

MALTESE HISTORY

G. The First Years of British Rule

1800 - 1824

Form 3

Unit G.1 - Britain takes control of Malta

1. Britain established a Protectorate over Malta, 1800-1813

In 1801 Alexander Ball was replaced as Civil Commissioner by **Charles Cameron**. The Maltese leaders petitioned **Ferdinand IV** of Sicily to transfer his sovereign rights over the Maltese Islands to **George III** of Great Britain. The **Peace Treaty of Amiens** (March 1802) between Britain and France included the following clauses about Malta:

- Britain had to evacuate the islands within a few months.
- Britain had to hand over the islands to the Knights.
- The Great Powers were to guarantee the neutrality of the Order of St John.
- Maltese nobles were to be accepted as Knights of St John
- The Maltese were to have a share in governing the islands with the Knights.

The Maltese leaders were not happy with the conditions of the treaty. Their reaction came in June 1802 when they met and drafted the *Declaration of Rights of the Maltese Islands and its Dependencies*. In this document, the Maltese declared their ancient rights and the way they wanted to be governed by the British. The document was given to Charles Cameron, Civil Commissioner, who presented it to the King. In May 1803 the war between Britain and France started again. The British then decided to stay in Malta. The British had by then recognized the strategic position of Malta as a **naval base** for the British fleet in the Mediterranean.

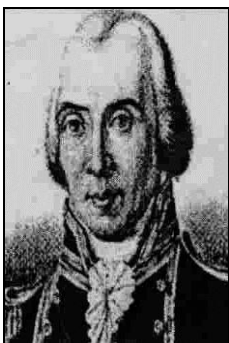
2. Alexander Ball as Civil Commissioner, 1802-1809

In 1802 Captain Alexander Ball was made Civil Commissioner for a second term. With him in charge, the British would surely win the loyalty of the Maltese. Alexander Ball made very little changes in the laws of the islands, even though government came under the strict control of the Civil Commissioner. He set up the **government departments** left in utmost confusion by the French. In order to reduce corruption and increase efficiency, Ball took a firm hold on the **finances**. The British were against piracy for this activity damaged their trading interests in the Mediterranean. For this reason in 1807 they made **corsairing** illegal and punishable by the death penalty. In the field of **agriculture** Ball brought to Malta the cultivation of the **potato crop**. This crop became very popular with the lower classes. **Cotton** remained for some years the principal export item for the Maltese farmers.

These measures were taking place during the **boom** (prosperity) brought about by the **Continental System** (1806-1812). This blockade was imposed by Napoleon against British goods. Britain responded by stopping neutral states from trading with France and her allies. Malta became the '*emporium* (supermarket) of the *Mediterranean*' as the centre for **contraband trade** of British goods smuggled into Europe. The number of cargo ships in Grand Harbour increase sharply. English merchants, commercial banks, insurance and shipping companies set up business enterprises in Malta. The Maltese enjoyed full-employment and a rise in wages and living standards.

3. Malta declared a British Crown Colony, 1813

In May 1813 with Napoleon nearly defeated, Britain declared Malta a **British Colony** governed by **military governors** having unlimited powers. These Governors were appointed by the **Secretary of State for the Colonies**. This change of British policy caused great concern among the Maltese patriots. The Maltese leaders hoped Britain would keep Malta as a **British Protectorate**. A protectorate meant that the British defended the islands from attack and left the local government in the hands of a Maltese elected assembly. But the future of Malta was finally decided at the **Congress of Vienna (1814-15)**, which confirmed Britain's possession of Malta. The Maltese felt cheated but helpless against the greatest power of their time. Malta was to remain part of the British Empire until Independence in 1964.



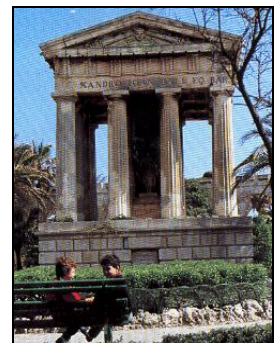
1. A. Ball



2. British Infantry soldier



3. Grand Harbour in the early 1800s



4. Ball's Monument at Lower Barracca Gardens

Unit G.2 – The Declaration of Rights of the Maltese, 15th June 1802

'Noi membri del Congresso delle Isole di Malta e Gozo e loro Dipendenze eletti per libero suffragio del Popolo durante l'assedio, per rappresentarlo nell'importante affare di assicurare i suoi native diritti e privilegii...e per i quail, quando furono usurpati, abbiamo sparso il nostro sangue per riacquistarli, e per stabilire una costituzione di Governo, che assicurerà a Noi, ed ai nostril discendenti in perpetuo la felicità della libertà, e dei diritti di una giusta legge, sotto la Protezione e Sovranità del Re di un popolo libero, Sua Maestà il Re degli stati uniti della Gran Bretagna ed Irlanda, dopo lungo e matura considerazione, facciamo la presente dichiarazione, obbliando Noi stessi, ed i nostril posterì per sempre, sotto condizione, che il Nostro or riconosciuto Principe e Sovrano dovrà dap arte sua adempire, e mantenere inviolate questa convenzione con Noi.'

1. 'Che il Re degli stati uniti della Gran Bretagna ed Irlanda e il nostro Sovrano Signore, ed i suoi legittimi Successori saranno in tutti i tempi avvenire consociuti come nostril legittimi Sovrani.'
2. 'Che la stessa Maestà Sua non ha nessun diritto di cedere queste Isole a nessuna Potenza. Che se Egli sceglie di ritirare la sua protezione...il diritto di ellegere un altro Sovrano, e di governare queste Isole apparterrà a Noi, ed agli abitanti solamente....'
3. 'Che i Governatori e Rappresentanti di Sua Maestà in queste Isole...sono e saranno per sempre tenuti di osservare, e tenere inviolate la Costituzione...stabilita per Noi, regolata dal General Congresso eletto dal popolo...'
4. 'Che il popolo di Malta e Gozo ed i suoi Rappresentanti nel Consiglio Popolare radunato, hanno il diritto di mandare lettere, o Deputati ai piedi del Trono, per rappresentare e lagnarsi della violazione dei dritti e privileggi...'
5. 'Che il diritto della legislazione, e di tassazione appartiene al Consiglio Popolare, con il consenso ed assenso del Rappresentante di Sua Maestà, senz il quail il Popolo non sarà obbligato.'
6. 'Che Sua Maestà il Re è il Protettore della nostra Santa Religione, ed è tenuto di sostenerla e preteggerla...'
7. 'Che...la referenza degli affair spirituali sarà solamente del Papa, e delli rispettivi Generali degli ordini monastici.'
8. 'Che gli uomini liberi hanno il dritto di scegliere la loro propria Religione. La tolleranza di alter religione è pertanto stabilita per diritto, ma non è permeso a nessuna setta di molestare, insultare, o disturbare quelle di alter religiose professioni.'
9. 'Che nessun uomo qualunque ha alcuna personale autorità sopra la vita, proprietà, o libertà dell'altro. Il potere risiede solamente nella legge...'

Segnata da tutti i Rappresentanti, Deputati, e Luogotenenti dei Vilaggi, e Città.

Unit G.1 – G2 Britain takes control of Malta



1. Give the years when Malta was a British protectorate and the years when it was a British colony?

(a) British Protectorate: _____

(b) British Crown Colony: _____ (2)

2. What did the Treaty of Amiens state about the future of the Malta Islands?

_____ (2)

3. Give **one** reason why the Maltese wanted to be ruled by the British rather than by the King of Sicily.

_____ (1)

4. List **three** articles from the *Declaration of Rights of the Maltese* of 1802 which you deem to be the most important.

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____ (3)

5. Why did the Maltese leaders draw up such a document? Give **two** reasons.

_____ (2)

6. Look carefully at the cartoon above. Explain the connection of this cartoon with Malta's history at the time of its publication in 1800.

_____ (2)

7. Why was Alexander Ball's administration crucial to the establishment of British control over Malta?

_____ (1)

8. List **three** areas that received Ball's attention during his administration.

_____ (3)

9. Why did the **Continental System** (or **Blockade**) make the Maltese more tied to British rule?

_____ (1)

10. What is meant by the terms:

(a) British protectorate: _____ (1)

(b) British colony: _____ (2)

11. What did the Congress of Vienna state about Malta?

_____ (1)

(Total marks = 20)

Unit G.3 - The Royal Commission of 1812 and the Plague of 1813

1. Hildebrand Oakes and the Royal Commission of 1811-1812

Ball's successor as Civil Commissioner was **Hildebrand Oakes**. During these years the Maltese nobleman Marquis **Nicolo Testaferrata** presented a petition in the name of the Maltese. He suggested the following changes:

- Government posts should be given to Maltese.
- Rent on government property to be reduced.
- the setting up of a *Consiglio Popolare* as a council of government made up of Maltese members.

The petition was sent to London. The Secretary of State then decided to send a **Royal Commission of Inquiry** to Malta. The task of this commission was to find out what civil liberties could be given to the Maltese without endangering the security of Malta as a naval base and fortress.

2. Conclusions of the Royal Commission of 1811-1812

- Malta was to have a military governor.
- the Governor could set up an **advisory council** made up of 4 British and 4 Maltese.
- the administration of justice had to be reformed upon the English model.
- English and Italian were to become the official language of the government.

Some of these reforms were implemented by **Sir Thomas Maitland** when he was first appointed British Governor of Malta between 1813 and 1824.

3. The Plague of 1813-1814

In March 1813 an English merchant ship came from Egypt infected with plague. The first victim of the plague was the daughter of a smuggler from Valletta. In April a shoemaker from Valletta died of plague too. On 5th May the disease was declared to be plague by the **Board of Health**. The Board of Health published a set of rules to try to contain the disease from spreading further.

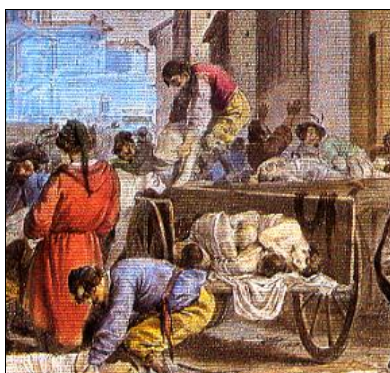
When the new Governor Sir **Thomas Maitland** arrived in October 1813, he at once enforced stricter **quarantine** measures. The last cases of plague were reported at **Qormi**. Maitland ordered walls to be built around Qormi and manned with guards. In January 1814 the plague entered Gozo where it killed 200 people. Qormi was freed from plague in April 1814. In February churches and shops opened again for the public. Maitland then asked foreign countries to open their harbours to Maltese ships. The epidemic killed 4,486 people from a population of 116,000 or 4 % of the population. But the fear of another outbreak of plague remained for years.



5. H. Oakes



6. Maitland



7. Carrying plague victims to the Lazzaretto (Naples, 1623)



8. Communion to plague victims (Malta, 1813)

Unit G.3 - The Royal Commission of 1812 and the Plague of 1813

1. What contribution did Marquis Nicolò Testaferrata give to Maltese political development?
_____ (1)
2. Why did the British send to Malta the Royal Commission of 1812?

_____ (2)
3. Which suggestions put forward by the Royal Commission of 1811-1812 put into force at once by the British Government? State why.

_____ (4)
4. How did the plague come to Malta in 1813?
_____ (1)
5. How did the government try to stop the plague from spreading?
_____ (2)
6. To what extent was it successful in stopping the plague?

_____ (2)
7. Put these events about early British Malta in chronological sequence by using numbers from 1 to 7. Read Units G.1 and G.2 to help you answer.

A	The Declaration of Rights of the Maltese Islands and its Dependencies	
B	The Royal Commission arrives and starts its investigation in Malta	
C	The arrival of Thomas Maitland as Governor	
D	The Plague enters the Maltese Islands.	
E	The proclamation of the Continental Blockade by Napoleon	
F	The Treaty of Amiens signed between France and Britain	
G	Britain declares Malta a British Protectorate	
H	Malta declared a British Crown Colony in the British Empire	

(7)

(Total Marks = 20)

Unit G.4 - The Plague Epidemic of 1813-1814

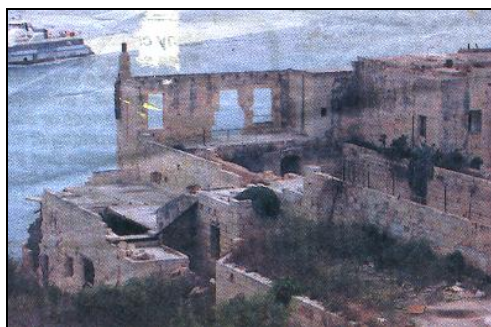
1. Malta was hit by the plague between May _____ and April _____ (1)
2. How did the plague usually reach the Maltese islands?
_____ (1)
3. How did the Maltese authorities try to prevent the plague from reaching Malta?
_____ (2)
4. How did the plague spread from one person to another?
_____ (2)
5. How did the health board try to stop the plague from spreading among the people?
_____ (2)
6. Name the two plague hospitals used at that time.
_____ (1)
7. How were convicts used during the plague? Why were they used in this way?

_____ (2)
8. Who was in charge of the government of Malta during the plague?

_____ (1)



1



2

9. Are the sources above primary or a secondary? _____ (1)
10. Source 1 is called *an ex-voto*? Why is it called so?
_____ (2)
11. Identify two human feelings are shown in source 1? _____ (2)
12. Source 2 shows the _____ on _____ Island. (1)
13. Describe the state in which it is today and say why it is so.

_____ (2)

(Total marks = 20)

Unit G.5 – The Administration of Sir Thomas Maitland (1813-1824)

1. Maitland and the Council of Government

Sir Thomas Maitland besides Malta was also Civil Commissioner for the Ioanian Islands and Gibraltar. Maitland was thus often absent for long periods from Malta. When appointed Governor by **Lord Bathurst**, the *Secretary of State for the Colonies*, he insisted to have *free and unfettered power* in Malta. Maitland refused to appoint an **advisory council** even when British members in this council were to be 4 and the Maltese members 3. The Council was only to discuss items put forward by the Governor. Maitland kept the entire government in his own hands. He chose all government officials himself. He became known by the Maltese by the nickname of *King Tom* because he pretended to govern like a king.

2. Changes in the way Malta was governed

Maitland was *Governor and Commander-in-Chief* with all civil and military powers in his hands. He reorganized the government departments and appointed Englishmen to the higher posts of the Civil Service. The top Government officials were the *Chief Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor, Crown Advocate, Superintendent of Quarantine, Collector of Customs, Superintendent of Marine Police, Officer of Port Duties* and a *Collector of Land Revenue*. The Maltese were appointed to the lowest offices of the administration. Maitland argued that the Maltese were too ignorant and irresponsible to be given greater responsibility in the administration.

To win over the loyalty of the Maltese nobles he made six of them *Lord-Lieutenants* in the major villages. Of course, their power was to be only nominal. A **police corps** was set up in 1814, organized on the English model. It was headed by an *Inspector-General* directly responsible to Maitland.

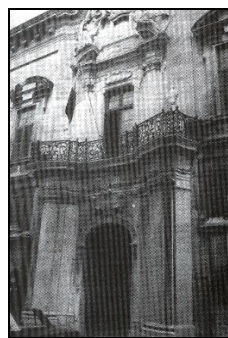
3. Reforms in taxation

Maitland kept a firm control over the **finances** and payment orders were issued from the *Treasury* only by his signature. He managed to increase both expenditure and income. The Government revenue came from three sources: (a) **rent** on government property, (b) **quarantine fees** on ships entering harbour and (c) **custom duties** on all imported goods. To boost Maltese commerce with foreign countries he: (a) encouraged the export of Maltese goods (b) made Malta a centre for **transit trade** between Europe and the **Levant** (Eastern Mediterranean) (c) reduced custom duties. **Import duties** were fixed at 1% on British imported goods and 2% on all other foreign goods. In 1819-20 the **export duty** and the **transit duty** were abolished while the **quarantine fees** were reduced. The positive effect of these reforms was greatly reduced when Greece became an independent country in 1829. From then onwards Levantine trade became dominated by the large Greek merchant navy.

In 1818 Maitland took the importation of grain from the Maltese *Università dei Grani* and appointed a **Board of Grain Supply** under his supervision. The Government kept a **monopoly** (strict control) on the importation of grain. This monopoly gave the Government about one third of its total annual revenue. Maitland argued that the government monopoly on grain would keep the price of grain low because it was the staple food of the lower classes.



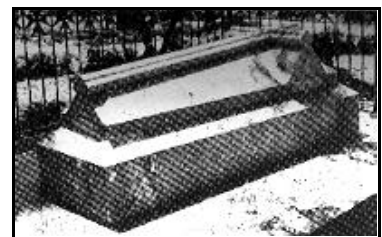
9. Gov. Maitland



10. The Law Courts
(The Castellania)



11. Francesco Rivarolo
Superintendent of Police



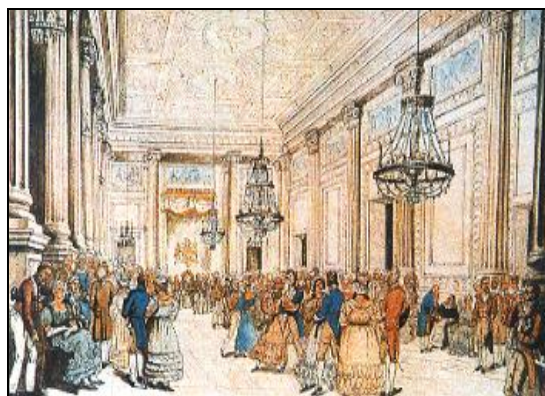
12. Maitland's Monument
(Upper Barracca Gardens)

4. Changes in the way the Law Courts were to function

The moment Maitland got rid of the plague he set about reorganizing the Maltese **judicial system** on the suggestions put forward by the Royal Commission. In 1814 the new **Constitutions of the Courts** were proclaimed and put into force. The most important changes were the following: (a) the *Consolato del Mare* of 1697 was turned into a **Commercial Court** (b) the *Castellania Court* was divided into two halls: the **Criminal Court** and the **Civil Court** (c) the **Court of Appeal** was made up of two halls, one for commercial and one for civil cases (d) the Governor and two judges made up the **Supreme Court of Justice** to deal with exceptional cases. All judges were appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the King. They could not work privately as lawyers. Cases were to be heard in an **open court** (open to the public). There was no appeal from the Criminal Court. The Governor could not change court sentences as the Grandmasters used to do. Italian was made the language of the Courts. One main criticism to these reforms was that, except for commercial cases, few changes were made to the **Criminal Code of Grandmaster Rohan (1784)**. One positive note was that the laws that permitted corsairing, torture and slavery were abolished.



14. Palace Square, Valletta, in Maitland's time



15. The Governor's main hall in the Palace, Valletta

5. Relations between Maitland and the Catholic Church

Maitland was advised by Lord Bathurst not to interfere with the Maltese Catholic Church. But in 1815 there developed a dispute over who was to sit on the Grandmaster's throne in **St John's Church** in Valletta. In the end a compromise was reached with the Vatican. St John's was to be used by the Catholic Church as a **Co-Cathedral** but it remained government property.

The dispute over the powers of the Church Courts took much longer to settle. The dispute started when a suspected person went to hide in a chapel (**right of sanctuary**). As a Protestant, Maitland held the Pope as a foreign power with no right to interfere in the laws of a British colony. In 1822 he went personally to Rome to settle the question of the *privilegium fori* (the right for the clergy to appear in a church court). Both questions were finally settled in 1828, years after Maitland's death, when the Vatican abolished both privileges. Only the Bishop continued to enjoy the *privilegium fori*.

Maitland tried to reduce the wealth and influence of the Church in Malta with the **Mortmain Law** of 1822. This law obliged the Church to sell all property obtained after that date within one year. Otherwise that property would become government property. There was great criticism against this law. To avoid further trouble with the Church, both Maitland and other governors after him did not put this law into practice.

6. Maitland and general education

The Maltese liberals used to point out the poor state of education and the widespread illiteracy of the common people. A voluntary association was set up to open primary schools in the larger towns and villages. One such school was the **Normal School** at Valletta which in 1821 had 200 pupils. But this plan fell short because the Government did not give it financial backing. The Government was of the opinion that a system of primary education would end as to be an added expense to the limited money resources of the islands.

Unit G.5 – The Administration of Sir Thomas Maitland (1813-1824)

1. Mention **one** measure taken by Maitland in Malta's administration with regards to the following:

(a) The Law Courts: _____

(b) The *Università dei Grani*: _____

(c) The police corps: _____

(d) The right of sanctuary: _____

(e) Custom duties _____

(5)

2. Maitland governed Malta like an autocratic Governor. Find **two** examples which prove this point.

_____ (2)

3. Why were Maltese excluded from the government in Maitland's time?

_____ (2)

4. Suggest **one** motive (reason) for Maitland reforms in Malta?

_____ (2)

5. In what way were the reforms in the law courts beneficial to the improvement of justice in Malta? .

_____ (2)

6. How do we know that the Maltese Church was very powerful in Maltese society in Maitland's time?

_____ (1)

7. What was the Mortmain Law say about Church property? Why was it never implemented?

_____ (2)

8. What was the *privilegium fori*? _____

_____ (2)

9. Which field received the least attention under Maitland's administration and why?

_____ (2)

(Total marks = 20 marks)

Unit G.6 – SEC Source Question on Maitland’s Administration

Read carefully these two sources about Maitland and then answer all the questions.

“...- alias *King Tom* is the only Mediterranean statesman in English history ... [He] was the embodiment of England’s power in the Mediterranean. ‘With one foot in Malta’ says his biographer ‘and the other in Corfù, King Tom stood set as the visible embodiment of a *Pax Britannica*. He bestrode the Mediterranean like a Colossus.

As an administrator, he was undoubtedly a capable, energetic public servant, zealously devoted to His Majesty’s service, ever ready to sacrifice himself on the altar of duty.

He had, however, one great defect – he was quarrelsome to the extreme and always spoiling for a fight...His dispatches to the Secretary of State are studies in satire. His pen was vitriolic: nobody, nothing was spared.

But, in spite of all this, [he] did a great deal – a very great deal – for Malta and when the personal reactions of his day subsided with the passage of time and the disappearance of the chief actors, history very justly pointed to [him] as the man who, with consummate ability, laid the foundations of Malta’s institutions, suppressed abuses and effected reforms which only a capable, energetic person, with dynamic energy and absolute fearlessness could effect.”

Source A: A.V. Laferla, *British Malta*, Vol. I, 1938, p. 88-90

“By the time of Maitland’s death, however...the process of formal institutionalization of British rule in Malta had been successfully completed. All authority was vested and exercised by British heads irrespective whether this was in the Courts, the Revenue establishments or the Charities. Maitland found, as a result, that he could absent himself from Malta as frequently as he wished and after 1816 the duties of Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands were added to his duties of Governor of Malta. In Malta, under the direction of Hankey, his subordinates carried on with the administration according to the spirit and letter of his instructions. By contrast the Maltese had, according to Agostino Portelli, a prominent Maltese merchant and lawyer, ‘lost every privilege and consideration’ and had almost become ‘strangers in their own country.’ Portelli’s view is not without significance for despite his readiness to co-operate with the British authorities in Malta, at one stage, he found it necessary to leave Malta and take up residence in Sicily where he stayed until Maitland’s death.’

Source B: Godfrey Baldacchino, *The Maltese Public Service, 1800-1940*, Malta,1997, p. 102.

1. What opinion does one gets about Maitland’s character and abilities when reading source A?

(4)

2. What opinion does one gets about Maitland’s character and abilities when reading source B?

(4)

3. Why was Maitland frequently absent from Malta? _____

(1)

3. Which source do you think is the more reliable for the historian and why?

 _____ (3)
4. What opinion did Maltese living at that time have of Maitland as a person and as an administrator?

 _____ (2)
5. Find **two** instances from the sources to show that Maitland behaved like an **autocratic** governor over the Maltese.

 _____ (2)
6. What is considered to be Maitland's legacy in Maltese history?

 _____ (2)
7. Find **one** fact and **one** opinion from any of the above sources.

 _____ (2)

(Total 20 marks)

Unit G.7 – Early British Malta (1800-1824)

Read carefully the following essay titles and answer any ONE in about 200 to 300 words. Essays carry 20 marks each.

PAPER 2A

On the first years of British rule (1800-1812)

1. Why did the Maltese welcome the British takeover of Malta? Did they have any alternative?
2. Explain the circumstances – political, economic, and otherwise – that led many Maltese to welcome the British presence in Malta in the first decade or so of the 19th century.
3. Sir Thomas Maitland was sometimes known as 'King Tom'. What characterised his governorship and what events did Malta pass through during his administration?

PAPER 2B

On the first years of British rule (1800-1812)

1. War broke out again in 1803 just one year after peace had been signed at Amiens.
 - (a) Why was war renewed between Great Britain and France?
 - (b) Was Malta directly or indirectly involved in this war?
 - (c) Did Malta benefit economically from the new war? Explain. (SEC 1998) **(Marks: 6, 6, 8)**