

The Post and Royalty have long been linked — hence The Royal Mail — but what happens to mail from the Royal Household? Glenn Morgan explains.

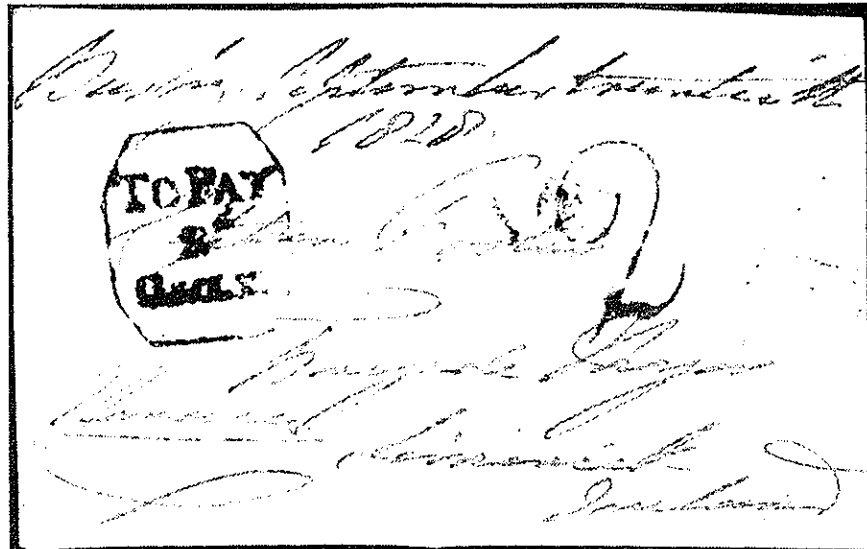
Royal Household Mail

The history of 'Royal' mail is the history of the Post Office itself for, in the reign of King John, messengers began carrying the mails, but were employed only when required so to do. By the reign of Henry III couriers called *nuncii* and *cursores* (messengers and runners) carried messages from the Court. They were an important part of the Royal Household and were the first to wear the Royal livery.

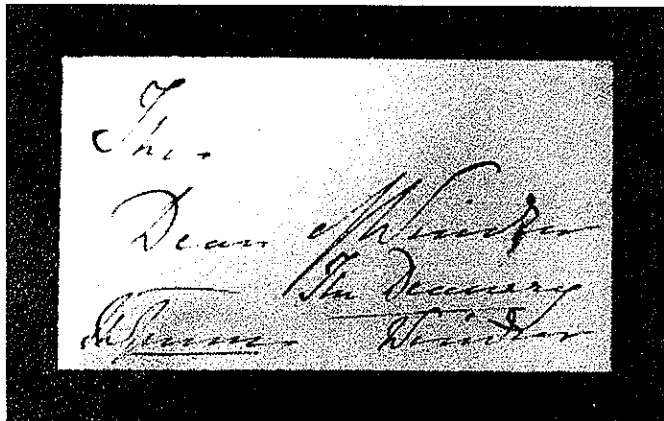
The control of the country, whether by Roman emperors, Saxon chieftains or English kings would always have required means of communication for the carrying of correspondence and administrative or military orders. It is perhaps not surprising that due to the illiteracy of the masses hundreds of years were to pass before more use was allowed to be made of the posts by ordinary folk. In 1635 Charles I opened-up the mails to everyone and the Post Office, as we know it today, gradually evolved as a direct result of the need for the Royal Family to communicate speedily with locations throughout their Kingdom and beyond. Our story continues.

Edward I's period saw horses being kept for hire at specific points (fixed stations) *en route* and William de Luda, Keeper of the Wardrobe, was responsible for paying the expenses of the messengers used for the service. By the following reign the King has twelve messengers constantly at the ready to travel anywhere the King went. They received 3d (1p) a day in pay, and 4s 8d (23.5p) a year for the purchase of shoes. Their pay was supplemented by gifts when they were the bearer of good news.

Nothing especially significant then happened until 1482 when single horsemen were first appointed by Edward IV and two hundred miles were covered in a mere two days by this method during the war with Scotland. By 1484 Richard the Third was afraid of the threat posed by Henry Tudor and needed to be kept informed of events as soon as possible. The Posts were therefore established by relays of horsemen every twenty miles and wherever the King was based his Post Riders would follow. By 1500 a Master of the Posts had been appointed to supervise the Standing Posts on roads to Dover and the North for Henry VII.

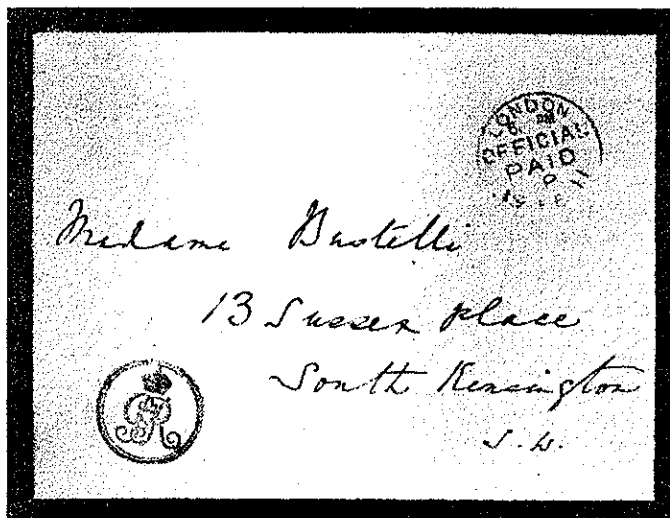


Front of 1828 franked by His Royal Highness The Duke of Clarence, subsequently to become King William IV.



Cover signed 'The Queen' in the handwriting of Queen Victoria.

A typical mourning cover with black edges sent during King George V's reign.



The reign of Henry VIII saw many improvements to the King's Post including the establishment of regular post-stages along major roads of the Kingdom and by 1509 the Treasurer of the Chamber was

made responsible for all payments relating to the Posts. By 1512 Brian Tuke (then termed Clerk of the Signet) was making payments to the Royal Postal Officers.

Tuke had ordered in 1526 that

horses were to be available for the King's service and all requirements for the City of London from 1539 were to be provided by one of the Hackney men, contributions in money being received from fellow Hackney men and Innkeepers. The nationwide provision of horses for use on official business proved to be a major issue with the owners of the horses who were expected to make them available to the messengers or couriers and often abuses occurred whereby payment was 'forgotten', or the animals were over-loaded or over-ridden. Frequently people pretended to be on official business in order to gain access to the horses but attempts at rectifying the situation failed to have much effect. Additionally, the sheer volume of despatches meant that sometimes horses had to be taken out of their ploughs to enable the required number of beasts to be available. Postmasters were allowed to supply horses to travellers at 2s 5d (12p) per mile on the understanding that fresh horses would be made available at only 1d (0.5p) per mile for Royal Messengers. This was to help

Messrs. Barnard, Bishop & Barnard

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General.
Keeper of His Majesty's Privy Purse.

Norfolk Iron Works,

Norwich

supplement their low wages.

Sometime between 1554 and 1558 orders were issued to cover the Posts. Item 3 stated: 'Euery of the postes shall be bound to have always the number of vj (6) horses at the least ij (2) for the pacquett for goers and comers by post.' Item 12 stated: 'The post of Swansford shall take for euery horse xvjd (16d / 6.5p) and shall not be bound to the conueyance of the pacquett to whome in case of lacke all other hacquenymen there shall be ready to furnish horses receiuing for euery horse so supplied to ronne post but by his appointment, neither take for any horse they shall giue out to goe in jorney fare aboue ijd (2d / 1p) at the most for the mile as is aboue said PHILLIP/MARY THE QUEEN.' (The 'pacquett' mentioned above contained letters from the Queen or her officials.)

Political circumstances forced a monopoly to be created for the Posts and it was ordained by Queen Elizabeth I that no letters could be sent to or from abroad unless by the Royal Posts but during this reign private messages did begin to be carried. When carrying the Royal Mail the Courier was to blow his horn ('as oft as he met company, or four times in every mile').

On August 5, 1565 Robert Gascoigne was appointed Poste of the Courte and in 1568 Thomas Randolph (Master of the Posts) discharged all Posts except those relating to the Court in the interests of economy unless they were prepared to work for half of their existing salary.

Special Articles of Instructions were issued in 1584. These proved that private letters had begun to be carried with the Sovereign's mail as Article 9 states: '... any postes servant or boy riding with the packet to deliver any by-letters or private packets before we have first discharged himself of the packet for Her Majesties affaires

Q.M.N.G.

M. B. ...
290/322 Oxford Street
W.

Cover from the offices of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild (QMNG), St James's Palace, 1916, which existed to help the troops.

Post Office Notice giving instructions of how to handle Royal Household mail.

Immediate.
GENERAL POST OFFICE, 101
SIR,
His Majesty the King has proceeded to
OUTWARD LETTERS.
You will stamp with the "Official Paid" date-stamp any letters or other postal packets sent by His Majesty, which bear His signature or are certified by the autograph signature of the Keeper of the Privy Purse or of either of His Majesty's Private Secretaries, and you will keep a proper official record of every packet so stamped, and forwarded free of postage.
If you have no "Official Paid" date-stamp, post will pre-pay by Postage Stamps, any such packets certified as above, unless they are addressed to Government Offices, in which case they should be forwarded unsealed with the Official Letters.
The value of the Postage Stamps which you may have affixed to packets sent as above, must be entered in the account overleaf, which you will forward to the Comptroller and Accountant General, as soon as His Majesty has left
The amount so claimed by you will be allowed after it has been checked.
INWARD LETTERS.
Any unpaid letter or other postal packet which does not bear an "Official Paid" date-stamp and is addressed to the King, the Queen, is to be delivered free. No postage stamps need be affixed to such packets; but their weight should be entered in the account overleaf.
I am,
Your obedient Servant,
A. F. KING,
Secretary.
The Postmaster
Clerk in Waiting.
11591 G.S.P. 49 250 2137 0 & S. 3639 217.21

Cover of 1906 signed by the Keeper of His Majesty's Privy Purse.

by delivering the same into the hands of the next Standing Post, unto whom also he shall commit and deliver all the by-letters and private packets as well as the other, under paine of the forfeiture of ten shillings (50p) to the post offended.'

In 1591 a Proclamation ordered that no letters could be sent or received from foreign countries except by the Post and on February 24, 1598 Sir John Stanhope (Master of the Posts) was instructed by letter to reinstate the Standing and Ordinary Posts between the Court and Holyhead, and also by way of Bristol.

The late 1500s saw certain towns beginning to receive relief regarding the supplying of horses for official despatch (Reading, Grantham and Kingston, for example). Also letters from Ireland arrived at Court via Chester from where the Postmaster would ride to London, or, indeed, wherever the Court was based and wait for the King's reply to be written. For this service he was paid £1 13s 4d (£1.66) for the journey and ten groats a day after the first two days attendance at Court.

During James I's reign there were four Posts centred on the Court, namely Courte to Barwicke (Scotland), Courte to Beaunoris (Ireland), Courte to Dover (Continent) and Courte to Plymouth (Royal Dockyard).

The Posts were losing the Crown £3,400 per annum by 1609 and a State Monopoly was therefore established on letter carrying. 1615 saw Matthew de Quester (Merchants Strangers Post within the City of London) complaining that the King had not paid £600 due to him in respect of postal packets carried.

In July 1635 the Royal Posts were opened-up to members of the General Public by Charles I, as mentioned above, and no longer was it for the sole use of State and reigning Monarch. Two years later, on June 22, 1637, a Patent was granted to Thomas Witherings. Headed 'PATENT FOR THE LETTER OFFICE OF ENGLAND GRANTED TO THOMAS WITHERINGS - 22 JUNE 1637' it contains detailed instructions for the 'speedy conveyinge, carrying and recarrying of letters by Post betwixt our Kingdoms'. Included is a list of 'the charges of the Postes for the Fower (four) Roades through the Kingdome to be given by the Master of the Letter Office of England, Scotland and Ireland, Betwixt London and Berwicke'. The first entry reads:

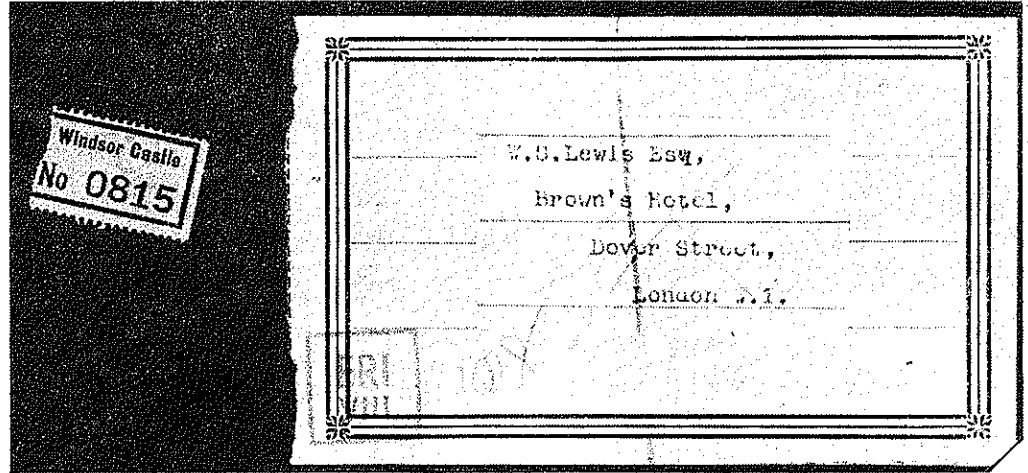
Name of Stage	To be now Paid Per Diem (Day)
Court	£00 02s 06d (12.5p)

James Hickes was appointed Head Postmaster by the King in the 1640s whilst his Court was cut-off from London and was ordered by Warrant to collect payments from the Postmasters and deal with arrears. He also established new stages including Weymouth and Lyme Regis. Letters destined for and from Court were also under his supervision, as was the reporting of disloyal Postmasters.

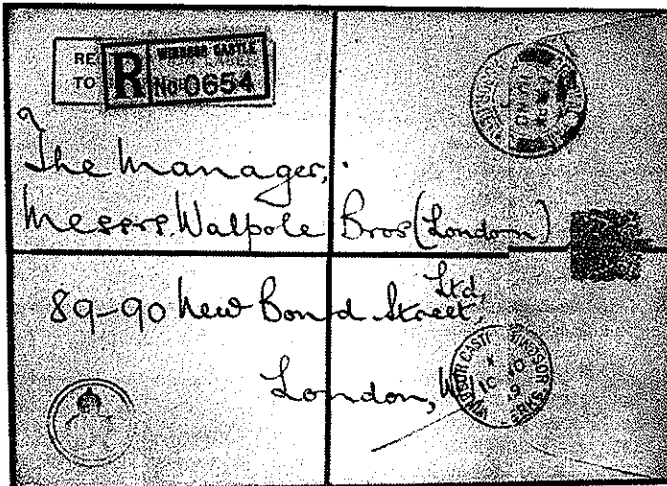
The rent for farming out the postal service in 1653 during the Cromwellian period of our history amounted to £10,000 per annum and in 1657 Cromwell passed a Statute establishing the Post of England with a Postmaster General and Comptroller. In 1660 the rent for farming-out the postal service amounted to £21,500 at the time of the Restoration of our Monarchy.

Charles II settled upon his brother, James, Duke of York, most of the revenues from the Post. The Act was 15 Chas. II c.14 (1663) and payments were made under the Privy Seal in favour of the King to an amount not exceeding £5,382 10s (£5,382.50) per annum. A later Act - 22 & 23 Chas. II c.27 - made the payment perpetual. James Hickes petitioned for compensation and support in 1666 following the thirty years that he had served the late King, especially during the Plague period. By 1680 the rent for farming-out the postal service amounted to £43,000 per annum.

When James II came to the throne in 1685 the revenues from the postal service were estimated at £65,000 per annum and during that year all revenues reverted to the Crown. The following year saw a pension of £4,700 being paid to Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, and her successors the Dukes of Grafton from the Post Office revenues until 1856 when it was commuted for a lump sum



Registered parcel label bearing the cypher of King Edward VIII, 1936.

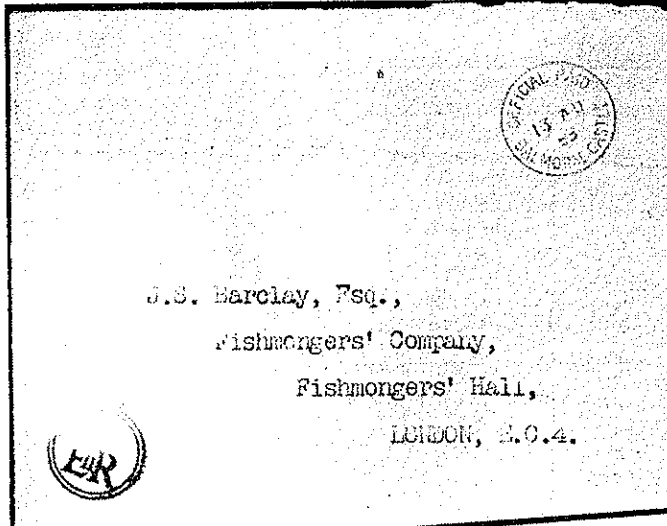


Registered letter from Windsor Castle, 1939.

Secretaries of State and their Clerks. Until the 1780s such Court mail had to be received at the General Post Office in London before the ordinary mails were permitted to leave the City. These delays were the subject of many complaints and the plans by John Palmer for his mail coaches included instructions that the ordinary mails should not be delayed due to the late despatch of Government (Royal) correspondence. However, as late as 1807, Court letters were still being delivered immediately upon arrival in London.

On June 21, 1793 the Office of Court Poste was abolished by order in Council but not until the death of the incumbent Mr Penton. In its place the Sovereign had his mail dealt with in the same manner as his Officers of State and the Franking Privilege was accordingly granted. It was not until January 1812 that Penton died and the Office could finally be abolished.

Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 and three years later on January 10, 1840 Rowland Hill's Uniform Penny Postage was

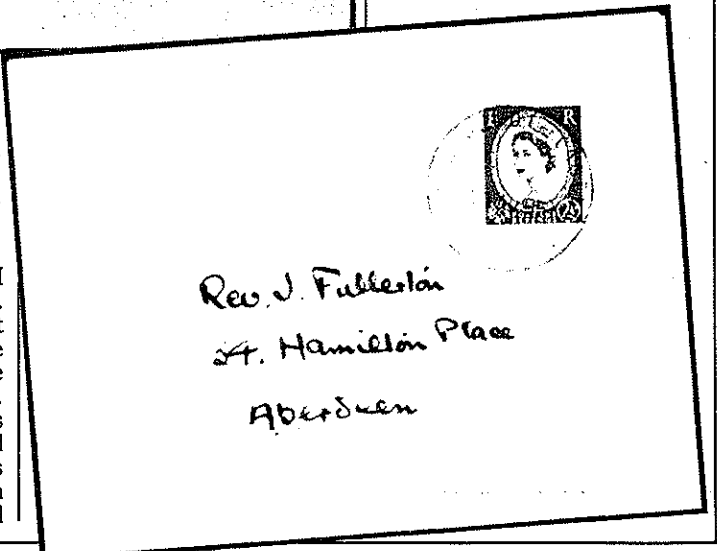


An Official paid item of mail from Balmoral Castle, 1955.

Posted at the fete held at Abergeldie Castle on August 20, 1955 - postmark in use for only a few hours.

payment of £91,000. George III surrendered all revenues in 1760. In its place he accepted a Civil List payment for the support of the Royal Household and the expenses of the civil government.

During the 1700s Court mail was considered to be letters directed to The Queen, His Royal Highness the Prince, the Lord High Treasurer, and both principal



introduced. The Franking Privilege ceased and the use of the mails for official items was accounted for the Post Office by the 'Official Paid' Mail System henceforth. Incidentally, Queen Victoria gave up her Franking Privilege as a gesture of goodwill and paid her postage bills by adhesive stamps, just like her Subjects, but she signed her envelopes 'The Queen' to denote sender.

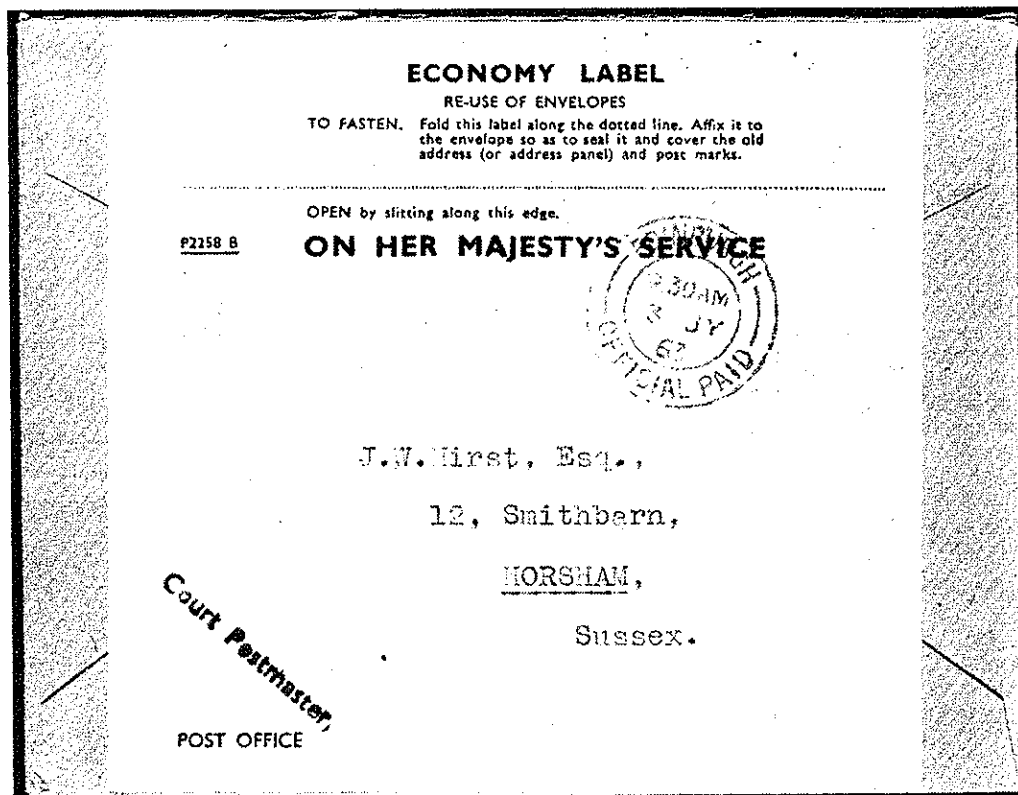
From June 4, 1843 petitions addressed to the sovereign by any of her subjects were allowed to be sent free of postal charges regardless of their weight and by the 1850s the Post Office was dealing with correspondence of a semi-official nature by the use of Paying Accounts. In 1857 the Duke of Cornwall and in 1863 both Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales took advantage of this means of accounting for their postage.

A Court Telegraphist called George Warren was appointed around 1870 and in 1877 a sub post office was opened at Sandringham House for the benefit of the then Prince of Wales. The final major introduction of Victoria's reign occurred in 1897 when Osborne House had the first Post Office opened on-site for use by the Court.

King Edward VII will go down in postal history as the Monarch who reintroduced free postage for himself and Household. In one fell swoop he did away with his mother's decision to abolish free postage and he consequently gave collectors of Household mail a whole new range of material to collect including certifying stamps for many departments and offices. Aside from this course of action the other major introduction in Edward's reign was that of 'ROYAL HOUSEHOLD/OFFICIAL' overprinted postage stamps. These are highly desirable, very expensive and attractive to forgers. Potential buyers should therefore exercise extreme caution when buying these stamps.

King George V's reign did not bring about any significant changes but King Edward VIII in his short period introduced the King's Flight. The service exists to this day (albeit renamed The Queen's Flight) and was set-up to offer the Royal Family air services when needed and the planes sometimes carry items of Court post. King George VI added nothing of significance to our story.

The earlier part of the reign of our current Queen saw few changes in the manner in which the mail was handled, although of late there have been moves away from the old methods. No longer are letters typed using the extra large typeface peculiar to the Household. In their place are high-tech word processing machines capable of handling the tens of thousands of letters dealt with



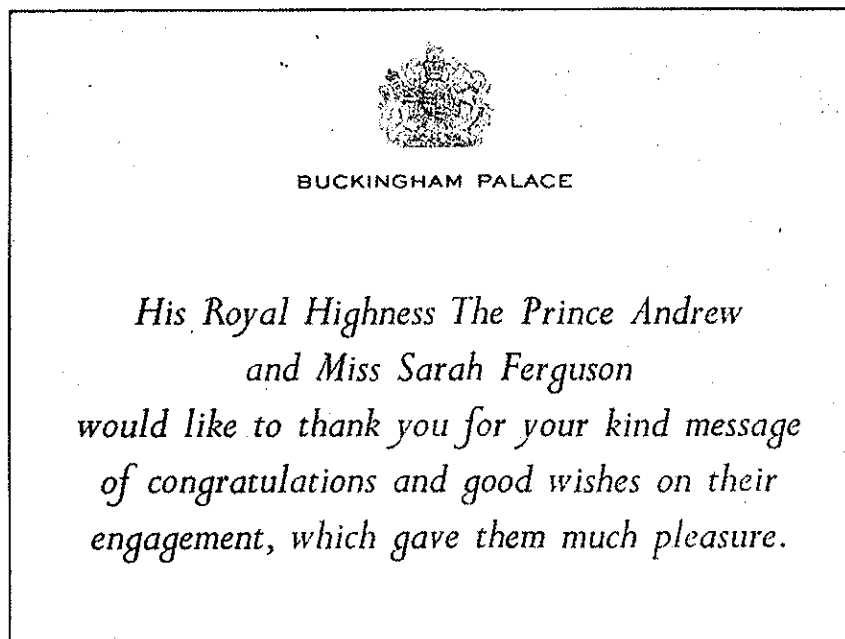
Single line cachet of the Court Postmaster, 1963.

annually. Postal franking machines are now used on mail from the Estate Offices of Sandringham, Windsor and Balmoral and Tele-messages have replaced the famous Telegrams used when one reaches the grand old age of one hundred years.

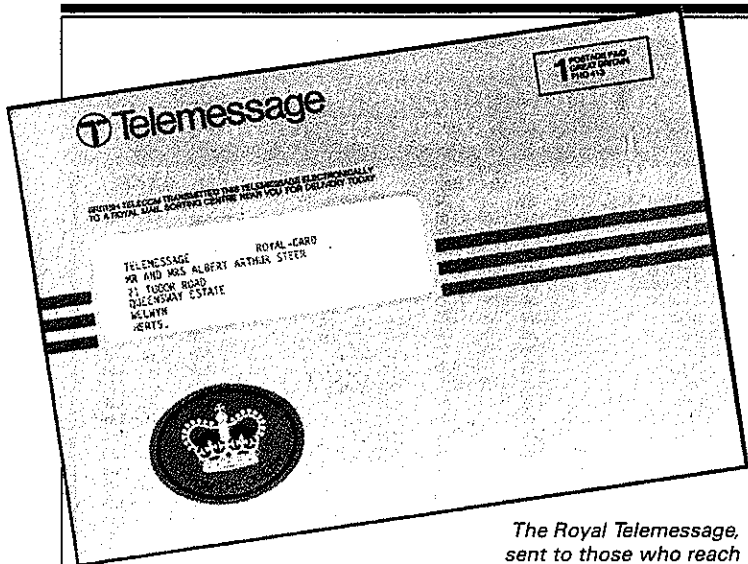
Recently there has been no use of 'Official Paid' cancellations in red on mail emanating from the Royal Household at Buckingham Palace. The writer has seen many recent covers all of which have either had a 'LONDON IS MLO' cancellation in black or no postal markings of any description. Prior to this departure the 'LONDON SWDO/OFFICIAL PAID' cancellers had the word 'OFFICIAL' removed



Parcel Post cancellation of Balmoral Castle, 1980.



Special card of thanks sent to those offered their best wishes to Andrew and Sarah on their engagement.



The Royal Telemessage, sent to those who reach their centenary or diamond wedding anniversary.

leaving a somewhat off-centre 'PAID'. This would appear to have been a deliberate change of policy towards such mail. The use of Departmental and Royal Monogram Certifying Stamps is also altering, albeit very slowly. The Ascot Office now uses pre-printed Certifying impressions on its envelopes and the Royal Monogram Certifying Stamp on letters from Balmoral at certain times is incorporated into the postal franking machine impression. Also, the Paymaster of the Household and Lord Chamberlain now use the Royal Monogram Certifying Stamp 'EIRR' instead of 'customised' versions of the Departmental Stamps.

The volume of Royal Household mail posted each year is immense, especially when events, anniversaries, births and deaths occur. A

heavy strain is placed on all concerned in processing the correspondence and it is not uncommon for very senior officers of the Household to give assistance at peak times and clearly a warm affinity exists between the staff at the residences and Post Offices used for the transmission of 'Royal' mail. Queen Victoria was very close to the Postmasters of Whippingham and Crathie and there is a great fascination in the Royal Family by millions of people around the world that hopefully will never wane. As long as people maintain their love of all things Royal there will be the need for postal facilities to serve them, be they resident at one of the grand State Palaces or at a small private country home and the postal historian will be around to record for posterity the changes that occur.



Paul Hogarth working on the design of the new Royal Telemessage intended for English residents (showing Windsor Castle).

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1000 India, Mixed.....	25.00	200 Tunisia.....	8.25		
50 Sarawak.....	3.25	1000 Turkey.....	12.75		
500 Malaya.....	15.25	1000 USA.....	21.25		
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