

# Royal Household Mail

from the Royal Residences, Households and  
Offices of Great Britain past, present  
and temporary

Glenn H. Morgan

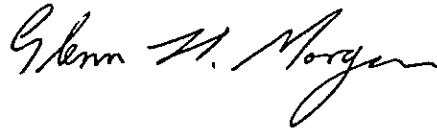
Foreword by Jean Farrugia  
British Post Office Archivist



Dedicated to my parents,  
Heather and Norman

“Psychologists say that people with hobbies  
are not likely to go crazy—but this  
doesn't apply to the people they  
live with” FRANK FOX

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## FOREWORD

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As a long serving employee of the Post Office, its Archivist and as a former Assistant Curator of the National Postal Museum, my interest in the subject of this book is threefold.

As an employee, I share with my colleagues throughout the kingdom a great pride in the title under which we still serve, the Royal Mail. We treasure, too, the memory of those special events in our history which have been graced by the royal presence; for instance, the opening of our new Mechanised Letter Office in South West London (which serves Buckingham Palace) by Her Majesty the Queen on 8 December 1983, or our 350th anniversary celebration at Bagshot on 31 July 1985 when HRH Prince Charles rode on a mailcoach carrying letters commemorating the proclamation of 1635 that opened up the Royal Mail as a public service.

As Archivist and custodian of the wealth of records forming the Post Office's archive, and someone daily facing questions about the history of one of the kingdom's oldest public services, I am constantly reminded that the Royal Mail has its origins in a service that predates, by centuries, that which began in the summer of 1635.

My personal interest in the particular subject of this book, began in the summer of 1974, when I was the fairly new Assistant Curator of the National Postal Museum. I had been in the museum only a few months when I was told by the then Curator, the late Tony de Righi, that it was time for me to gain some practical experience of exhibition work. He told me that he would give me the mezzanine gallery, a suitable subject to research and present to a standard worthy of a national museum, one helpful contact - and two months to complete the task, with a deadline of 20 November, when 'my' exhibition was to open to the public. Until then, I was on my own. The subject? The story of the Court Post. My contact? Sir Peter Horsley, a distinguished collector of Royal Household mail. Panic struck me for a day or two, and I wandered forlornly about the museum wondering whether my wisest course of action might be to seek a different job, perhaps delivering the Royal Mail. And then Sir Peter breezed into the museum, bringing with him his collection of Royal letters. We spent a happy day choosing a selection of covers illustrating as wide a variety of aspects of Royal Household mail as possible, and then it was up to me. Somehow, knowing absolutely nothing of the subject, I had to create for the general public a display that would be informative as well as entertaining - and do justice to a remarkable collection of material lovingly built up over the years by Sir Peter, and now entrusted to my care. Where should I start? There was only one place - Post Office Archives.

Fired with enthusiasm and optimism, I abandoned as far as I dared my everyday museum tasks, and took up the challenge. I would unearth all there was to discover about every single letter lent by Sir Peter, all the different postal markings used over the years, and thoroughly background every change that had affected the operation of the service from its very beginning. Not surprisingly, I failed. But in the few weeks given to me

to background the subject, write the panel texts, wrestle with the designer over the importance of relevance over design, and caption the selected exhibits, I managed to discover just enough in the archives to complete the task I had been set, and 'my' exhibition opened on time.

Happily, it was well received, and popular with those who visited the museum; but afterwards I was left with an unsatisfied interest in the subject that could never have been met with just a week or two's research in the archives, intense though that had been. As the years passed by I became involved with other research projects, until 1980 as Assistant Curator of the National Postal Museum and, since then, as Archivist to the Post Office. And so the time that I could hope to spend on this particular subject was minimal. But over the years my interest remained, along with the hope that someone, some day, might carry on from where I had left off back in 1974....

That someone was to be Glenn Morgan. I first noticed him in Archives' Search Room a few weeks after he had begun his daunting task. I asked a colleague who was the young man who was researching so diligently, and what was he studying with such quiet but obvious determination? "The story of the Court Post", I was told.

Perhaps I more than anyone else can appreciate what a formidable, dusty and exhausting task it was that Glenn undertook. He has shown us all what hard work, endless patience and dedication to a subject can achieve. I feel honoured indeed to have been asked to write the Foreword to this excellent result of his study.

Jean Farrugia  
Post Office Archives, London



## PREFACE

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Mail from the Royal Household has always held a special fascination. A philatelist is more likely to be interested in the envelope rather than its contents as many postal markings and cachets have been used over the years. However, the non-philatelist will eagerly read the letters or cards contained within, paying scant regard to the missives outer cover. Their interest might be as a lover of the Royal Family, of ephemera or of history. When compiling this book I have endeavoured to cater for all tastes to some extent, although the postal aspects have obviously taken precedence.

Special emphasis has been placed on the postal activities from the first Elizabethan period onwards as very little material prior to then is available for collectors to purchase on the open philatelic market. Indeed, it is not until the Victorian era that covers and cards become available in any quantity and at a price that the average person could afford.

Several articles have been published on this subject (see the bibliography starting on page 178) but until now the story has not appeared together in one work of reference. In publishing this book I am all too aware that probably some items will have been excluded or the odd error will have crept in despite exhaustive research and checking. The problem is does one carry on with the study never getting around to publishing, or does one go into print in the fervent hope that it will stimulate other students into undertaking further research? I have opted for the latter.

A reviewer of the late Norman Hills' booklet "The Royal Tour Trains" wrote in the GB Journal of July 1977: "Some day, someone will write a comprehensive catalogue on the handstamps and cancellations associated with the Royal Household and the collectors' volcano will erupt." Only time will tell if this prediction was correct.

Sections four and five detail land based and 'on the move' residences of the Royal Family together with non-royal homes known to have been visited by them. It is a fact that many other such non-Royal residences, however temporary, have also been visited. Until examples of Court mail can be identified they have been excluded unless the likelihood of such mail is overwhelming. Where there is a royal residence that is in current or very recent occupation but does not have special postal facilities it has been included thus enabling collectors to seek out examples of the official headed notepaper and envelopes showing correct postal usage.

When the royal residence ceased to be so I have continued to list all postal markings and cachets known to me. These items are annotated "Included here for completeness only" to indicate that they are not of royal origin. All postal markings are shown life size unless marked "Illustration not to scale". I have endeavoured to show a range of dates for each postmark and cachet wherever possible in order to give some idea of their period of use. All markings in black unless otherwise stated.

The whole field of modern "royal" mail is becoming very standardised and potentially boring. Stamp societies are not going to want to see displays of almost identical covers anymore than they would wish to see sheet after sheet of penny blacks. The use of rubber stamps may be archaic in these days of high technology but they do currently offer collectors a fascinating range of material to collect. As the cost of communicating by mail and labour and stationery costs increase anything that can help contain costs must be implemented, hence the changes. This should turn the attention of collectors to earlier material.

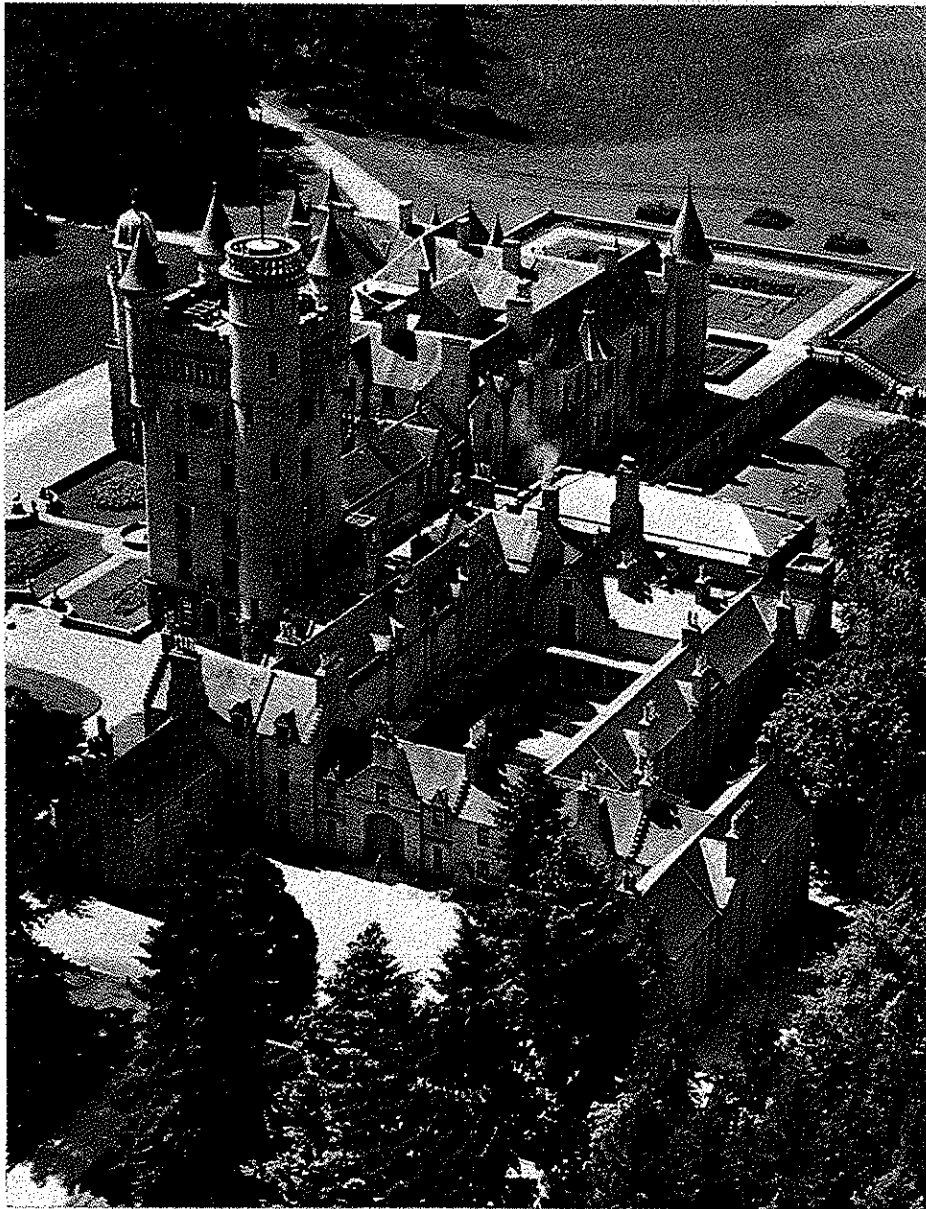
In concluding this Preface I would like to stress to readers that members of the Royal Household are extremely busy people who could not cope with an influx of letters from collectors requesting examples of the certifying stamps or printed stationery detailed within this book. As a refusal to co-operate could offend, your best source of supply must lie with the many dealers in ephemera and postal history around the country, most of whom maintain extensive stocks. Consultation of any up-to-date philatelic magazine will reveal their addresses.

Glenn H. Morgan, 1992

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**SECTION 1 -**  
**INTRODUCTION**

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**BALMORAL CASTLE**

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 had 12 Messengers constantly at the ready to travel anywhere the King went. They received 3d (1p) a day in pay, and 4s8d (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. The postal service is mentioned in the "Chronicles of Croyland" for the first time that year also. 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.

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 (now Master of the Posts) recorded in 1533 that "As to Posts betwene London and the Corte, there be nowe but ii. Whereof one is a good robust felowe, and was wont to be diligent, evil intreated many tymes; he and other posts, by the herbigours, for lak of horserome or horsmete, withoute whiche diligence cannot be. The other hath been the most payneful felowe in nygt and day that I have knowen amongs the messengers. If he nowe slak he shall be changed, as reason is, he sueth to the Kings Grace for som smal living for his olde service, having never had ordinary wages til nowe, a monthe or little more, this posts wages. It may please you to advertise me in whiche of them ii ye fynde fault, and he shal be changed. I wrote unto my lorde of Northumberland to write on the bak of his pacquetts the houre and the day of the depeche, and so I did to other, but it is seldome observed. I wol also desire you to remember that many tymes happen ii depeches in a day on way, and somtyme moo, and that, often seasons, happen counter posts;

that is to ride bothe northwarde and southwarde. This is moche for on horse or on man."

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 Hackneymen, contributions in money being received from fellow Hackneymen 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 2.5d (1p) 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 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 abouesaid. PHILLIP/MARY THE QUEENE". (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 instructed to blow his horn "as oft as he met company, or four times every mile".

On 5 August 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 he have first discharged himself of the packet for Her Majesties affaires by delivering the same into the hands of the next Standing Post, unto whome 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 24 February 1598 Sir John

Stanhope (Master of the Posts) was instructed by letter to re-instate the Standing and Ordinary Posts between the Court and Holyhead, and also by way of Bristol.

The late 1500's 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 (five marks) (£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 Beaumoris (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 22 June 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, carryinge and recarryinge 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 Hicke was appointed Head Postmaster by the King in the 1640's 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:00d (£5,382.50) per annum. A later Act - 22 & 23 Chas. II c.27 - made the payment perpetual. James Hicke 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 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 1700's Court mail was considered to be letters directed to The Queen, His Royal Highness the Prince, the Lord High Treasurer, and both principal Secretaries of State and their Clerks. Until the 1780's 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 mailcoaches 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 21 June 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 10 January 1840 Rowland Hill's Uniform Penny Postage was introduced. The franking privilege ceased and the use of the mails for official items was accounted for to 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 4 June 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 1850's the Post Office were 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 re-introduced free postage for himself and Household. In one fell swoop he did away with his mothers decision to abolish free postage and he

consequently gave collectors of Household mail a whole new range of material to collect. 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 little 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 wordprocessing machines capable of handling the tens of thousands of letters dealt with annually. Postal franking machines are now used on mail from the Estate Office at Sandringham, Windsor and Balmoral and Telemessages 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 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 "EIIR" 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 wain. 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.