

Private Royal Mail from Elizabeth and Charles

by
Dane Garrod

In these months of royal celebration, how The Queen and other close members of her family utilise the postal systems of the United Kingdom is of particular topical interest. Dane Garrod, social and postal historian, explains how and why.

The use of the Official Paid handstamp on mail emanating from the Royal Household will be known to stamp collectors, philatelists and postal historians, as will the round or oval royal cypher, which naturally changes design upon each royal accession to the throne, and is impressed on the front of the envelope. What is less known will be how private mail is sent from the Royal Family, how it is kept private and secure, and how the items are authenticated and authorised. This article will endeavour to throw some light on this subject, and may even assist collectors to be aware in order to spot such an item in the future, when they occasionally filter through to the open market.

The Royal Family has naturally always had a need to send correspondence and telegrams, just like any other family, even with the more frequent use of the telephone from the beginning of the 20th century, which does not meet the need of considered thought and writing to set down expression of feelings which can be read more than once. Although this article will cover private mail from the current monarch and heir, as the title says, it will cover some items from their predecessors in the last 100 years.

The earliest example to be shown here (*Fig. 1*) is from one Prince to another, and utilises the normal postage system of the time, which is 1914. On this occasion, no attempt is made to

hide the status of the recipient – no covering envelope addressed to the House Master of the school, for example. Prince George is clearly named, and the envelope has initials in the bottom left-hand corner. The writing is of Edward, Prince of Wales,

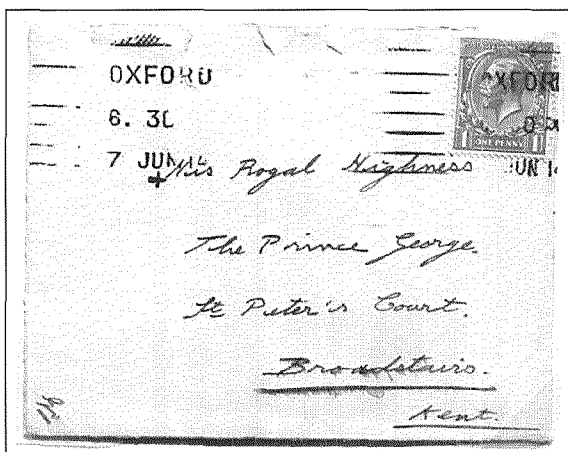


Fig. 1 Prince Edward (David) to Prince George in 1914

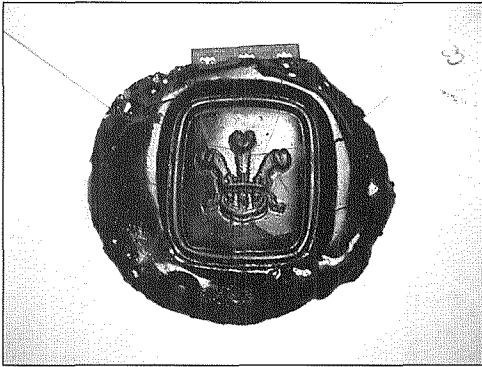


Fig.2 Seal of the Prince of Wales on reverse of envelope to Prince George

whilst studying at Magdalen College, Oxford. As a measure of security, the envelope has his personal black wax seal impression of three feathers on the reverse (Fig.2). Regrettably, the letter has been retained elsewhere, even if the envelope has not, and it is of interest how it came to be so. A collection of 200 wax seals, a photograph album, a quantity of postcards, and this envelope were all discovered in a box in an attic of a manor house in Mold, Cheshire, some 30 years ago. From the information

therein it was deduced that the wax seal collection belonged to Albinia Bacon, sister of Edmund Bacon (later Sir Edmund Bacon, Premier Baronet of England) who was the same age as Prince George and probably at the same preparatory school. George handed the envelope to his friend, Edmund, for his sister's collection – and who can say he did not.

In April 1932, when our present Queen was Princess Elizabeth of York, and aged six years old, her grandmother, Cecilia, Countess of

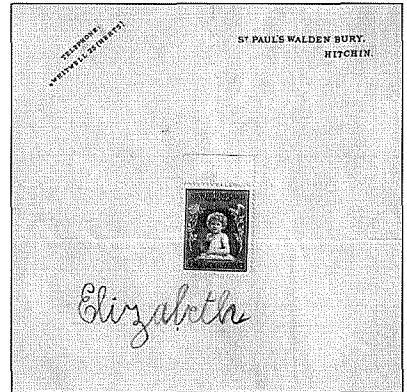


Fig.3 Signature of 6 year old Elizabeth next to stamp with her portrait

Strathmore, responded to a request for her grand-daughter's signature next to the recently issued stamp showing her photograph – the Newfoundland 6 cents light blue of January 1932 – and this was sent from the Bowes-Lyon family home at St. Paul's Walden Bury in Hertfordshire (Fig.3), together with a letter which begins as follows:

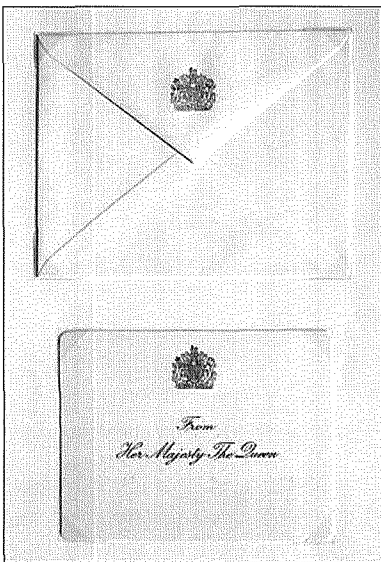


Fig.4 Her Majesty's personal compliment slip and envelope

Dear Mr. Elliott

I have secured the enclosed signature for you! but my little Grandaughter could not write over the stamp, so perhaps you or Mrs. Elliott could stick it over the name?

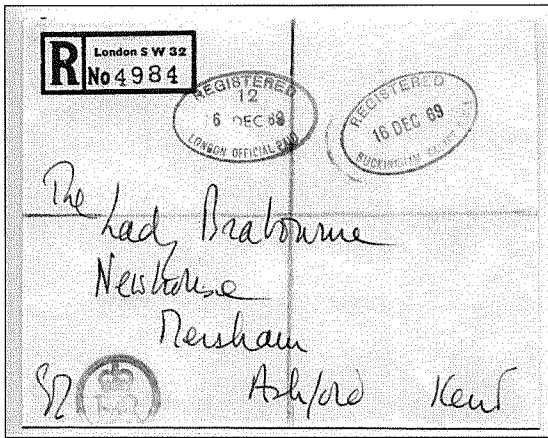


Fig.5 Registered envelope written by Her Majesty in 1969

...and so he did, as the illustration shows. However, should Her Majesty have a need to personally thank you in the present decade, then you might receive a crested envelope with printed compliment slip, as also shown here (Fig.4).

To ensure security, royal mail (as opposed to the organisation known as Royal Mail) is often sent registered, and the envelope itself would contain an inner wrapping so that the contents

could not be read by any photographic or digital means. Here is shown a registered envelope from mid-December 1969 (Fig.5), probably containing a Christmas gift and personally addressed by The Queen in her handwriting, together with handstamps confirming registration officially paid and emanating from Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty has also confirmed her authorship by writing 'ER' in the bottom left-hand corner.

Her Majesty has also sent telegrams when appropriate, though these naturally do not have the element of confidentiality. Whilst at Buckingham Palace in April 1980, The Queen sent a telegram to her Clerk of Works on the Crown Estate at Sandringham – Robert Marrington – thanking him for his birthday congratulations and sent under Her signature – Elizabeth R. As shown (Fig.6), this was received at Dersingham post office

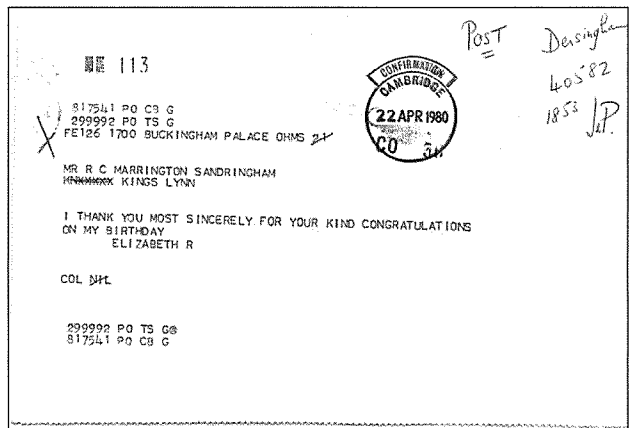


Fig.6 Personal telegram from Her Majesty in 1980

and taken the final few miles by road to Sandringham.

Sometimes, the thanks from the Royal Family is more personal, as is shown by the compliment slip from Charles and Diana to their personal chauffeur, George Murphy (Fig.7). Although the envelope has gone, and the transmission would have been by messenger rather than by post, it is of interest as it was an item of royal mail delivery from the heir to the throne. The Prince of Wales has used, and no doubt

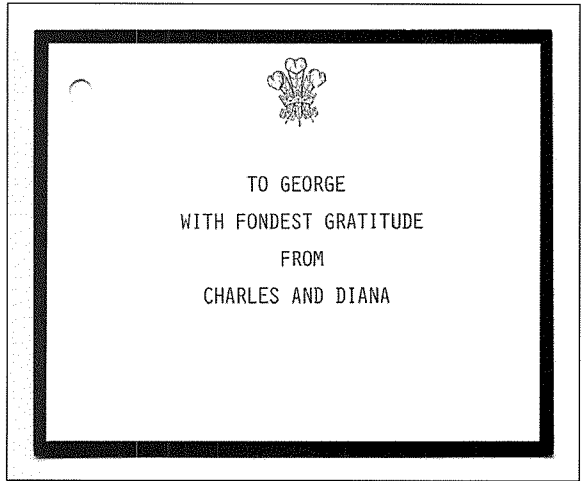


Fig.7 Compliment card from Charles and Diana to their chauffeur

continues to use, both private messenger services and national postal mail services – whichever is appropriate at the time. The transmission to Sgt. Ron Lewis from the Prince of Wales was one not utilising the postal system, but private messenger, and as well as being written in his hand, His Royal Highness has added his 'C' initial on the envelope to confirm authenticity (Fig.8).

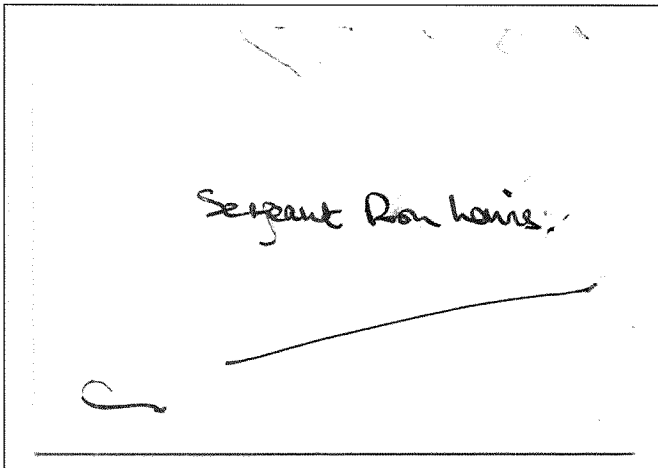


Fig.8 Envelope written and sent by the Prince of Wales

to August 1966. In his own writing and with his 'C' initial, he writes in March 1966 from Victoria by Air Mail to Mersham in Kent, and this was re-addressed to a London town-house. 1966 was the time of the Australian changeover from sterling to decimal, and this is reflected by the two postage stamps, one of which is rated at 1/6 (one shilling and sixpence) and the other at 15 cents. Although decimalisation took place on 14 February 1966, the sterling postage stamp has not been marked

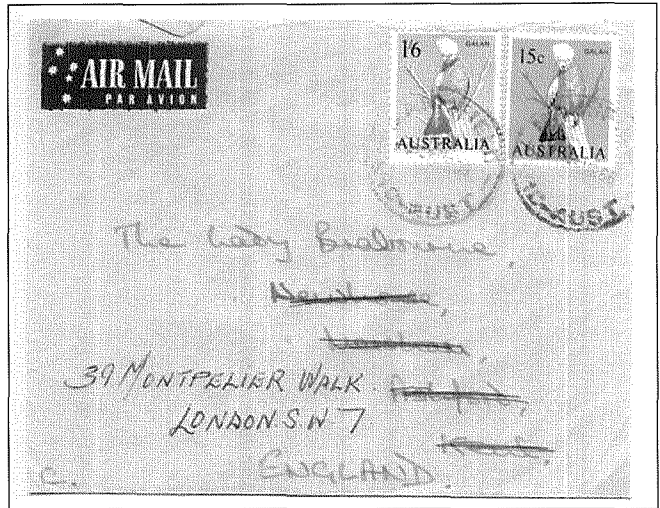


Fig.9 Air mail envelope sent from Australia in 1966 by Prince Charles

as invalid – this cover is therefore a dual currency air mail item (Fig.9). Finally, a second cover from the heir to the throne, but from the same year of 1966. Sent to England by air mail from the Principality of Liechtenstein where he had been skiing, and with a 50 rappen postage stamp (Fig.10), it again is addressed by the Prince of Wales himself, and confirmed with his ‘C’ initial.

Due to the number of years that both the Her Majesty The Queen and The Prince of Wales have lived and been sending correspondence, there is no doubt that many postal items from them have survived, a few of which are in the public domain. You might just find one in a dealer’s box for which the seller has not appreciated the significance....but don’t expect to find a letter inside though!

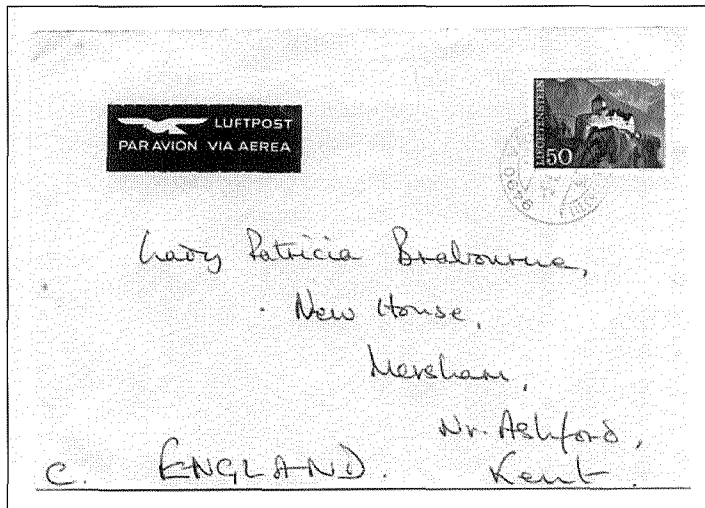


Fig.10 Envelope from Prince Charles in Liechtenstein to the UK