge mark in sterling currency: 2s. 6d.

The M.S.C. Handbook indicates that the highest recorded sterling Delivery Charge Mark was the one shilling and three pence (1s.3d).

I am reproducing part of a strange parcel wrapper showing a handstamp “27 May (blank) S (blank) D.

The figures in front of the S and D were added in manuscript: 2S. 6D. The whole was then crossed out and “Free” written on top in manuscript! There is a brown sender’s seal and a damaged red wax disinfection seal. (Figure 5).

Postal rates

Government Notices indicating postage rates and changes thereof are published in Chapter 6 of the M.S.C. Handbook³.

The Government Notice dated December 24, 1839, altering some changes, seems to have escaped notice (Figure 6).

NOTIFICAZIONE.

Sua Eccellenza il Governatore si compiace di ordinare, che dal di 1. Gennaro 1840, i dritti di Posta da essere esatti per conto del Governo di Malta su tutte le lettere che si consegnano dall' Ufficio della Posta dell' Isola, saranno regolati uniformemente alla seguente scala :

Su lettere non eccedenti $\frac{1}{2}$ oncia	1. Denaro
superiori a $\frac{1}{2}$ oncia, e non eccedenti	1. oncia	2.	—		
1. „ „ „ „	2. „	4.	—		
2. once „ „ „	3 once	6.	—		
3. „ „ „ „	4. „	8.	—		

e così progredendo proporzionalmente.

a' di 24 Dicembre 1839.

Figure 6: An unpublished postal tariff dated December 24, 1839.

“Free”

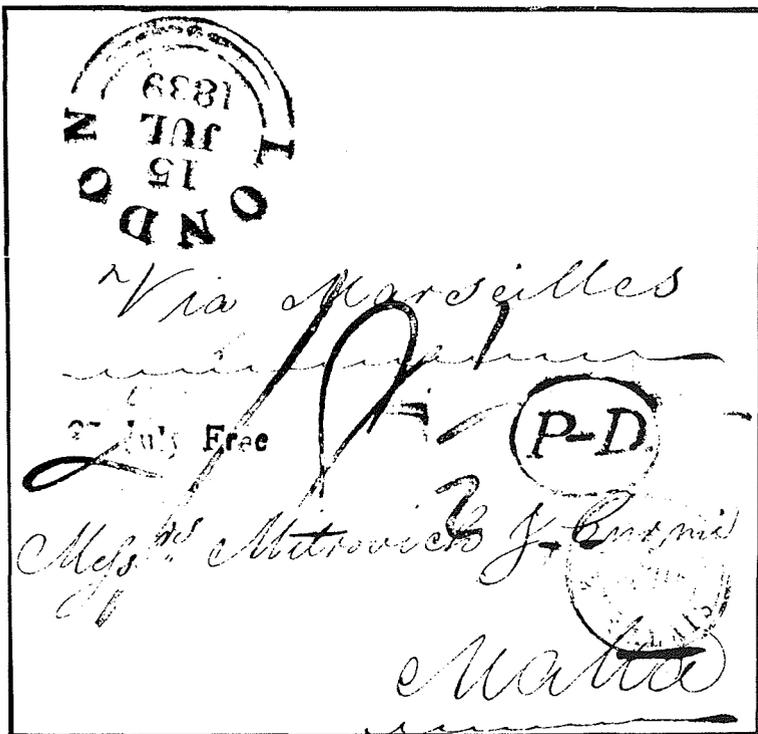


Figure 7

The “Free” straight-line handstamp is well known. As a historical curio, I am publishing a letter handstamped “Free” written by Giorgio Mitrovich (1794 – 1885) the father of the Maltese patriotic movement, commemorated and portrayed in the 8c stamp issued in Malta last year. He is writing to his firm “Mitrovich & Curmi” from his London address: No. 1, Crescent Place, Regent’s park, on July 15, 1839 (Figure 7).

“French Postage”

The M.S.C. Handbook states that “some letters from France in 1837 and 1838 have added beneath the straight line marking a further sum in manuscript followed by “French Postage” and the two amounts totalled in manuscript.”⁴

I am reproducing one such letter postmarked 8 June (1837) and charged “4d” and “2 Francs, French postage” (Figure 8).

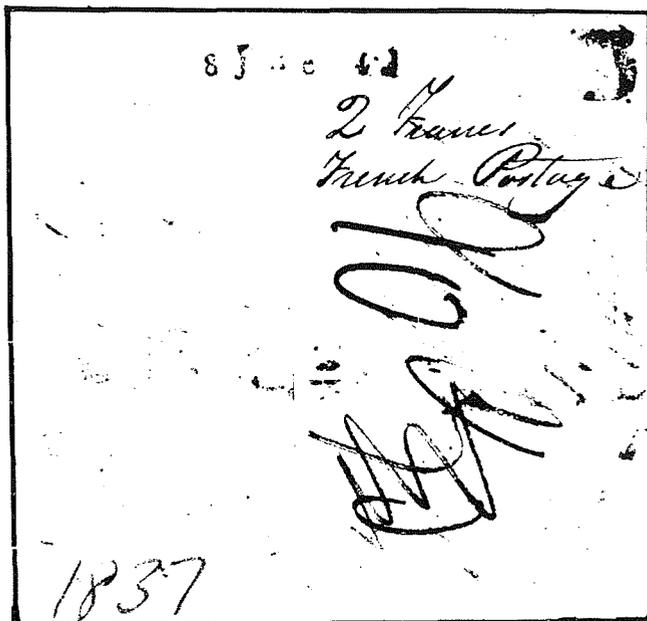


Figure 8: A sample of a straight line delivery charge mark to which is added the extra “French postage” charge.

Notes:

¹ page 56.

² published in the December 1985 issue of this magazine, page 10.

³ page 71 et seq.

⁴ page 56.

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