

POST OFFICE 350
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Bagshot was the location of the Post Office's 350th anniversary celebrations held on 30 July 1985. Set in the delightful grounds of Bagshot Park several hundred local inhabitants, press and television people and invited guests gathered to witness a re-enactment of the signing of the proclamation setting-up the Post Office back in 1635.

Despite being mid-summer, the weather could only be described as abismal. Heavy rain threatened to ruin the afternoons open-air proceedings but fortunately, shortly before the crowds began arriving, the sun broke through for the first time in several days and remained for most of our stay. It was rumoured that the Army Chaplain on whose land we were put in a good word with his "boss" up above. It worked.

Once inside the grounds there was much to amuse both young and old alike. For children the Post Office had arranged fairground rides, competitions and even Postman Pat and his cat put in an appearance. The grown-ups meanwhile were able to visit a display of beautiful roses by the National Rose Society and a police stand where the highly successful "Code-it-and-keep-it" campaign was explained.

The North West Postal Region hot air balloon was in attendance as were many very old and up-to-the-minute vehicles from the Post Office fleet and private collections ranging from the hen-and-chickens bicycle of the 1880's through to a C registration van and just about everything in between. An indication that the Post Office is prepared for the future came with the large-scale model of a space shuttle in Royal Mail livery. Datapost vehicles were well represented in the form of motor-cycle despatch motor bikes, a model helicopter and the Datapost Racing Team Ford Escort car looking very smart in its red and yellow colourings. A favourite of the writer was the pre-war Mobile Post Office with the highly appropriate registration number GPO2. It was rescued from the scrap-heap in 1982 and has been fully restored to its former glory.

At 1500 hours the drone of a helicopter could be heard in the distance and as it approached the crowd cheered and waved the Wessex chopper of the Queens Flight, piloted by His Royal Highness Prince Charles. The helicopter landed in the high security area where Prince Charles met the welcoming party at the house. The dignitaries then boarded the mailcoach used for the 200th anniversary celebrations last year where, once again, John Parker drove the coach-and-four into and around the arena.

Prince Charles and his entourage then proceeded to inspect the postmen in period uniforms prior to sitting on the dais for the commencement of the arena festivities. First to appear were the men and women of the Sealed Knot Society who spend most summer weekends re-constructing battle scenes from the English Civil War. No battles this day, though, but a fascinating insight into the uses of the Pike and musket gun. Not a drop of pillar box red blood was to be seen, thankfully.

The main event of the afternoon came next as actors re-enacted the Proclamation signing. Thomas Witherings, Britains first Postmaster General read the manuscript to King Charles I, whilst our future King, Charles III, listened attentively to his predecessor. Much needed revenues would accrue from the opening-up of the Royal Mails to the general public. ~~Money~~ ^{which} was desperately needed to help pay for the wars raging at the time.

Next came the speeches. First Sir Ronald Dearing, who presented Datapost aeroplanes and Royal Mail lorries for Prince William and Prince Henry, followed by Prince Charles who replied ~~with~~ ⁱⁿ his usual witty style.

The Royal guest then left to view the marquee exhibition prior to flying himself home for tea.

A parade of historical postal vehicles then followed and to close the event we were treated to a display of the skills of the Red Devils parachute team.

The afternoon was a tremendous success and is, After all, unlikely to be repeated for at least another twenty five years, if not fifty, by which time the Post Office will be unrecognisable. Already plans are afoot to split the organisation into four separate subsidiaries namely Counter Services, National Giro, letter post and parcel mail. This, coupled with continued threats to do away with the Post Office monopoly on letter mail services could have unimaginable effects on its future.

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