

# NEWSLETTER

No 90\3\2023

G  
P S

[www.stamps-goza.org](http://www.stamps-goza.org)

*Merry Christmas*



*Open Your Hearts to Jesus*





**PHILATELIC SOCIETY  
OF CANBERRA**



Large Silver Medal awarded  
to the Gozo Philatelic  
Society Magazine

**GPS Magazine —Official Organ of  
The Gozo Philatelic Society**

*First issued on 12 February 2000*

**Editor: Austin Masini — Designer Anthony Grech**

Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the  
Committee's official policy.

Correspondence (and material for publication)  
should be addressed to:

*The Editor, GPS, PO Box 10,  
VCT 1000, Gozo, Malta.*

*e-mail address: [secretary@stamps-gozo.org](mailto:secretary@stamps-gozo.org)*

© All rights reserved. Requests for reproduction of contents  
should be addressed to the Secretary.

**Gozo Philatelic Society Patron His Excellency  
Dr George Vella President of the Republic of Malta**

**CONTENTS.**

G.P.S. Diary No 80	Antoine Vassallo	4
Rev Ugolino Gatt a little known WWII hero.	Anthony Grech	5
Gozo in the Press (The MALTA MAIL)	Anthony Grech	6
GPS Christmas Postcards	Lara Grech	8
Philatelic Centennials (Libyan parts)	Antoine Vassallo	9
In Memory of Pat Patrick	Jesmond Borg	11
E & O Not E	Antoine Vassallo	12
GPS 24th Exhibition Photos	Rachel Debattista	14
Gozo on Malta Stamps	Anthony Grech	15
ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS	Jesmond Borg	19
Why?	Antoine Vassallo	20
Malta Over Seas (Netherlands Stamps)	Antoine Vassallo	22
Is it really true.A stamp is over 7 inches wide	Antoine Vassallo	24
1813 THE EPIDEMIC	Anton Mifsud MD	26
A Special Annual Exhibition	Mary Grace Xerri	30





(80) *G.P.S. Diary*

Antoine Vassallo Gozo Philatelic Society Secretary

VO/0546 [secretary@stamps-gozo.org](mailto:secretary@stamps-gozo.org)



**12 July 2023** Anthony Grech resumes the weekly stamp sessions at the Oratory Summer School

**14 July** Another thematic article in the Festa publication by La Stella Philarmonic Society.

**24 July** Melita (Journal of the Malta Study Circle Philatelic Society) features our publication in issue Volume 25 No 2.

**4 August** News item in “The Voice of the Maltese” shows the Il-Haġar showcase.

**8 August** Anthony Grech produces a cover for the *It-Tokk* Sepac stamp.

**20 August** Australian website [thevoiceofthemaltese.org](http://thevoiceofthemaltese.org) again features one of our productions.

**31 August** Anthony Grech produces a cover for the Saint Lucy stamp, jointly with the Santa Luċija church. He also produces two others for the Saint Paul and *Marija Bambina* stamps.

**2 Sept.** Anthony Grech produces a cover for Xagħra coronation anniversary handstamp

**2 Sept.** GPS President Jesmond Borg features in MSC virtual meeting through a George V presentation

**21 Sept.** Committee decides about changed Exhibition, to be held at Il-Haġar due to unavailability of Ministry Halls.

**25 Sept.** Newsletter #89 features the impressive number of seven different authors.

**27 September** Il-Haġar showcase changed to the Opera theme in the Gozo Ministry initiative.

**October-December** issue of the *L-Anzjani Llum* periodical from the National Elderly Council continues our series of Stamp Errors.

**9 October** Another successful visit by A.Grech, MG Xerri & A.Agius to Żebbuġ Primary.

**10 and 16 October** Encouraging visits to Seminary Secondary.

**12 October** Committee members participate in a MaltaPost Museum event.

**28 October** Committee finalized preparations for the November Exhibition.

**28 October** A ceramic plaque with the GPS logo donated by Samuel Parnis was displayed in the office.

**9 November** Setting up of the Exhibition in the new setting of Il-Haġar (p.14 & 30)

**11 November** Anthony Grech prepares covers and relative personalized stamps for the Exhibition.

**12 November** GPS Chaplain Fr Joseph Attard blesses the exhibition.

**15 November** GPS Chaplain Fr Joseph Attard celebrates Mass at St George’s for the needs of GPS members and supporters, living or dead.

**16 Nov.** Groups of Seminary students brought for a tour around the exhibition

**18 Nov.** Anthony Grech interviewed for a newspaper writeup about the Exhibition.

**24 November** Anthony Grech continues the tradition of posting a Christmas Card with special postmark of *Il-Milied f'Għawdex*, free to all members.

**26 November** Exhibition dismantled .

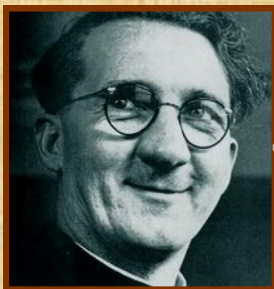


# REV UGOLINO GATT O.S.A.

A WWII little known Maltese hero.

Anthony Grech

I love visiting the car boot sales organised by the NGO Friends of the Sick and the Elderly in Gozo. During one such visit I found a particular entire letter. What really interested me at that moment was the old Vatican stamps and the place where it was sent from Segreteria di Stato Di Sua Santita. At that time I did not know who was the addressee, Rev P. Ugolino M. Gat(t). After some research I found out that he was a Maltese Augustine Friar who during WW II lived and worked in Rome, but that was not all. In fact he was one of many other Maltese clergymen, Nuns and a Maltese Widow Chetta Chevalier who worked in secret with the Irish Mgr.Hugh O'Flaherty known as the Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican. Mgr O'Flaherty together with his team helped thousands of Allied servicemen and Jews by concealing them or to escape the claws of the Nazi.



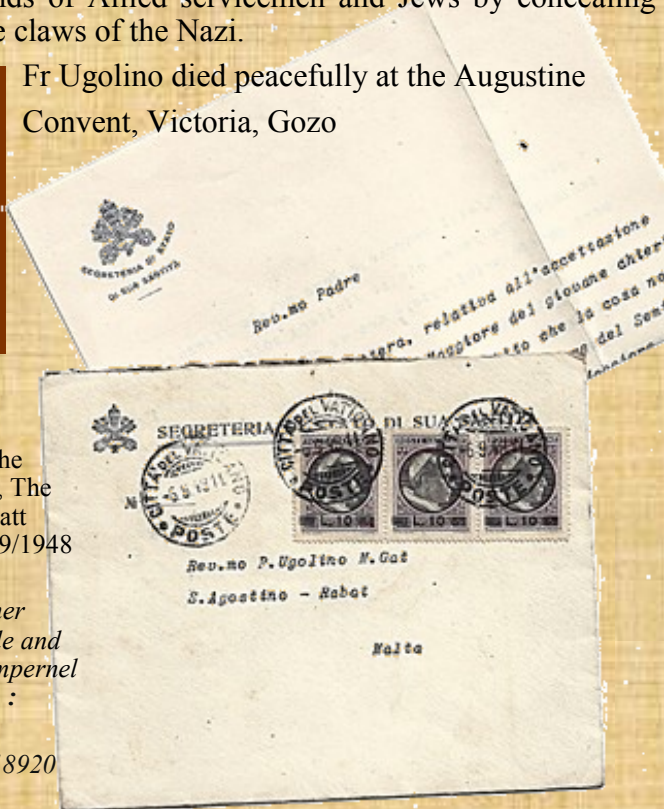
Mgr.Hugh O'Flaherty

Fr Ugolino died peacefully at the Augustine Convent, Victoria, Gozo

Entire Letter sent from the Segreteria Di Sua Santita, The Vatican to Fr Ugolino Gatt OSA, Rabat Malta on 6/9/1948 arriving on 13/9/1948.

• Would suggest further reading Wikipedia article and the book *The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican* ISBN-10 : 000621892X

ISBN-13 : 978-0006218920





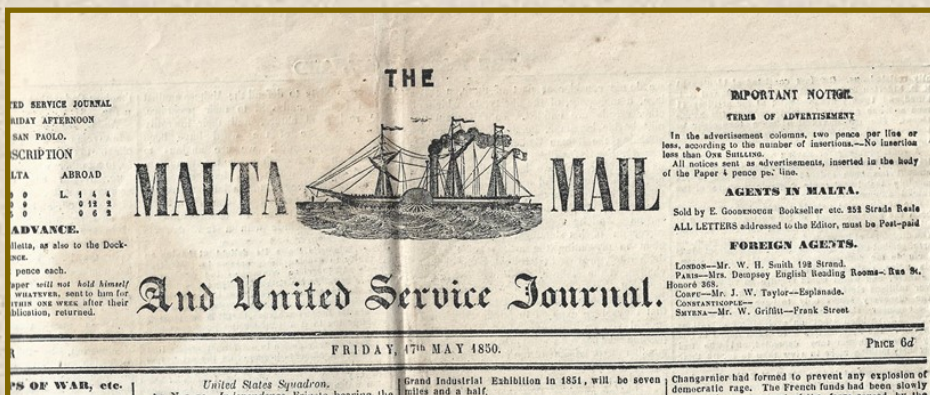
# Gozo in the Press.

## SOCIAL HISTORY

Anthony Grech



Periodicals have already been treated in past issues of our Newsletter. However, hoping to help out collectors who focus on philatelic and social history, the editorial board decided to offer examples regularly. We begin this series with the **MALTA MAIL AND UNITED SERVICES JOURNAL**.



This was first published in Malta in 1842 from 301 Strada San Paolo - Valletta. Agents in Malta were E Goodenough of Strada Reale (presently Republic Street) - Valletta, together with foreign agents in London, Paris, Corfù, and Constantinople. It was published every Friday afternoon, its reports including information about arrivals and departures of war ships and **Mail steamships**. Besides details about British services, one could also find British and international news and details about the Malta Council of Government sittings.

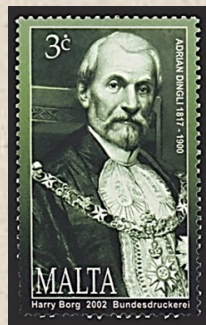
For example, the 17 May 1850 issue contained an interesting report regarding Gozo from the 1 May Council sitting. The Chief Secretary brought





forward a resolution that the sum of £901 be transferred from the fund appropriated for the enlargement of the *Santo Spirito* Hospital at Notabile: for the completion of the Poor House at Gozo. It had formerly been intended to erect additional walls and materially expand the building of the Hospital but it was no longer considered necessary that *Santo Spirito* be enlarged. This was due to the positive working of the system of dispensaries, combined with the amount of relief afforded by the Floriana central hospital and the House of Incurables.

After more discussions and explanations about how and from where the money was to be transferred for the Poor House of Gozo, the resolution was put to the vote and passed unanimously. Gozo representative Dr Adrian Dingli (the future Chief Justice and Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael & St George) remarked that many of his Gozitan friends had expressed to him their fears that the completion of the Poor House would be delayed for want of funds, the original estimate having been expended. In fact he was bent on carrying on the work immediately. Expressing thanks to the Government for the interest, he noted that the institution of a Poor House was likely to prove a great boon.





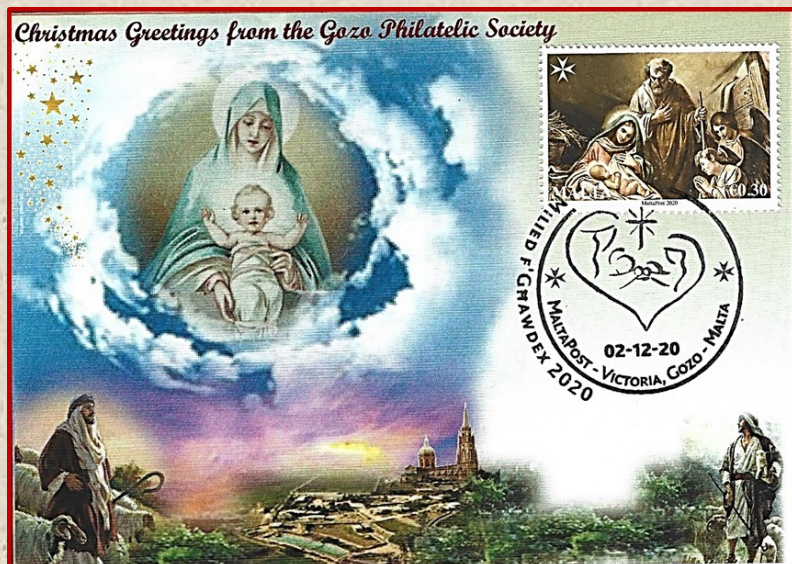
## GPS CHRISTMAS POST CARDS. *Lara Grech*

On the initiative of the Gozo Ministry, MaltaPost has been issuing a special postmark since 2014 for *Milied f'Ghawdex* (Christmas in Gozo). And obviously the Gozo Philatelic Society took this opportunity to produce an annual greeting card sent free to all members, usually franked with a stamp from MaltaPost's Christmas set or with an adequate recent religious stamp.

Postmark and card are quite popular with thematic philatelists since the scene depicted is always related to the true spirit of Christmas: the Birth of Jesus on a Gozitan backdrop! The design also carries a Christmas message.

A typical example was that for Christmas 2020 when our country and the world were going through a very difficult period due to Covid 19 and its restrictions. The cards showed an aerial view of the popular "Bethlehem in Ghajnsielem", the villagers creating a typical and realistic neighborhood just outside their normal houses. The Christmas festivities still occurred but the locale had to remain closed to the thousands of visitors who usually visited the site. Even the shepherds are keeping their distance, wondering why all remains empty!

All cards to date - and even the postmarks – are the work of our own Anthony Grech.





# PHILATELIC CENTENNIALS

*glances – and longer looks – at events from a hundred years ago*

*presented by Antoine Vassallo*

## **31 – Libyan parts (1923)**

The Italian colony of Libia on the Mediterranean coast of north Africa consisted of Cirenaica and Tripolitania. These two did not really need separate issues from those of Libia as a whole!

But these actually were born in the latter part of 1923. On 24 and 29 October commemorative Italian stamps were simply overprinted.

The first set was for the third centenary of the *Propaganda Fide* – missionary - Congregation, designed by GB Conti (who was later to produce numerous outstanding works of art in our islands). The four original unoverprinted stamps had appeared in Italy in June.



Self portrait of GB Conti



In contrast with this religious theme, the second set was more “political”: these six stamps celebrated the first anniversary of the Fascist March on Rome. The original set had appeared in Italy just five days before.

Interestingly, separate colonies were created in 1927, when specific designs were introduced too.

*Please note that I have used the “Italian” version of these three names.*



## PHILATELIC CENTENNIALS

*glances – and longer looks – at events from a hundred years ago*

*presented by Antoine Vassallo*

### 31 – Libyan parts (1923)

The Italian colony of Libia on the Mediterranean coast of north Africa consisted of Cirenaica and Tripolitania. These two did not really need separate issues from those of Libia as a whole!

But these actually were born in the latter part of 1923. On 24 and 29 October commemorative Italian stamps were simply overprinted.

The first set was for the third centenary of the *Propaganda Fide* – missionary - Congregation, designed by GB Conti (who was later to produce numerous outstanding works of art in our islands). The four original unoverprinted stamps had appeared in Italy in June.



Signature of the artist  
Gianbattista Conti  
on a 1965 Christmas card sent to  
his friends in Gozo




In contrast with this religious theme, the second set was more “political”: these six stamps celebrated the first anniversary of the Fascist March on Rome. The original set had appeared in Italy just five days before.

Interestingly, separate colonies were created in 1927, when specific designs were introduced too.

*Please note that I have used the “Italian” version of these three names.*



IN MEMORY

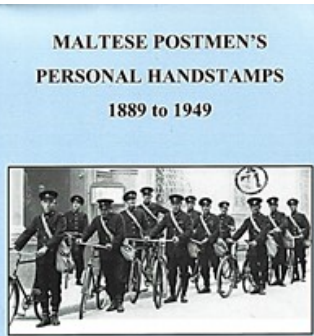


**Pat Patrick is gone**

*Jesmond Borg*

The Maltese philatelic scene is poorer with the demise in October of Bremner Patrick, known to all as Pat.

Actively involved in the Malta Study Circle, he specialized in Postmen's Personal Handstamps used in our islands. GPS members helped him a lot in researching for the 2017 revision of MSC Study Paper 18 he compiled jointly with his son Adrian or Paddy.



MALTESE POSTMEN'S  
PERSONAL HANDSTAMPS  
1889 to 1949

Researched and compiled by  
B.D. & A.D. Patrick

MALTA STUDY CIRCLE  
STUDY PAPER No. 18  
(Revised 2017)

Both served in the British Army Intelligence Corps – and got stung with the “Malta bug” during their three-year stint here. In fact their interest in all things Maltese, such as history and geography, was of immense use in the creation of this publication (which is obviously available for perusal on request at the GPS office/library).

PHS are an extremely interesting aspect of philately - even though rather “specialized” - and our Newsletter has probably not yet done it justice!

But at least we did lend our support. To mention just two committee members, Anthony Grech scanned all material in his possession while Antoine Vassallo helped identify both present-day addresses and individuals who sent or received particular letters.



# E & O not E

Antoine Vassallo

*glances at stamps with design or printing mistakes  
(well-known or obscure)*

I begin today with two Christmas printing faults.



In 1972 the United States choose a section from a Marian painting housed in the Washington National Gallery of Art. The artist's identity remains uncertain but experts tend to identify him with a certain Flemish or Dutch from the fifteenth century. A

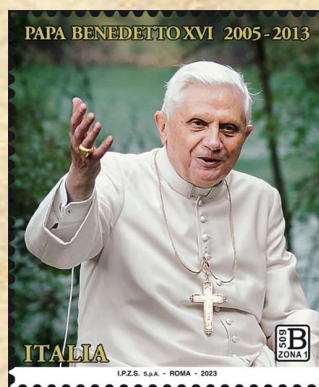
printing mishap resulted in the loss of the black colour but the angels still remain clear enough. Obviously it is not all that strange that slips crop up in runs of millions of copies!



Neighbour Canada also had its Xmas missing black – in 1969. This attractive design of “praying children from around the world” was transformed into an anonymous and valueless stamp!

I now look at two Papal errors – though I do not really know if they are the designers' faults.

Benedict XVI's death at the end of 2022 was commemorated by numerous issuers, including Vatican City itself. Unfortunately someone added *Emerito*, obviously incorrectly since on his demise he reverted to a





straight Pope in the list! Benedict was in fact an Emeritus only during the few years after his resignation. Italy was on the point of making this same error but luckily their attention was captured just before the design was sent to the printers – and the years were made to refer to just his actual Pontificate.



In 1965 the African republic of Mali commissioned a very popular designer to commemorate the now canonized Pope John XXIII in 1965. Pierrette Lambert (or the chap who instructed her) showed liturgical ignorance! It is of course true that in those days a pope still used the tiregnum or special pontifical mitre. But this is a no-no if he is not wearing some vestment such as a cape or chasuble.

## GOZO PHILATELIC SOCIETY

### 24th. ANNUAL EXHIBITION 2023.

### List of participants.

#### SENIOR SECTION

Jesmond Borg  
 Mark Anthony Poulton  
 Anthony Grech  
 Rev. Anton Schembri  
 Rachel Debattista  
 Dr Anton Mifsud  
 Christopher Ciappara  
 Antoine Vassallo  
 Angelo Agiusi  
 Il Haġar Museuml



#### JUNIOR SECTION

Francesco Borg  
 Amy Agius  
 Isaac Bugeja  
 Laurent Jacques Bishop  
 Kiril Xerri  
 Lucas Joe Portelli  
 Craig Borg  
 Noah Camilleri  
 Nathan Sultana  
 Jake Refalo  
 Martina Grech  
 Liana Pace  
 Nina Xerri  
 Francesca Buttigieg



# Inauguration of the GPS 24th Exhibition.





# GOZO ON MALTA STAMPS

Issued by Malta Postal Administrations trough the years

Continued from issue no 88

Anthony Grech



## GOZO (& MALTA) LOCAL COUNCILS COAT OF ARMS.

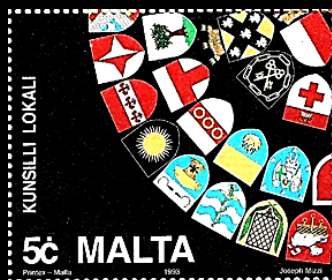
### MUNXAR, NADUR, FONTANA

Face Value; 5c. Multicolour.

Issued 20/11/1993

Perforation 14 x 14 Comb.  
WM; Maltese Crosses pointing sideways

Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .  
Designer; Joseph Mizzi.



## GOZO (& MALTA) LOCAL COUNCILS COAT OF ARMS.

### KERCEM, SANNAT, SAN LAWRENZ

Face Value; 5c. Multicolour.

Issued 20/11/1993

Perforation 14 x 14 Comb.  
WM; Maltese Crosses pointing sideways

Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .  
Designer; Joseph Mizzi.



## GOZO (& MALTA) LOCAL COUNCILS COAT OF ARMS.

### GHAJNSIELEM—GHARB—GHASRI—QALA—VICTORIA

Face Value; 5c. Multicolour.

Issued 20/11/1993

Perforation 14 x 14 Comb.  
WM; Maltese Crosses pointing sideways

Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .





# **AVIATION-INTERNATIONAL AIR RALLY OF MALTA. PLANE OVER ‘GHAWDEX’**

Face Value; 5c. Multicolour.

Issued 02/07/1994

Perforation 14 x 13.9 Comb.

WM; Maltese Crosses pointing sideways  
Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .

Designer; Richard J. Caruana



# **NATURE CONSERVATION YEAR. NICCA TAL-MADONNA TAR-RUMMIENA**

Face Value; 5c. Gold, cyan, magenta,  
yellow & black

Issued 26/06/1995

Perforation 14 x 13.9 Comb.

WM; Maltese Crosses pointing sideways  
Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .

Designer; Maurice Tanti Burlo’



# **TREASURES OF MALTA. MALTESE CLOCKS. THE OLDEST SUDIALS IN THE MALTESE ISLANDS—XEWLIJA, GOZO**

Face Value; 25c. Multicolour.

Issued 05/10/1995

Perforation 14 x 13.9 Comb.

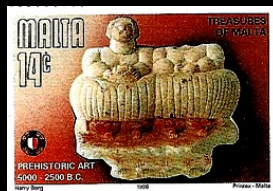
WM; Maltese Crosses pointing upwards  
Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .

Designer; Frank Ancilleri.



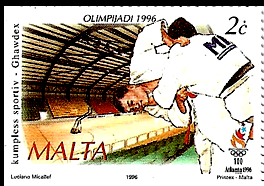
# **TREASURES OF MALTA. XAGHRA STONE CIRCLE.**

Face Value;  
5c & 14c.  
Multicolour.



Issued 28/03/1996 .Perforation 14 x 13.9 Comb.WM; Maltese Crosses. Printers;  
Printex Ltd. Malta.. Designer; Harry Borg





## OLYMPIC GAMES, ATLANTA JUDO AT SPORT COMPLEX GOZO

Face Value; 2c. Multicolour.

Issued 10/ 07/1996

Perforation 14 x 13.9 Comb.

WM; Maltese Crosses pointing sideways

Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .

Designer; Luciano Micallef



## EUROPA-STORIES & LEGENDS ST DIMITRIUS & ŽUGUINA LEGEND

Face Value; 35c. Multicolour.

Issued 05/05/1987

Perforation 14 x 13.75 Comb.

WM; Maltese Crosses

Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta. .

Designer; Joseph L. Mallia



## 300 ANNIVERSARY OF THE GOZO CATHEDRAL

Face Value; 5c & 14c. Multicolour. 10/07/1997 .Perforation 14 x 13.9 Comb.

WM; Maltese Crosses. Printers; Printex Ltd. Malta.. Designer; Posta Ltd



## 25th ANNIVERSARY REPUBLIC OF MALTA

Face Value; 19c. Multicolour.

Issued 10/12/1999

Perforation 13.75 x 13.25 Comb.

WM; Maltese Crosses

Printers; Bundesdruckerei.

Designer; Richerd J. Caruana





## MALTA IN THE 20th CENTURY

Face Values;

16c Multicolour. Two members of the first Gozo band.

27c. Gozo Landscape. Lace maker and Shepherd.

Issued, 7 March 2000. No Watermark Printers; Bundesdruckerei

Designer; Frank X. Ancilleri



## MALTESE FLOWERS

### Definitive part 2

Issued 13 September 2000

Face Value; 1c Multicolour.

*Sempreviva ta' Ghawdex.*

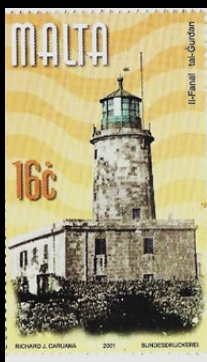
Gozo Everlasting.

No Watermark.

Printers; Bundesdruckerei

Designer; Maurice Tanti Burlo'

Stamp reprinted on 13 September 2006



## LIGHTHOUSES

Face Value; 16c Multicolour.

*Fanal Tal-Ġurdan*

Tal-Ġurdan Lighthouse, Gozo.

Issued 21 March 2001

No Watermark.

Printers; Bundesdruckerei

Designer; Richard J. Caruana





During 2024 GPS is celebrating our Silver Jubilee on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of our foundation, for which obviously we are preparing a programme of events.

We are proud to announce a first initiative: a special set of 15 personalized stamps and 14 relative covers portraying Malta's Presidents and Acting Presidents since the Republic was proclaimed in 1974 – half a century ago. The plan is that the first stamp and card will be issued in January, with the rest appearing monthly.

These will be in the able hands of Anthony Grech – a guarantee!

We are offering you the opportunity to book yours now because it has happened that prospective acquirers have missed out in the past. You are invited to send us a letter of application by not later as soon as possible. It can be posted to GPS POBox 10 Victoria or to Anthony Grech, Warda Maltija, 4, Tri Ibisku, Xewkija, Gozo.

**The year is almost up.**

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO SEND  
YOUR MEMBERSHIP FEE FOR 2024.**

**ADULTS €5.00. JUNIORS €2.00.**

**Send your payment in Malta 20c stamps  
to Anthony Grech, Warda Maltija, 4, Tri  
Ibisku, Xewkija, Gozo**



# Why shouldn't the first "Xmas" stamp be included in a Christmas collection?

*a series in which Antoine Vassallo clears up uncertainties*



Canada had moved quickly to bring into practice the idea of an Imperial Penny Postage rate agreed at a London conference in July 1898. But, when the map design was presented to Queen Victoria for approval (as was the practice then), some official mentioned to her that the stamp would serve to honour the Prince. He was referring to the Prince of Wales, whose birthday was on the originally projected issue date (9 November). Her sharp response made him clarify that he was thinking of the "Prince of Peace", that is Baby Jesus!

Actually, there is no documentary proof that this is what in fact happened; this might simply be an apocryphal "fact". What we can be sure of is that the stamp which appeared on 7 December 1899 had an added caption: XMAS 1898. But the bottom "claim" would seem to prove that this was not produced to commemorate Christmas, though the new postal arrangement was to commence on 25 December. So the first stamp referring to Christmas should not be considered as a truly Christmas stamp! Over the following decades various countries issued charity stamps or seals, often in a part of the year which could make one think of being aimed at Christmas use. Though some



christmassy designs were included, it is quite doubtful whether these sets should be considered as Christmas stamps.



*Netherlands Welfare Fund set issued in 1933*

It is not until December 1943 that a set appeared which can reasonably be considered Christmas stamps, even though not so called at issue. The three Hungarian monocoloured stamps showed, respectively, Angels announcing to the Shepherds, a Nativity scene and the Magi.



Not all readers need agree with my suggestion but I contend that this European country issued the first Christmas set, followed by Cuba in 1951 with two small stamps showing a simple Christmas flower. This last set – clearly inscribed NAVIDADES –



states “1951 1952”, probably to show possible additional use for the New Year festivities. From 1952 Cuba changed the caption to NAVIDAD which, as is well known, is Spanish for Christmas.



In conclusion, I also refer to a 1948 Austrian stamp honouring “Silent Night”, such a representative carol or seasonal hymn.





*Antoine Vassallo*





Obviously Malta was included! The Maltese stamp chosen had been included in the set issued in 1968 for the VI European Regional FAO Conference. The Food and Agriculture Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger, aiming to achieve food security for all and to make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead healthy lives. Founded in 1945, its central office moved to Rome in 1951 but regional work is led at other sites. Thus, Hungary hosts (in Budapest) the coordinating office for Europe and Central Asia.



The first Regional Conference for Europe was held in Rome, with the sixth in St. Julian's between the 28th and 31st of October in 1968 – just four years after becoming a member (in 5 October 1964). Regional Conferences are an official forum where Ministers of Agriculture (and other high officials) from all states in the region meet – every two years - to debate challenges related to food and agriculture, thus promoting regional coherence.

Unsurprisingly, this set had been designed by Emvin Cremona, our regular designer from 1957. This genius actually succeeded in creating an identity for Malta's stamps, appreciated internationally. Innovations included the use of gold and silver, as well as unusual shapes (especially in certain Christmas issues). Regarding these last, we must remember that local Christmas stamps were “created” in 1964 – just a few weeks after political independence. In fact I do not really understand why this particular stamp – in a rather distorted format - was chosen!

*You are invited to send write-ups (or even just suggestions) about other foreign stamps with themes or designs related to Malta.*





## that a stamp is over 7 inches wide?!

*Antoine Vassallo*

A stamp issued in January 2023 is probably the widest ever!

One of the two postal administrations in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz Express Post, celebrated the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development – declared by the United Nations for 2022. The dimension is an incredible 184 millimeters (in excess of 7 inches).

The 250-som stamp, designed by Daria Maier, shows a wide swath of Kyrgyzstan's Chaar-Tash mountain range – as photographed by Vladislav Ushakov. The three-stamp sheet is more impressive still! One should not forget that



nearly 90% of the territory of this landlocked country in Central Asia is located at an altitude above sea level of more than 1500 metres, peaking at over seven kilometres.

The previous “record holder” was another Asian country - Thailand, with a 2017 commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the king's accession: 170mm







**An Item from my Collection**      *by Anton Mifsud MD*

**1813–THE EPIDEMIC**

**The plague**

It is the purpose of this short article to make known a communication from Malta during this epidemic: from a foreign trading company (Grabau & Stresaw) stranded in Malta at the time, addressed to their main offices in Manchester.

The plague had started in Constantinople in 1812 and reached Alexandria soon afterwards through trading ships. In April 1813 two sailors from the brigantine *San Nicola* that reached Malta from Alexandria were taken to the Lazzaretto where they passed away. The vessel was looted and a plague epidemic followed, claiming four and a half thousand lives.

In 1813 the microbe was still unknown but it was well known that infected humans transmitted their illness to others through close contact. Measures were taken to prevent this mode of transmission, such as quarantine, segregation, isolation, and curfews: all too familiar from the Covid-19 pandemic!

**Paper dreaded**

One misconception in 1813 was the belief that paper was capable of transmitting the illness. All letters to and from Malta and other Mediterranean ports were subjected to disinfection measures, such as by immersion in vinegar or by fumigation through toxic fumes using slits that penetrated the cover. Paper was considered so infectious that letters were often written on wood!

**Trade and commerce disrupted**

This letter comes from the end of September, with no indication of a remission in the number of cases reported and deaths. Business on the island had been brought to a standstill through a proclamation of 3 June, when all the banks and warehouses were closed up. By September, the towns were relatively free of the plague but the countryside was not, so that no public health measure had yet been lifted.

**Hostilities at sea**

Malta was still a British Protectorate and the war of Britain with both France and the young United States was adding its toll of merchandise losses at sea due to enemy action. A few of the trading vessels were even fitted with cannon for self-defence.

**Isolation**

Since the end of July, there were no letters reaching this firm in Malta





from their head office in Manchester; and vessels from the Eastern Mediterranean, from Salonika and Constantinople, were no longer reaching Malta. Several foreign traders sailed away from Malta in August leaving all their businesses behind; but Grabau held on, and their letter is self-explanatory.

### Sea routes for communication

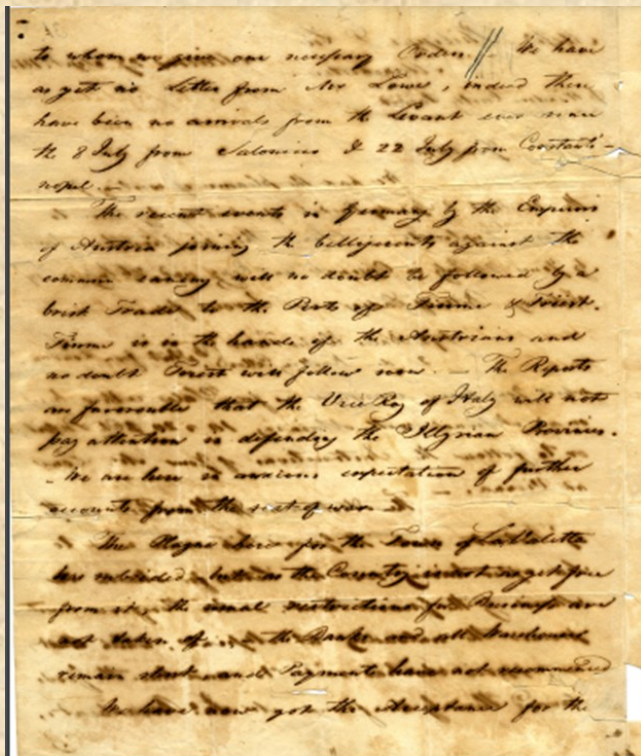
At the time a number of routes were employed for the conveyance of letters to and from Malta. For example, letters from Malta to Gibraltar and London were sent by the 'packet', sometimes after pre-payment of postage; with sea-captains or friends; with the "royal transport" or even with merchant vessels escorted in convoy to dodge enemy warships.

### Grabau & Stresaw to Philipps & Lee

The letter in question was sent by 'packet', as stated in its opening lines, "Messrs Philipps & Lee, Manchester, Windsor Castle Packet, Malta, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1813."

In its philatelic context, the letter is marked with counter date handstamps, "FOREIGN NO 25 1813" and "B. NO. 25.1813", and also with manuscript markings, "3/3" and "5332-27-11-13". The "MALTA" stamp in cursive script within a curved box certified its disinfection at the Lazzaretto, and this is confirmed by the generalised brownish discoloration of the paper, through its immersion in vinegar. The twelve disinfection slits are evident when the letter is opened up, a much smaller number of stabs penetrating the thickness of the





folded letter having been required; these slits permitted the entry of fumigating gas into the letter's interior prior to dispatch.

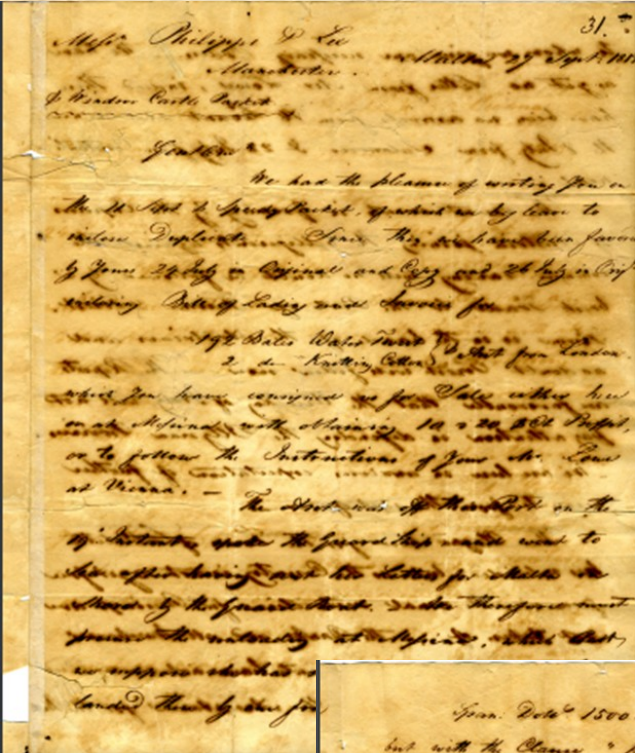
Messrs Philipps & Lee of Manchester had earlier dispatched their commercial schooner-rigged vessel, the *Ant*, to Malta with mail and merchandise from London. According to their Malta agents, the vessel had just left the island eight days previously, on 19 September, after consigning its mail through the Guard boat, to be disinfected at the Lazzaretto prior to distribution. The

merchandise was not unloaded but forwarded to Messina with their agent, a Mr Broadbent, who was instructed on the business procedures to be followed there.

Despite their isolation, the Malta agents of Grabau & Stresaw still kept abreast of the political turmoil in Europe, as can be gauged from the following paragraph, "The recent events in Germany by the Empires of Austria joining the belligerents against the common enemy (sic) will no doubt be followed by a brisk Trade to the Ports of Flume and Trieste. Fiume is in the hands of the Austrians, and no doubt Trieste will follow soon. The Reports are favourable (sic) that the Viceroy of Italy will not pay attention in defending the Illyrian provinces. We are here in anxious expectation of further accounts from the sort of war."

Their concluding paragraph "We are in hopes that with[in] another month Government will be induced to recall its Proclamation of the 3rd June, and that Commerce may be allowed again" was not realised. Three months later, in January 1814, Malta was declared free of the plague, but it erupted the following month in Gozo and lasted there until May 1814. It was officially declared over the following September; the precise total number of deaths is uncertain, with figures quoted ranging between 4,487 and 4,668. In a population of approximately 91,000 at the time, the calculated mortality was thus 4.9%.





19 June 1813 edition of the Giornale di Malta, making reference to the spread of the plague. Source Wikipedia



The Lazzaretto, Malta

Conclusion

In the wake of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, one can readily appreciate the hardships and psychological trauma suffered by the Maltese and Gozitan inhabitants during this period of time, when medical knowledge and practice were limited, when hostilities at sea were rife, and when letters and the basic necessities of life in the form of supplies were not reaching the islands.



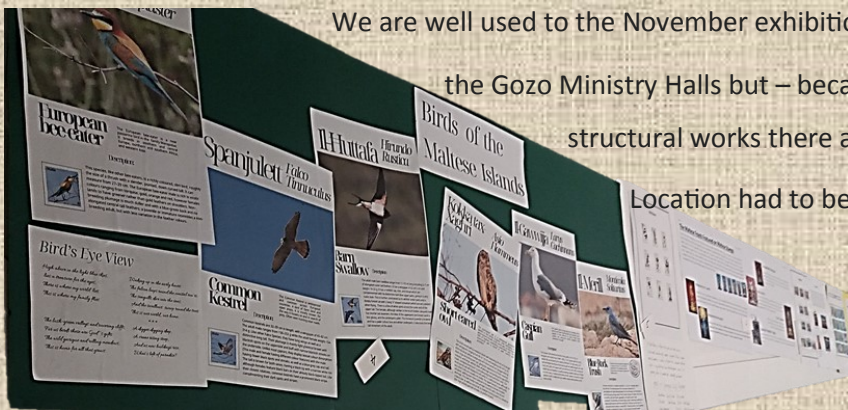


## A special Annual Exhibition

*Mary Grace Xerri*



We are well used to the November exhibition in the Gozo Ministry Halls but – because of structural works there a new Location had to be found.



We were lucky that Il-Haġar museum – with which we have a close relationship – could host us. In fact the three sectors allocated permitted a good presentation, helped by the attractively practical display frames.

We had obviously to adapt our usual method, putting some more pressure on those who set it up, but comments received were really positive. We have



also noted new visitors! Another positive development was the strong return by students from two schools – respectively Żebbuġ primary and Seminary secondary – as Junior exhibitors.

The Committee had decided not to organize a formal opening on the announced Sunday 12 November but chaplain Fr Joseph Attard did use holy water in blessing around the exhibits, accompanied by most committee members and other supporters. Three days later he celebrated Mass at St George's Basilica, praying for the repose of dead members and the needs of all of us – members and friends.

The exhibits from Juniors and Adults offered an interesting range of topics, in Traditional Philately and other classes.

To focus on a few examples, the religion theme offered the Xagħra titular anniversary and processional statues, as well as Vatican stamps. Flora and fauna were well represented, together with various history flashes such as the 1565 siege (with an impressive scale model) and the 1916 New Caledonia migrant episode. Personalities featured included Maltese authors, Tagliaferro and an “early philatelist from Gozo”. Thematic items, such as Buses and United States sheets, could also be appreciated.

Early Malta postmarks, errors and varieties, and censor marks were among the more specialized exhibits. An exhibit showed covers and folders connected with Il-Ħaġar, beginning with its 2013 inauguration. Also on show were all the covers and personalized stamps produced on the occasion of our Annual Exhibition. Decorated albums could also be admired and free copies of the GPS Newsletter could be picked up.



Special thanks goes to Mr Carmel Navarro and Mr Samuel Parnis for judging our exhibition.

**All participants will as usual receive certificates and gifts, with MaltaPost as main sponsor, during the GPS AGM.**



# SLIEMA STAMP SHOP

## THE BOOK AND STAMP SHOP IN GOZO

De Soldanis Street Victoria, Gozo.

The only proper stamp shop in Gozo and one of the best in the Maltese Islands with a vast collection of local postage and philatelic material for sale.



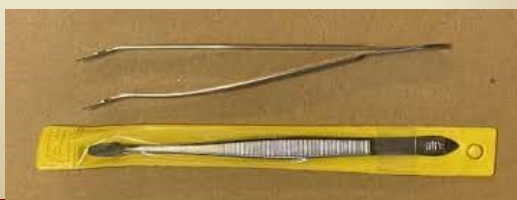
**The current opening hours are:**

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 8.45 to 12.45

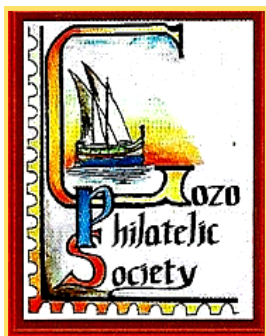
Saturday: 8.45 to 12.45.

Wednesday and Sunday CLOSED

Reception Telephone  
**21551211**







GOZO PHILATELIC  
SOCIETY

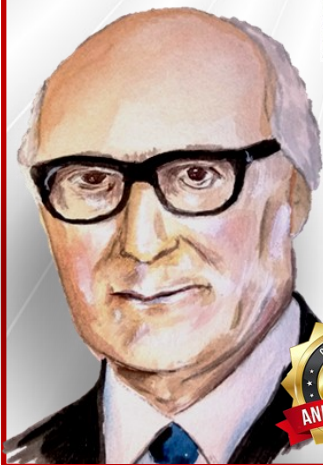
25<sup>th</sup>

*Anniversary*  
1999 ~ 2024

NO 91/1/2024

# Journal

**FIRST PRESIDENT**  
1974 ~ 1976



*A. J. Mamo*



*Republic Malta 1974 ~ 2024*