

THE MYSTERIOUS HANDSTAMP OF THE VAG-5f TYPE

by

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BACKGROUND

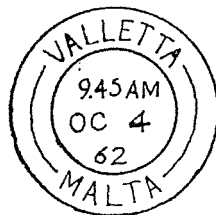
In 1952 a new type of metal handstamps were introduced by the Malta Post Office, used in conjunction with the "TRADE FAIR — MALTA" cancellors used between October 2-5, at the Sub Post Office located in the grounds of San Anton Palace. These steel handstamps, of diameter 27mm, with arcs as spacers, are of the type commonly used in the British Possessions. The handstamps contain time, day, month and year slugs, with "VALLETTA" and "MALTA" arched in between the double rings, code-named by the Malta Study Circle as the "VAG — 5" series.

USE AT VALLETTA G.P.O.

The VAG-5 series of handstamps first appeared for normal use in 1957. Ten such handstamps were recorded in use in the late 1950's, nine of which were introduced during 1957. On the 1st December 1957, a further twelve handstamps were put into use. 6 on counter duties, 4 at the Sorting Room and 2 at the Philatelic Bureau. A further two each were employed at the Parcel Office and at the Valletta B.P.O. respectively. One of these handstamps, reference VAG-5f is rather elusive and we have nicknamed it "The Mysterious Handstamp".

THE HANDSTAMP VAG-5f

An examination of 342 covers and 242 used stamps, all showing clear full strikes of the VAG-5 series of handstamps and covering the period 1957 to 1977 yielded no examples of this particular handstamp. We have investigated also the time codes on these handstamps and compared them with the recorded official closing of mails.



DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

- length of right 'arc' = 15mm;
 - length of left 'arc' = 14.5mm;
- (Note: both lengths are the longest of all the handstamps in the series).
- the distance between the left top vertex of "M" and the vertex of "A" of "MALTA" is the shortest in the whole series, at 9.75mm;
 - the distance between "L" and "T" OF "MALTA" is the shortest of the series at 2.5mm.

USE AT THE PHILATELIC BUREAU

The first day of use of this handstamp at the Philatelic Bureau is uncertain but the first recorded official use is 3 April 1977 on covers carried on the first Air Malta flight Malta-Zurich. Although two new VAG-5 handstamps were introduced at the Philatelic Bureau on the 1st December 1977, with clearly distinguishing

features, namely code letters "A" and "B" respectively instead of the time code, the handstamp VAG-5f remained in use at the Philatelic Bureau up to mid-September 1978 when it was used to replace the handstamp of the type VAG-33 (characterised by Maltese Crosses as spacers) at the Delivery Branch in the Mail Room.

With the transfer of VAG-5f to the Mail Room, VAG-33a was transferred back to the Valletta Postmen Mustering Room using the "7.30 AM" time-code.

USE AT THE DELIVERY REGISTERED LETTER BRANCHES

The VAG-5f handstamps, which we have termed "mysterious" began its employment at the Government Repository from mid-September 1978 (near the Delivery entrance) and sometime between the 3 and 5 April 1979 it started to be used at the Registered Letter Branch at the G.P.O., Valletta, without the time-code.

It can easily be identified by the fact that during its use at the Philatelic Bureau, the Government Repository and finally at the Registered Letter Branch, it can be seen with the day slug preceding the month slug. When the VAG-5f was finally transferred to the Registered Branch it was replaced with another handstamp of the type -5 series inscribed "VALLETTA (R.G.) — MALTA", normally used with "12 — PM" or "4 — PM" time codes.

AWARDS TO MEMBERS AT INTERNATIONALS

We are pleased to announce the following awards to Society members at this year's two International Philatelic Exhibitions. "The P.S.M. Magazine" obtained two awards.

LONDON 1980

General Competition Class

- * Dr. A. Bonnici — Vermeil with Special Prize

Malta Queen Halfpenny Yellow

Postal History Class

- * Mr. Godwin Said — Vermeil
Specialized Collection of Malta Postal History

- * Mr. George A. Coates — Silver
Malta Disinfected Mail

Literature Class

- * E. Said — Bronze
Said Stamp & Coin Catalogue 1980
- * E. Said — Diploma
Said SMOM Stamp Album
- * E. Said — Diploma
Said Stamp Album
- * N.A. Cutajar (Editor) — Diploma
The P.S.M. Magazine.

NORWEX 80

General Competition Class

- * Dr. A. Bonnici — Vermeil with Special Prize
Malta Queen Victoria Halfpenny Yellow

Postal History Class

- * Mr. Godwin Said — Vermeil
Specialized Collection of Malta Postal History

Literature Class

- * E. Said — Silver
Said Malta Stamp & Coin Catalogue
- * Mr. N.A. Cutajar (Editor) — Bronze
The P.S.M. Magazine