

## The Court Post Office 1990-2004 Part 5:

by Glenn Morgan FRPSL

Parts 1-4 of this series were published in the *Bulletin* from April-July. (Part 4 in July was incorrectly headed part 3.) Mr Morgan is the author of *Royal Household Mail*, published in 1982, and Hon Librarian of the National Philatelic Society. A profile of him was published in the *Bulletin* in February 1998.

**Mourning mail** The past 15 years has seen much joy for the Royal Family. Unfortunately they have also experienced much sadness, as in any family, although their grieving is extremely public. The Royal Family goes into immediate mourning, traditionally for a period of up to six months, depending on who has died, although these days it tends to be only a few days.

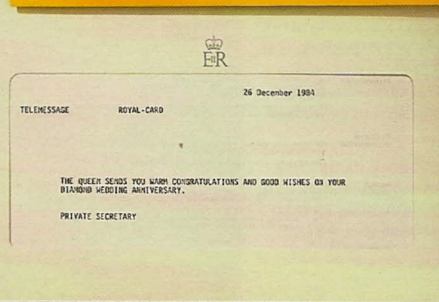
Princess Diana, Princess Margaret and HM Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother all passed away. As recorded in the June 2003 *Bulletin*, such events result in huge increases in mail to the Royal residences. At the height of mourning for Princess Diana, between 80 and 100 mailbags a day were received, compared to the more usual two or three. From a collecting viewpoint, Royal deaths produce mourning stationery, as envelopes and letter-heads framed with a black border are brought into service as a mark of respect. There are funeral invitations to send out, acceptances to process and letters of thanks in respect of the condolences expressed to despatch.

**Celebration mail** There is a long tradition of a Monarch sending greetings to subjects reaching a milestone in life, be it a significant age or wedding anniversary. King George V introduced a service in 1917 that marked 100th birthdays and diamond (60th) wedding anniversaries. This tradition has been continued, and expanded. Her Majesty now sends messages for diamond, 65th and platinum (70th) wedding anniversaries and every year thereafter, and for the 100th and 105th birthdays and every year thereafter.

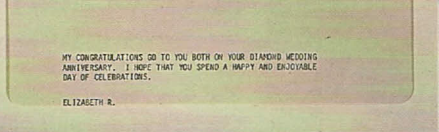
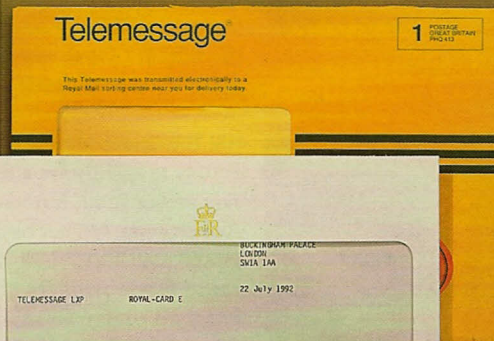
The Inland Telegram Service was used for many years, until it ceased in 1982, when Telemessages took their place. Royal Cards have replaced these since 1999. Many people do not realise that it is necessary to apply for a congratulatory message, believing that a card will magically appear. This is not feasible, not least because of Data Protection Act legislation which would preclude the Royal Household from having access to the dates of every potential celebrant. A form addressed to the Anniversaries Office at Buckingham Palace will, however, result in a card being sent. Applications must not be made more than three weeks in advance, but can be sent up to six months after the event has been celebrated. As it is The Queen's custom to send messages only to citizens of one of Her Realms or UK Overseas Territories, those born or married overseas, or who currently live abroad, must provide evidence of their British nationality. Wherever possible, cards are 'pulled' in instances where death of the proposed recipient has been advised in time, to avoid impacting on the grief of the family. This can involve contacting the local delivery office on the proposed date of delivery – something that was never possible with Telemessages.

**Royal Telemessages** There were two different types of Telemessages, as shown opposite. The artists were chosen locally by the regional Arts Councils and were all approved by The Queen. The final Royal Telemessage was despatched from Buckingham Palace in time to be delivered to the addressee on 11 June 1999, to be replaced next day by Royal Cards.

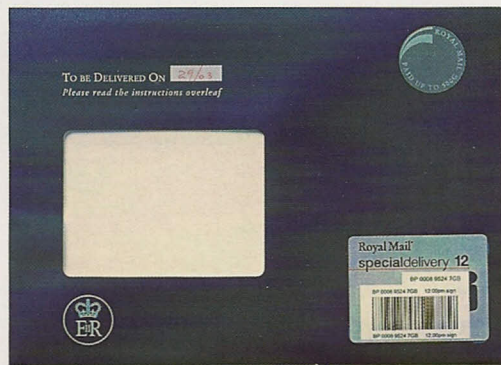
# The series concludes with Royal messages and postmasters



**Royal Telemessages** The initial design (top) bore the Royal Coat of Arms on its face and a Royal Mail Coach inside. This was replaced in 1990 by a set of Royal residences: Windsor Castle (left), Caernarfon Castle, the Palace of Holyroodhouse and Killyleagh, used as appropriate for celebrants in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

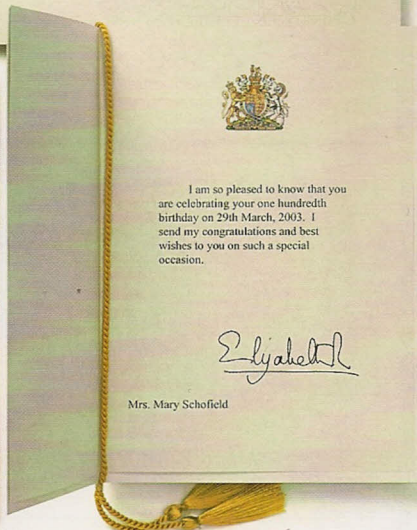






**Royal cards** are intended for recipients residing in the UK. An insert bears the Royal Coat of Arms, a greeting from Her Majesty and a facsimile of her signature. A BP (Buckingham Palace) prefix on the label's number identifies the source of the mail item to Royal Mail officials.

A new envelope design may have been introduced by now, as one was planned for introduction by the end of 2003.



**Royal Cards** Royal Cards were introduced on 12 June 1999, timed to arrive on The Queen's official birthday. In 2002, a total of 22,000 cards were despatched, all of which were sent by Royal Mail Special Delivery two days prior to the intended receipt date. If the celebrant lives in Australia, Canada or New Zealand, the completed application form is submitted to the relevant Governor-General, who, as The Queen's personal representative in these countries, arranges for despatch of the greetings.



**HM The Queen Mother's 100th birthday card** The first member of the Royal Family to qualify for a free congratulatory birthday message on the occasion of her 100th birthday was Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, on 4 August 2000. On her birthday, The Queen Mother emerged from Clarence House with The Prince of Wales. Following a ride past by the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, she watched the Band of the Irish Guards playing Happy Birthday, and a march past by the Grenadier Guards. The Queen's Postman, A (Tony) Nicholls, then delivered the Royal Card (left). She asked her equerry, Irish Guards Captain William de Rouet, to open the envelope with his sword, as the envelope had been sealed prior to despatch. She was clearly delighted, smiling as she opened the card because The Queen had signed the card 'Lilibet', her childhood name.

**Royal Postmen** The Court Postmaster is backed-up by a small team of postmen who prepare the mails for delivery to each department. Similarly, they collect the post in readiness for several van delivery runs per day to Nine Elms sorting office for London mail or the local office elsewhere in the Kingdom. The postmen also staff the counters at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle and each wears a unique badge. Prior to 1990, these were cloth badges that were sewn on to the uniform, and then an attractive red, black and gold generic badge was utilised (right, at top). These bore the residence name only and were not personalised. The current version is worded either Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace below a crown, and with the words Royal Mail (right, centre and bottom). It is in red, gold and black with the forename of the postman; only two were ever made for Windsor Castle.

**Court Postmasters** The role of Court Postmaster involves managing all employees, plus the incoming and outgoing mail for and from the Royal Family members and their Households. The postal staffs are employees of Royal Mail and are not employed by the Royal Family. There have only been 28 holders of the office of Court Postmaster from Robert Gascoigne, appointed in 1565, through to Michael Delaney who came to office late in 2003. Three have held office during the period covered here and brief biographical details follow.

Adrian Vidler MVO took-over from Brian G Johnston on 21 December 1990, having previously been Assistant Court Postmaster since March 1985. During Adrian's period of office, the position of Court Postmaster was evaluated and upgraded to Superintendent (PE 'A') in 1998, having previously been Assistant Superintendent. The job content was further re-evaluated in 2003 to become graded as a (SB9) Senior Management position. Adrian's final day of service as Court Postmaster was 28 June 2002. Shortly before, he was given the MVO (Member of the Royal Victorian Order). Queen Victoria instituted this title as a reward for personal service to the Sovereign. It is clear that the major contribution that Adrian made to update the outmoded Royal postal services had met with Her Majesty's approval.

David Wren came to Buckingham Palace from the House of Commons, where he had been the Assistant Postmaster, on 4 June 2002. He was appointed temporary Court Postmaster, a position he held until 29 August 2003. David has now returned to the House of Commons, where he is Deputy Postmaster within the Palace of Westminster.

Michael J Delaney was appointed as Assistant Court Postmaster on 1 April 2001; retitled Deputy Court Postmaster in July 2003. His appointment as Court Postmaster was effective from 1 September 2003 and hopefully Michael will experience a long and happy time in this unique position, having joined the Royal Mail staff at Buckingham Palace 13 years previously as a cadet ●



It is hoped that this survey will assist collectors to identify items they may be unaware of and therefore are probably missing from their collections. However, it must be stated that Royal Mail and Royal Household members employed at Royal residences are extremely busy and therefore cannot respond to requests for copies of any postal cachets or markings recorded here. As a refusal to comply with such a request may offend, please consult a dealer in British postal history or ephemera if you wish to obtain such material.