

Her Majesty is on record as having referred to the Royal Family as 'The Firm' and, like any successful business, it has to process large quantities of incoming and outgoing mail. In early 2012, the authors were given the opportunity of visiting Buckingham Palace to interview The Court Postmaster, David Baxter, and this article is the result of that visit. It also contains information gleaned from a previous visit made in 2004 in instances where there have been no changes to the arrangements in place.

The Court Post Office: Part One

By Glenn H Morgan and John Holman

Detailed arrangements about the Court Post were first published in *Royal Household Mail* in 1992 (Ref. 1). This was later updated for the period 1990-2004 in 'The Court Post Office' series of five articles (Ref 2). This present article serves to introduce the subject and to record current postal and certifying markings used on mail in all the Royal offices and residences. Part two will cover mourning and celebratory mail, and list the main Royal residences and their postal arrangements.

Postal and telegraph services

The Court Post Office currently provides a wide-range of services including:

- A Court Post Office service at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. Both locations offer a counter service with a range of post office products, and internal delivery communications.
- All postage.
- Preparation, despatch and bringing to account all official and private mail.
- Couriers and delivery services to accompany the mail on all special despatches for The Queen and The Prince of Wales between the palaces and other residences.
- Additional services such as travelling 'Court' despatches, telegrams and the Royal Card service.

Staffing

Royal Mail Group Ltd provides staff in the Court Post Office, not the Royal Household as many assume. The Court Postmaster, Postmen and Telegraph Clerks are based at Buckingham Palace. One Telegraph Clerk is based at Windsor Castle and drivers and couriers are also part of the establishment of 12 personnel.

Court postmaster

The current Court Postmaster, David Baxter, was appointed to the role in 2006, having previously been at the House of Commons Post Office. David is only the 29th person to hold this important position since its formation in 1565 when Robert Gascoigne became the first holder of the office. By 2008 David had transformed much of the mail from being posted first class to using the second class service, which offered huge ongoing savings in costs for the Household. He has continued to reduce costs by purchasing outright the Pitney Bowes franking machines at Buckingham Palace and at Windsor Castle and by doing away at every opportunity with all activities that involve departments or Principals applying cachets or

cancellations by hand.

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, much as it would have done in the first Elizabethan era. Until recently there was a Deputy Court Postmaster, but the role became vacant and is unlikely to be filled in the future.

Royal postmen

A small team of postal workers prepare the two mail deliveries received daily from the London South Mail Centre at Nine Elms for delivery to each department and Principal, with four deliveries to, and five collections from, each office 'In/Out tray' daily. There are two van delivery runs per day to Nine Elms for London mail, or to the local office for those to be found elsewhere in the Kingdom.

The postmen also staff the post office counters where, incidentally, there are no Horizon counter automation machines in use. Each postman wears a unique badge, the current version being worded either Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace below a crown, and with the words Royal Mail. It is primarily gold in colour with a red line and black wording, including the forename of the postman. Only two have ever been made for Windsor Castle.

Accounting for postage

Until 31 March 2001, the Court Post Office's postal and telegraph services were provided free of charge by the Post Office. From 1 April 2001 the Household, at its suggestion, has paid. As a result of revisions to the level of service and a review of the costs with Royal Mail, significant savings have been made.

Arrangements for the handling of mail

Services for the land-based residences

Postal vans are used at all times from/to Buckingham Palace for the transmission of mail relating to Sandringham House, Highgrove House and Windsor Castle, plus the London residences of Clarence House, St James Palace and Kensington Palace. Skynet air services function for Balmoral Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse when Her Majesty is in residence.

An interim mail van service is used from Buckingham Palace for mail destined for The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge when they are at Anglesey until such time as they take-

up full-time residency in Kensington Palace. Their outgoing mail envelopes are cancelled with the Buckingham Palace franking machine when at their London office, which can be readily identified when separated from the contents due to the use of a 'W' (William) or a 'C' (Catherine) on the envelope flap. The Duke also still uses envelopes with a 'W' and an 'H' on it when working from the office that he shares with his brother Prince Harry.

Mail entering Royal residences continues to have been previously security screened at appropriate locations and by appropriately trained personnel, adhering to a consistent national policy introduced following the 11 September tragedy of 2001.

Royal Household employees have access to a postbox by the Side Door at Buckingham Palace and three boxes at Windsor Castle for personal mail.

Services for offices on the move

HM Yacht *Britannia* has been run by a charitable trust since it docked at Leith, Edinburgh in 1998 and no longer has Royal associations. Similarly, The Queen's Flight no longer uses any markings following its relocation to RAF Northolt. The Royal Train has never utilised any special markings to indicate its origin, with mail simply being posted at its arrival town.

The Royal Mews has responsibility for The Queen's state and private motor and horse-drawn vehicles and carriages and The Master of the Horse used to use a certifying cachet, but such mail now receives the Buckingham Palace meter marking with no indication as to department of origin.

Postal markings

The past few years have seen major changes in how the mail is cancelled at each residence and this has been adequately described and illustrated previously (Ref 1 and Ref 2).

This section instead describes the markings that may be seen on Royal Household mail as of 2012. It is a simplified listing of types in that it does not illustrate subtle changes to markings, nor does it necessarily depict the same basic type of marking from every residence.

Handstamps used today are made of a rubber composition and so invariably have a limited life and will be replaced whenever necessary, resulting in no, minor or major changes to the appearance of the new cancellation. They incorporate rotating dials within, enabling the day, month and year to





be chosen (as distinct from the old-fashioned method of inserting loose type) and these can only hold a set number of years, resulting in the need to replace them periodically. Sandringham House provides an example of this, as the existing handstamp expired on 31 December 2011, so when Her Majesty is next in residence at Christmas a new handstamp will be in use.

All handstamps may be of the SID (Self Inking Datestamp) type that incorporates its own built-in ink pad, as its name implies, or may be a simple rubber stamp requiring the use of whatever ink pad is to hand. This explains why some markings are seen in colours other than black, such as red, blue or violet. Indeed, a current handstamp for Holyrood is struck largely in blue but with a red date at its centre, which is especially attractive. However, the Court Post Office places no significance on these colour changes, nor should any be implied by collectors.

Photo credits: (Top left to right) Buckingham Palace - David Baron, Royal Mail van at Buckingham Palace - Glenn Morgan, the Palace of Holyroodhouse - Alexandre Vialle, Windsor Castle - CodyR and Sandringham House - Jim Linwood

Principal markings on outgoing mail

Mail from Royal residences is despatched in one of three types of labelled mailbag.

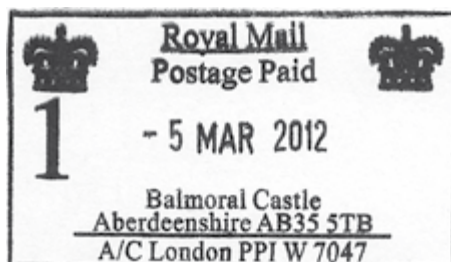
1. Stamped mail

Type 1 – *With Court Post Office wording.* Used on general mail, special delivery items, certificates of posting, etc, at Buckingham Palace. The Balmoral and Holyroodhouse handstamps are probably left-over from the days when they provided a counter service.

Type 2 – *Without Court Post Office wording.* Used primarily on first day covers from Royal Household staff working at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, as there are counter services provided for them. The postage stamps invariably will only bear the outer ring when struck.

2. Rectangular 'Postage Paid' mail

Type 3 – *First Class.* Used on first class inland mail.



Type 4 – Second Class. Used on second class inland mail.



Type 5 – No Class, but with Great Britain. Used on overseas mail.



3. Meter franked mail

The red markings will consist of up to three elements. At far left may be the cipher (crown/EIIR), centrally may be the residence name and date, while far right will always bear either a first or second class rectangular PPI to Royal Mail's standard pattern, or, for the Diamond Jubilee year only, wavy lines over a postage stamp on appropriate mail.

Type 6 – Incorporating cipher, residence name/date and PPI. Used on most mail from Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, in first class (now rarely seen) or second class (more generally seen) versions.



Type 7 – Incorporating PPI section only. Used on mail from specific departments, such as Royal Collection Enterprises, in first class (now rarely seen) or second class (more generally seen) versions at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.



Type 8 – Incorporating cipher, Buckingham Palace date and wavy lines cancelling a diamond blue (or pre-launch of that colour stamp, gold) Machin first class definitive postage stamp. Used on mail responses to congratulatory letters and cards received during 2012 from subjects congratulating The Queen on Her Diamond Jubilee. A Windsor Castle 'wavy lines' element does not exist.



Other markings encountered

These days there are only a few other markings seen on Royal Household mail, and most of these (except meter markings **Type 13**) will probably cease over time, as they are deemed to be largely unnecessary in today's automated and standardised world. This is a shame from a collector's point of view, but is totally understandable when realising that the Royal Household is a major British business,

where costs need to be held in check.

Certifying stamps (cachets)

Previously used examples of certifying stamps have included those for the Privy Purse, Lord Steward and Lord Chamberlain. These largely obsolete markings are popular with some collectors, with a few variations being quite elusive. Most types known are fully detailed in (Refs 1 to 3).

Type 9 – Royal Cipher handstamp. Occasionally still seen on mail from various offices and residences. At least one copy is held by the Court Post Office (9a). Examples are known with an incorrect ‘11’ between the E and R (9b)



Type 9a



Type 9b



Type 10

Type 10 – Departmental Certifying Handstamp for The Royal Collection. (A similar cachet but worded ‘ROYAL COLLECTION / ENTERPRISES LTD. / [crown] / St. JAMES’S PALACE SW1A 1BQ’ was seen on an item of outgoing mail during our visit.)

Type 11 – Departmental Certifying Handstamp for Royal Collection Enterprises Ltd., but rarely seen these days.



Type 11

Type 12 – Departmental Pre-Printed Stationery. The Lord Chamberlain at Holyroodhouse still uses this envelope with the marking and his title at bottom left. It is thought to be the last surviving item of this type of pre-printed certifying stationery.



Type 12

Lord Chamberlain

Meter markings

Types 13a-c – Typical currently used meter markings from outlying offices or residences. Markings from other locations may well exist, such as The Royal Studs, Sandringham, which was last seen in use during 2003.



Type 13a — Balmoral Castle

02
02
00
07
19
76
94



Type 13b — The Castle and Gardens of Mey



Type 13c — Sandringham House

02
07
08
40
28
08
71



IF UNDELIVERED
RETURN TO
ESTATE OFFICE
SANDRINGHAM
NORFOLK PE35 6EN

03
05
51
0A
19
77
13



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 do not respond to requests for copies of any postal cachets or markings recorded here. As such a refusal to comply may offend, please consult a dealer in British postal history or ephemera if you wish to obtain such material.

Thanks

Special thanks to David Baxter for the time that he so willingly gave in answering the many questions posed, and to the Royal Household for agreeing to the meeting and for its subsequent approval of the use of the text and imagery before you.

Look out for Part 2 of this article in the next issue.

Sources

- (Ref. 1) *Royal Household Mail*, Glenn H Morgan, 1992. Published by The British Philatelic Trust.
- (Ref. 2) *The Court Post Office 1990-2004*, Glenn H Morgan, 2004. Serialised in Royal Mail’s *Philatelic Bulletin* in the April to August issues of volume 41.
- (Ref. 3) *Collect British Postmarks*, 2011. Published by Stanley Gibbons. Specifically consult chapter 22, which relates to Royalty.

Various snippets from newspaper reports, Freedom of Information Act requests and other sites of relevance on the internet.

Photo credit: Balmoral Castle - Bert Kaufmann

