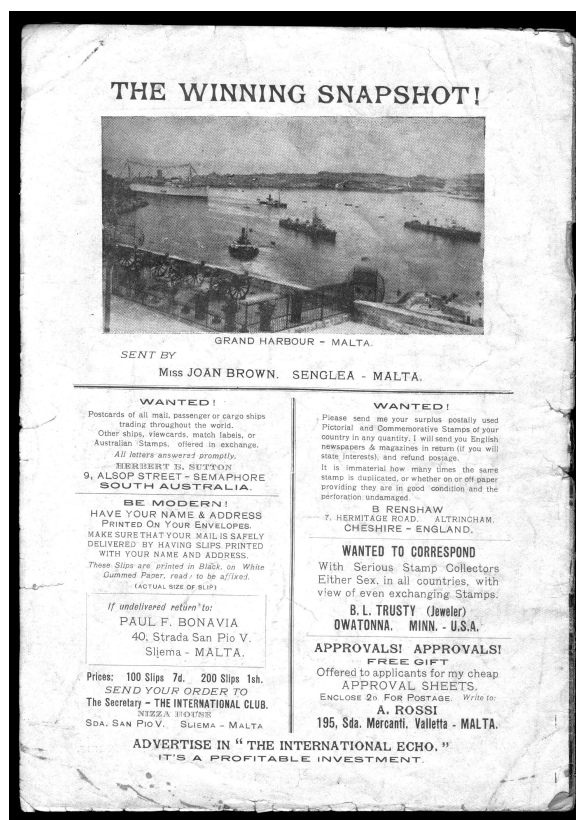
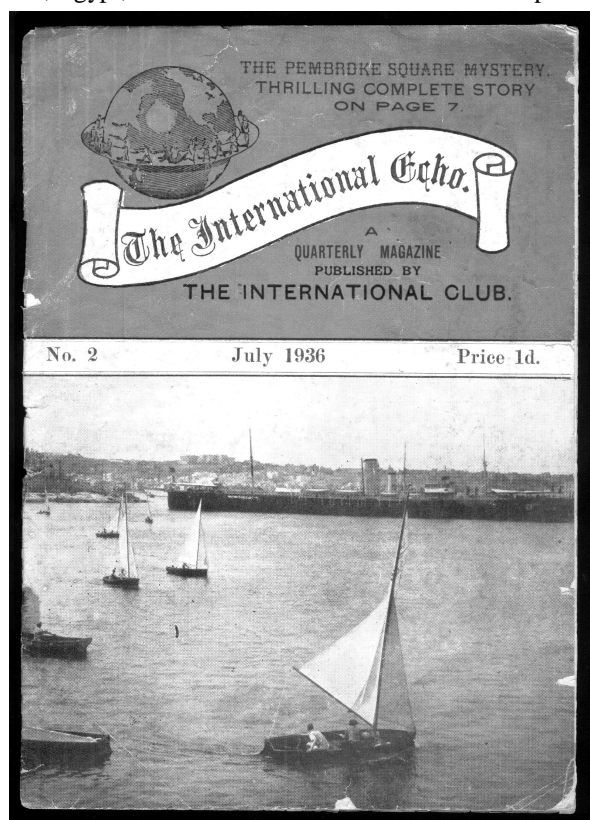


Maltese Correspondence Magazines of the 1930s and 1940s

Dedicated to the late George Bonavia

Albert Ganado

An esteemed friend of my school days has recently passed away. I knew George Bonavia at the Lyceum and we soon became close, as we were keen stamp collectors. I learnt a lot from him as he was about four years older than I was. In those days, a stamp collector usually laid his hands on stamps of the whole world, although some specialized collectors limited their interest to one or a few particular countries, or just covered the British Commonwealth with its well over 50 countries. Consequently, most stamp collectors sought to have correspondents both in their own country and overseas. Addresses were readily available in philatelic and correspondence magazines, some of which were published in Malta. When George and I were at the Lyceum, Paul F. Bonavia, of Nizza House, 40 Strada San Pio V, Sliema, a distant cousin of George, brought out *The International Echo – A quarterly magazine published by The International Club*. The first number was issued in April 1936, selling for one penny. Both the front and back cover were printed in colour. It met with a favourable reception from the local press and congratulatory letters poured in from all corners of the world. One of these letters, signed Frank V. Ganado (a first cousin of mine) was published in the second issue, alongside letters from England, Egypt, Australia and the USA. Photos were published on the front and back covers.



Front and back cover of *The International Echo* of July 1936

Of the first numbers in the first volume, I have numbers 2 and 3 of July and October 1936. Three Maltese dealers advertised in no. 3: E. Said, 33 Sda. Brittanica, Valletta; C. Zammit, 132a Sda. Brittanica, Valletta; A. Rossi, 195 Sda. Mercanti, Valletta. From 23 cm the size of the four numbers in volume 2 was reduced to 15 cm, at the price of halfpenny. The pages became 16 instead of 12, while the three-colour front cover remained the same. I have numbers 5, 7, 8, all of which contain a Pen-Pals list. One of the collectors listed was 16-year-old Edwin Bonello, of 17 Tigne Wharf, Sliema; in 1947 we graduated in law together from the Royal University of Malta. In his 'Editorial Chat' of January 1938 (no. 8), Paul Bonavia wrote that the circulation of the magazine at that stage had reached 5,200 copies. It was 'Printed and published by the International Club, Sliema, Malta'.

I have only no. 12 of the third volume (February 1939). The sub-title had now become *The official organ of the International Club*. The annual subscription was 4d., while the circulation had gone up to 8,000. The editor announced that owing to the continuous rise in the prices of paper, printing, ink, etc. the subscription fee was being raised to 6d. In the 'Editorial Chat and Club Notes' Paul Bonavia declared that it had been decided to enlarge the magazine and the next number of April 1939 would contain 20 pages instead of 16. What happened then I am not aware. Perhaps the publication was overtaken by the rumblings leading to World War II. I would be glad to hear from anyone who has other numbers of

The International Echo.

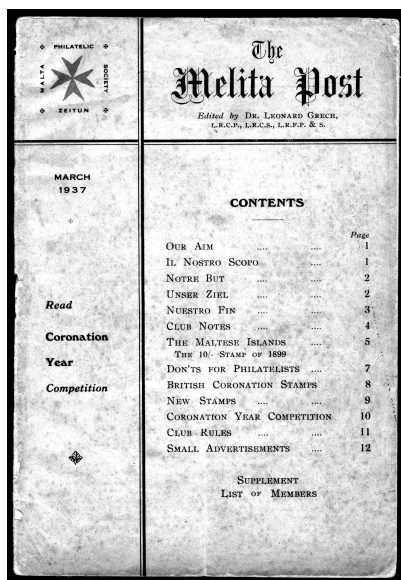
After his studies at the Lyceum, George Bonavia served during the war in the King's Own Malta Regiment. He then worked for three years at the Allied Malta Newspapers Ltd., a company which published the dailies *Times of Malta* and *Il-Berqa*, and the *Sunday Times of Malta*. This employment gave him the golden opportunity to form a correspondence club and publish its magazine. I have a four-page printed list of collectors from various countries, including five from Malta, which probably precede the magazine. This list is entitled *MALTA CORRESPONDENCE CLUB*, the same words being repeated on its logo having the eight-pointed cross as its background on which an envelope and a dove were superimposed. These words are written beneath the title and logo: 'Director - G. BONAVIA - 20, SACRED HEART STR., ZABBAR, MALTA G.C.' At the top left corner two words 'Temporary List' are written in pencil, probably by George Bonavia himself. For other correspondents one had to write to the Director who had over 3,000 available to the club. The list (22.5 cm) was printed at the Allied Malta Newspapers Ltd. It has no date.

George Bonavia started the magazine in 1947, consisting of 24 pages (22.2 cm) plus the red cover. Boxed at the top of the front cover was the title *MALTA CORRESPONDENCE MAGAZINE. OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE MALTA CORRESPONDENCE CLUB*, flanked on the left by its logo. The first issue incorporated two numbers: "No 1-2, Spring-Summer (1947)". The subscription was 5s. yearly. The listing of members, with their particular hobbies, took up pages 4 to 9. Member no. 1 was George Bonavia himself, as 'Founder and Director' of the Club, while no. 2 was his brother Charles as 'Assistant Director'. Classified advertisements (mostly foreign) were spread over various pages, including stamps, view-cards, photography and books. A request to buy a medical book was in the name of Dr. Joseph Galea (1901-1978), a foremost Melitensia collector, President of the Association of Maltese writers, who later became Chief Government Medical Officer. Another advert was made by the 'Pen Hobby Club' from Birkirkara.

Apart from myself, the list of members included Victor V. Denaro, of 88 Old Mint Street, Valletta, a numismatic expert, who published in Florence (at Olschki's) in 1972 *The Goldsmiths of Malta and their Marks*. The issue also carried some photographs, and articles on The Maltese Language by Prof. J. Aquilina, Regimental Badges, A rare sixpence, and the Malta peace issue. "No. 34 Autumn/Winter (1947) contained another interesting article by the expert folklorist Joseph Cassar Pullicino on 'Malta's National Feast' of the 8th September. The editor announced that the Club would be organizing lectures, recreational tours, exhibitions, competitions, a tourist section and a press section for the distribution of articles.

According to A.F. Sapienza's *A checklist of Maltese periodicals*, no. 5 of the magazine was issued in 1948, and it was available at the National Library in Valletta, together with numbers 1-4. In June of that year George Bonavia emigrated to Canada, settling down at Windsor, Ontario. That is presumably why the magazine came to an end. In his new home George became the author of various publications, among which *The Malta News*, a newspaper published monthly between 1954-1965 for the Maltese in Canada and the USA. It was then the only Maltese newspaper in North America.

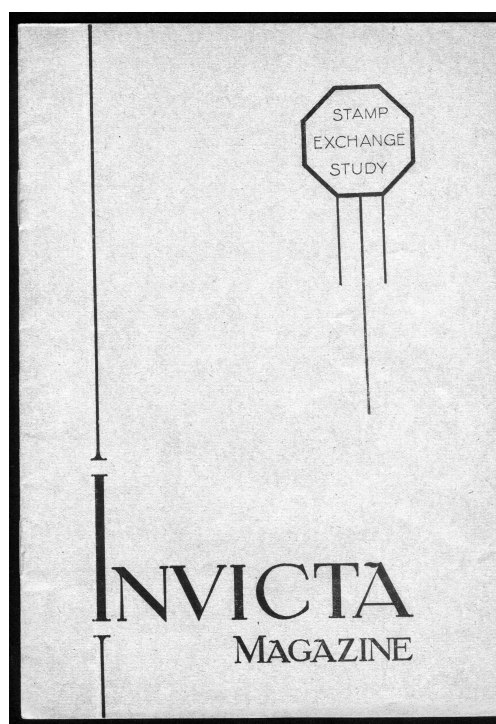
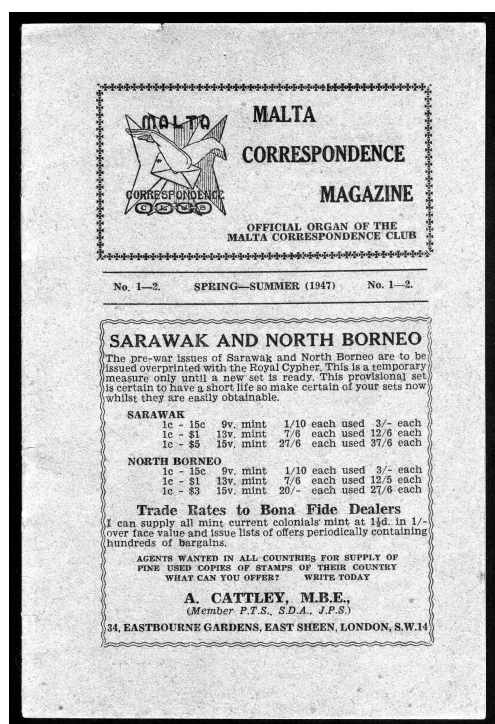
The Malta Correspondence Club was not the only one issuing in Malta a magazine for collectors when the war was over. Charles J. Whelpdale started publishing in 1947 the *INVICTA MAGAZINE - Quarterly publication of the Invicta stamp exchange and study circle*. Members of the circle were to pay an annual subscription of 10s. and the magazine was distributed free to members. The first number of volume 1 was published in January 1946, and number 12 of 1948 closed the volume. Father Sapienza also recorded number 1 of volume 2 dated 1949. Possibly, this was the last number published. The magazine was printed at The Allied Newspapers Ltd., 341 St. Paul Street, Valletta.



Front covers of the *Malta Correspondence Magazine*, *Invicta Magazine* and *The Melita Post* issue of September 1947

Another philatelic magazine circulated in 1947 was *THE MELITA POST*, the organ of the Malta Philatelic Society whose headquarters was at 20 St. Emidius Street, Zejtun, Malta. It was published by A. Gulizia, of Via Gagliani N. 13 int. 2, Catania, Sicily, and also of Zejtun. The first issue came out in June 1947. The Society's membership fee was 5s. and the magazine was published quarterly. It was the first post-war number of *The Melita Post*.

The Melita Post was a pre-war publication, starting in March 1937, 'printed for the Malta Philatelic Society by the Modern Press, 17 Strada San Paolo, Zejtun'. It was edited by Dr. Leonard Grech. Charles Spiteri, of Ghaxaq, was President, and A. Gulizia, of Zejtun, was secretary, of the Club. As from the issue of September 1938, the editor became Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, a lawyer popularly known as *Il-Gross* (the fat one), as Dr. Grech passed away on 5 August 1938 at the age of 31. Dr. Mifsud's Bonnici's address was at 19 Strada Cospicua, Cospicua. He was a stamp collector and could correspond in English, French, Italian and Latin, apart from Maltese. What might have been the last number was dated March 1939. The format was 22 cm, while the title was flanked on the left by a red eight-pointed cross as the logo of the 'Philatelic Society Zejtun Malta', used also on the Society's letter heads. The cover was yellow in colour. I have in all seven numbers of this pre-war magazine, which came from the collection of Dr. Mich. van Meensel, of Louvain, Belgium, who had membership number 145 of the Society.



The front and back cover of a pre-war issue of *The Melita Post*

The post-war issue kept the same format, and the same number of 12 pages, but the logo became the same cross and MPS within a triangle superimposed on a globe within a double circle enclosing the words MALTA PHILATELIC SOCIETY. The first number had a green cover, changed to orange for the September and December issues. The articles were in English, Italian and French, whereas in the pre-war issues only the editor used different languages, including German and Spanish. With the first number, a Supplement of List of Members was issued.

Among the items published, I was intrigued by what the editor wrote on 'Famous men on recent issues', among whom was Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone, portrayed on a 3 cent stamp issued in Canada. Very recently, a feature in *Reader's Digest* (July 2007, p. 48) entitled 'Hidden in the myths of time' had this to say on the telephone: Bell was the first to patent it, but it was invented by Antonio Meucci, an Italian immigrant who moved to America in 1835.

With the quarterly issue of March 1948, "New Series N. 1", *The Melita Post* changed its format into a newspaper (29.5 cm) with four pages. It was described as the "Official Organ of the Malta Philatelic Society - Affiliated to the British Philatelic Association, London, and Member of the Alianza de Clubs y Revistas Filatelicas of Barcelona (Spain)". The Editor and Managing Director was still A. Gulizia. I have only the first two numbers of this new series. All post-war issues I have are also from the van Menseel collection.

In his checklist Father Sapienza recorded the following holdings at the National Library in Valletta:

1. *Malta Correspondence Magazine* - n. 1-5, 1947-48,
2. *Invicta Magazine* - vol. 1-2, n. 1, 1946-49,
3. *The Melita Post* - [n. 1-2], 1947.

When I tried to examine them and compare them with my holdings, I found that the National Library did not have them any more. Were they mislaid, hopefully? Were they purloined, like so many Melitensia items? Or were they simply thrown away along with a lot of 'unused' books and pamphlets about a decade ago?