

## Introduction – the origin of postmen's personal handstamps

*“With a view of readily identifying individuals who may commit a misdelivery, a “numerical stamp” has been supplied to each Letter Carrier who is bound to impress therewith as near as possible to the Receipt Stamp every article of his ‘charge’ before leaving the Duty Room. On the misdelivery being brought to the knowledge of the office, the ‘numerical stamp’ will at once discover the officer in fault. To make sure that due attention is paid to this Regulation, the Chief Sorter before dispatching the letter Carriers to their beats, takes at random one or two charges and examines whether each article bears the number of the ‘Personal Stamp’. I have seen it adopted in all the Italian Post Offices. It has been in operation in this Department since the 14<sup>th</sup> of August last (1889) and has had the beneficial effect of reducing misdeliveries to one instance only during the remaining portion of the year.”*

From the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Post Office for the year 1889, page 51 (National Archives of Malta)

The above citation describes the origin of the personal handstamps assigned to Maltese postmen from their inception in the late 1890's to the late 1940's. As mentioned by this source, these handstamps were used in several other countries.



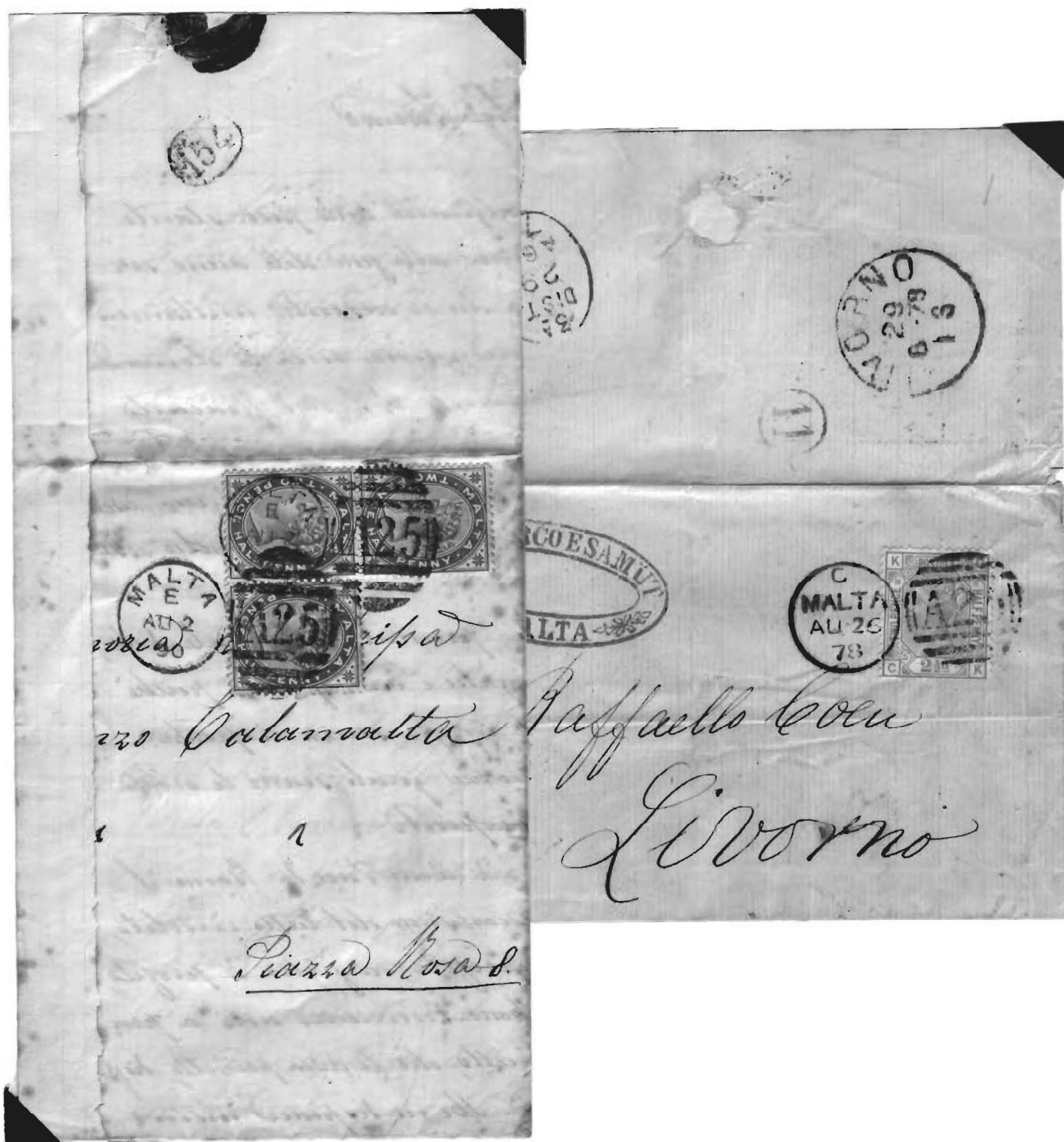
The handstamps consisted of small numbered ovals struck in black ink on the backs of mail delivered to addresses in the Maltese Islands. The number of the handstamp was the official number of the postman using it and also appeared on his uniform. They were issued to the postmen upon their appointment and were retained by the same

postmen, generally, until they retired, irrespective of the area which they served. Although they were supposed to stamp all the mail entrusted to them for delivery, the application of the handstamp appears to have been rather spasmodic and studies so far indicate that 25% to 30 % of the mail prior to 1914 received these strikes. Thereafter it was even less.

### Bibliography

- Malta Study Circle (1980) *Malta – The stamps and postal history 1576 – 1960* Martin RE (ed) Robson Lowe
- Proud EB (1999) *Postal history of Malta* Proud-Bailey
- Wood H (1984) *Postmen's Handstamps* Magazine of the Philatelic Society of Malta 13(1)
- Abela Medici A (2000) *Postman's numerical stamp* Melita 15(2)

Letters from Malta to Italy with British QV stamp used in Malta, and Italian Postman's Handstamp



## Types of Handstamps

The Malta Study Circle has allocated six different types to the handstamps. As handstamps were worn out or lost, replacements with different types were also introduced, leading to different types for the same handstamp. Proud's "Postal History of Malta" lists 107 handstamps classified according to the six basic



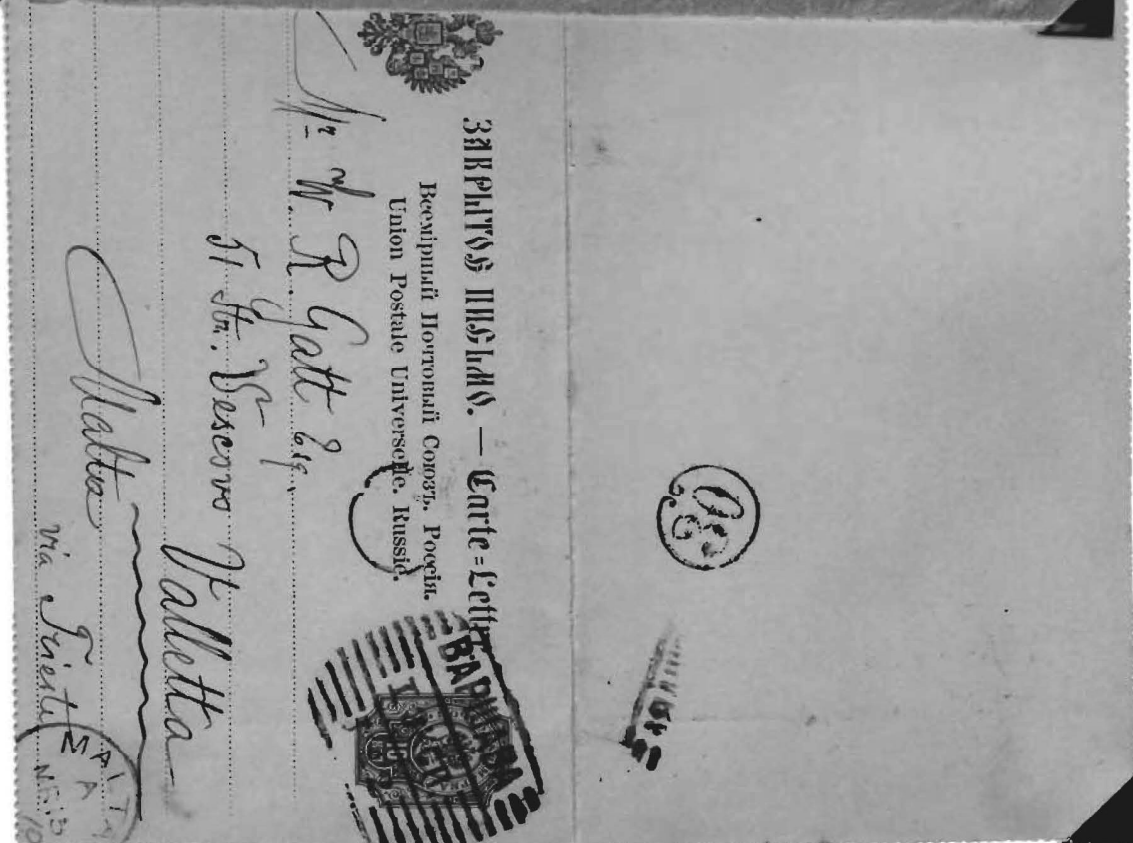
### Type A



Early use of PHS 1 on this cover received in Valletta five months after the introduction of handstamps

EKD: 30.12.1889

LKD: 04.04.1920



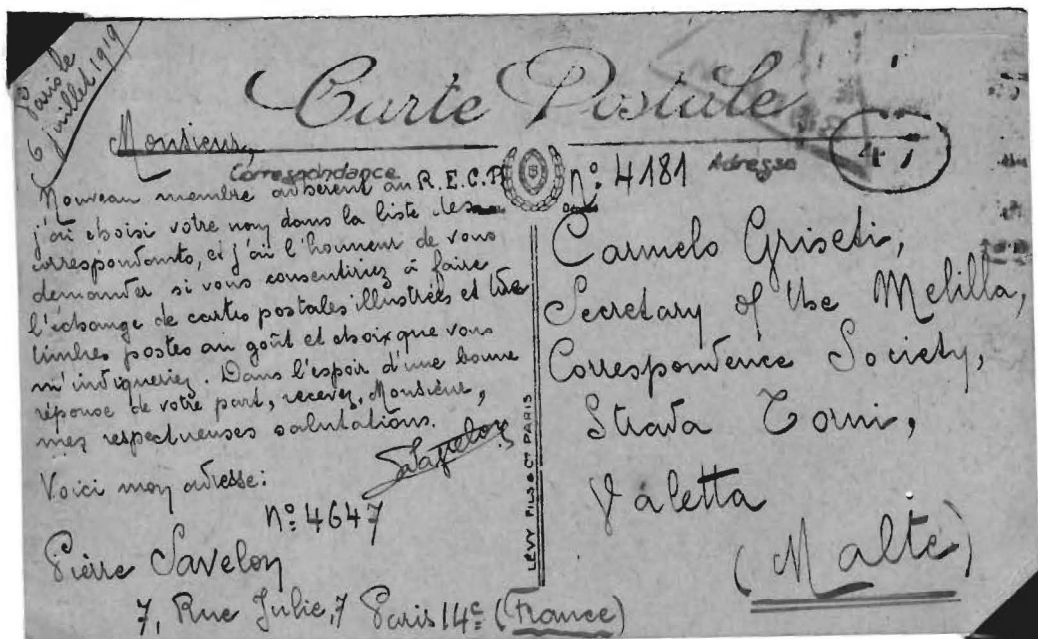
### Type B



PHS 30B on a lettercard to the philatelist William Gatt in 1906

EKD: 15.08.1906

LKD: 20.05.1921

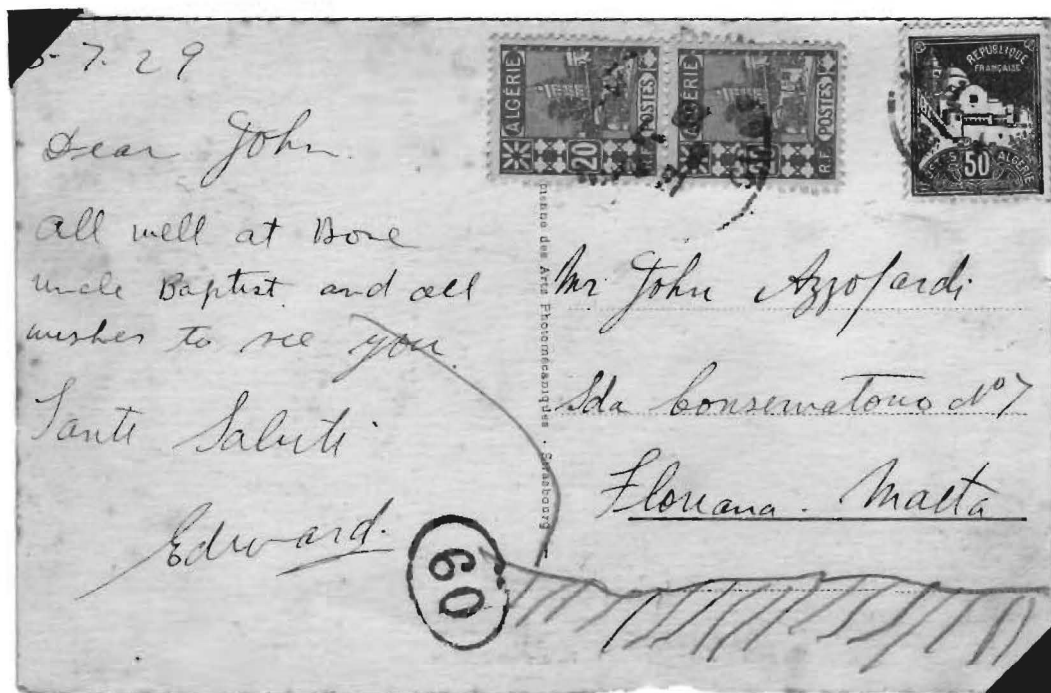


Type C

37

Postcard from France to  
Valletta showing PHS  
47C in

EKD: 25.10.1912  
LKD: 29.03.1945



Type D

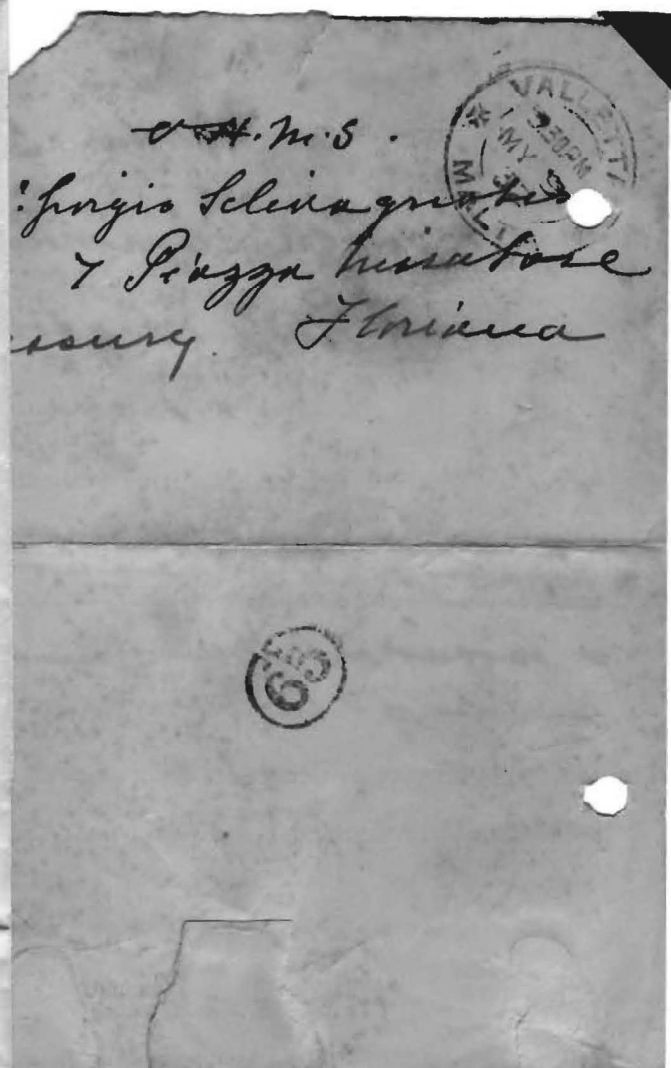
32

Postcard from Tunis to  
Floriana showing PHS  
60D in 1929

EKD: 17.08.1926  
LKD: 25.11.1948



Some handstamps do not conform to the mainstream types



## Type E      Type F



Offical government  
correspondence to  
Sliema in 1946  
showing PHS 56E

EKD: 01.12.1930  
LKD: 07.04.1947



Offical  
government  
correspon-  
ce to Floriana  
on 9 May  
1932 showing  
PHS 65F -  
Earlier use  
than EKD in  
the literature





Two of the three recorded types of PHS27 are shown. Handstamp 27 is known between the years 1905 and 1938 in Valletta, Sliema, Cospicua and Birkirkara. Usage in Valletta is in both the earliest and last known strikes. It is possible that one postman initially placed in Valletta was transferred to the other towns before rounding off his career in the desirable location of the general Post Office in Valletta.

PHS27B on a postcard  
from Rotterdam to Sliema  
in 1906

EKD: 04.10.1905  
LKD: 05.07.14



PHS27D on a postcard  
from Bethlehem to  
Valletta in 1935

EKD: 26.11.1926  
LKE: 09.01.1939



## One Handstamp – different types

Several handstamps exist as more than one type. It has been proposed that as handstamps were worn out through use, they were remade with the type then current. However, the significant intervals in time and the different locations of use sometimes evident suggest that remade handstamps were issued to different postmen.

**PHS 6A on Italian  
post card to Valletta in  
1902, also showing  
postage due strike.**

**EKD: 16.03.1891**  
**LKD: 15.09.1934**

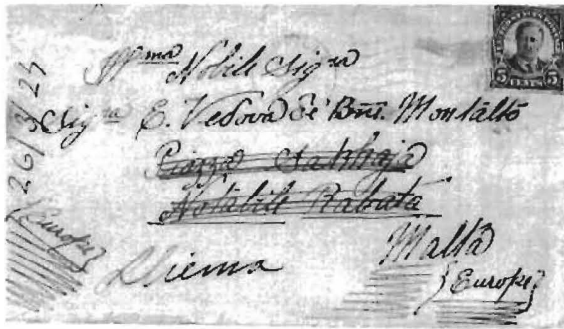


**PHS 6B on Italian post card to Valletta in 1937.**

**EKD: 1930**  
**LKD: 02.07.1938**

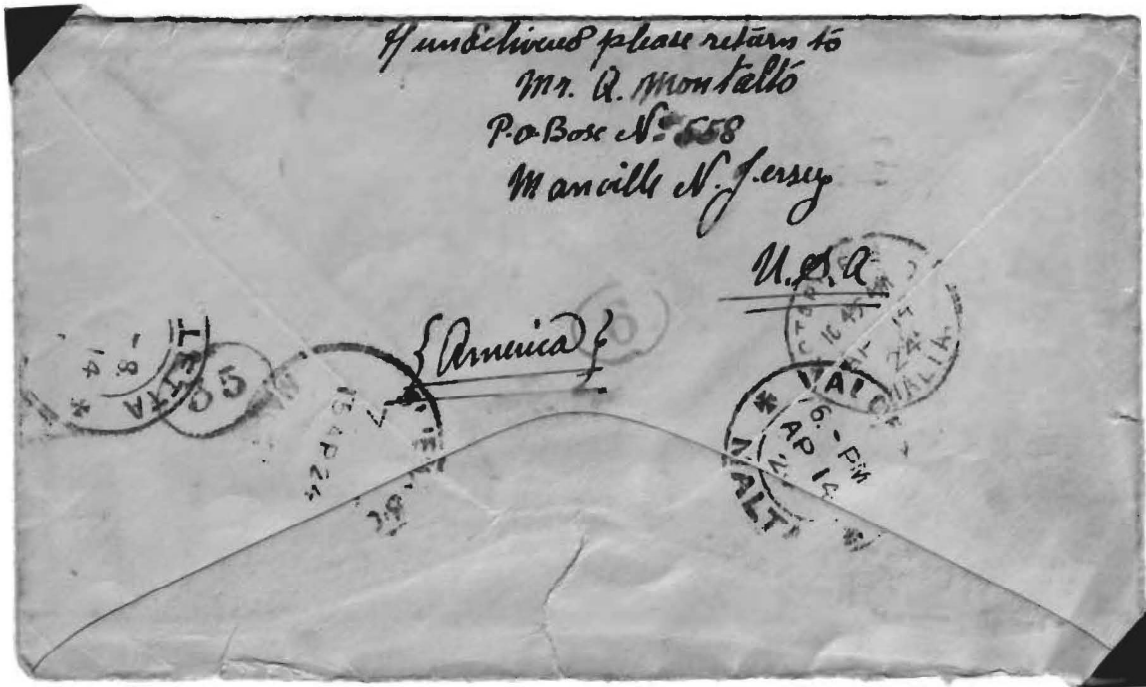


## One cover – different handstamps

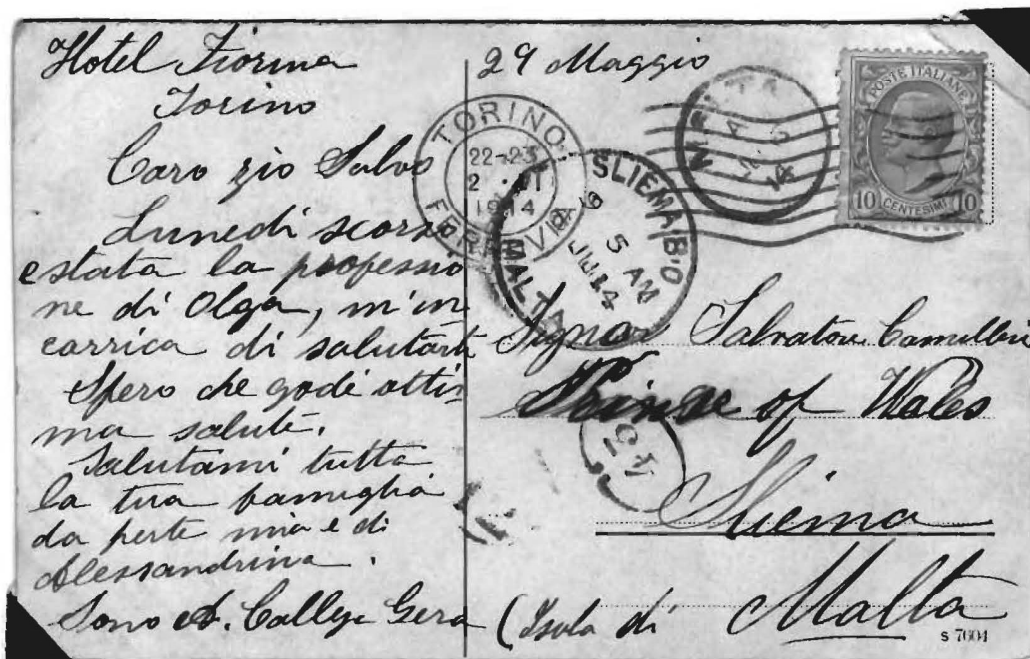


Less than 2% of recorded covers/cards show two or more postmen's handstamps. Such items can be divided into the following categories:

1. Re-direction
2. Incomplete address
3. Postage due
4. Difficulty in delivery in the absence of the recipient when the mail could not be passed through the letter box eg registered mail, size/absence of letter box etc.



This letter from New Jersey was sent to Notabile where it was stamped with PHS35C and then on to Sliema where it acquired PHS9A  
PHS35C:  
EKD: 19.03.1915  
LKD:04.01.1949

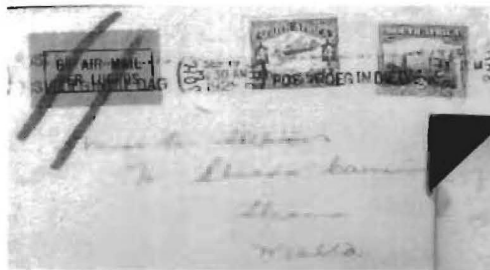


Postcard from Italy to Sliema showing PHS43C and PHS12A. The reason for the use of two Sliema handstamps is unclear.



## One address – different handstamps

Examination of a large number of items indicates that some streets had one postman for a number of years, while others had a number over the years and some had several simultaneously.



PHS9A and 56E to the same Sliema address within an 11 month period. Postman 56 was apparently in need of a new inkpad in September 1930 – the faint strike is found on two separate covers delivered to very close addresses within 9 days of each other