

THE CIRCLE AT ITS BEST

By Alec Webster

Out of the blue, I was sent two examples of Melita 1/- overprinted Postage (SG 152) both with plate flaws. The flaw is in two parts around the 1/- value box, part on the "1" of 1/- and part on the left hand edge of the box itself. The flaw on the "1" appears almost the same on both, while the flaw on the box itself is more pronounced on one than the other.

Interesting! Are they genuine, constant flaws or just a one-off result of dirt on the plate? If constant, do they appear on more than one plate/printing and if so which? Are they progressive? Do they occur on un-overprinted and overprinted issues? How scarce are they? Trory's catalogue does not mention this flaw but there is a brief reference in Study Paper No. 24 page 14, namely: "Flaw around Value Tablet and a break in the numeral 1". No illustration!

So...could anyone throw any light on it/them? Try the committee, I thought, by email plus scan. Instant response: try Brian Franklin in S Africa! By return came Brian's most helpful reply (which I have summarised).

The flaws appear to be constant as these are the second & third examples reported.

Only one plate appears to have been used for the frame of this value and it is housed in Malta. Three printings were made of this value, approx one year apart: 1st of 1412 sheets, plus 75 for dealers, despatched 18 Jul 1922; 2nd of 1306 sheets despatched 2 Oct 1923 and 3rd of 1158 sheets despatched 12 Aug 1924.

It looks from the scans as though the dent in the "1" may be from physical damage; whereas the frame part as well as the area to the left of the dent may be a progressive flaw from wear. Brian suggests that all of this took place during the last printing. As yet the plate position of the flaw is not known. If the plate in Malta could be inspected minutely, we may be able to see the damage as well as plate the position, thus confirming constancy.

The report in the old SP 24 does not specify Overprinted or not. The recorded example (which has been used to illustrate the flaw in the new edition of SP 24 – not yet published!) is from Alan Green's pair of Overprinted stamps (one normal). These 2 examples are next. Because of this, we can safely assume that the wear occurred during the last printing, but exactly when we can but guess at. Also, were only stamps from the end of the printing used for Overprinting 'POSTAGE'? So, there are three Overprinted stamps and one unknown recorded so far.



600 sheets were overprinted and most probably came from the last printing.

Maximum possible with the Postage overprint would be 600 examples but the actual number is impossible to know.

Brian's final comment was that Alan Green might be able to assist, so I copied Alan into the correspondence. Again practically by return came Alan's reply (again summarised)

Alan's copy (referred to above) is the RH stamp of a pair and appears to show somewhat less of the damage/wear compared to these two. Maybe this suggests that the flaw became progressively more pronounced during the printing run? If the overprints were performed on the later sheets, it might explain why the recorded examples of the flaw have the POSTAGE overprint.

Bob Martin updated the last version of SP24 and some of the detail was based on his Melita collection (some of which Alan now has). There is no annotation on his album page or any further detail accompanying the above-mentioned pair (i.e. no positional information) apart from a sketch of the flaw. Alan believes it is likely that the entry in SP24 is based on this pair, so he wouldn't count this example in addition to those known!

Alan also referred to Fig.29 in the Paul and Barbara Kayfetz booklet "Malta: Finding a Treasure Trove of Information", as this photo shows the Duty Plate for the 1/- value. Unfortunately, the print size doesn't allow examination at the level of detail needed to position the flaw. Presumably, the negatives will exist somewhere and this could be an alternative to looking at the Plate itself?

So in the space of a couple of days I had detailed responses to my enquiry! What an excellent example of the Circle at its best!