

The dawn of the second Elizabethan Age

The death of a reigning monarch marks both the end of an existing era, and the start of a new one. So it was in 1952 with the death of King George VI and the beginning of 'the second Elizabethan age'. The Coronation gave Britain, indeed much of the world, something to celebrate following years of conflict and rebuilding. It was seen by many as an occasion that would offer a new start to life.

We are rarely prepared for death in our personal lives and it appears to be no different in public life. As a result, there was no overnight change in postal arrangements, even within the Royal Household or the GPO. The Royal Family went into immediate mourning, and tradition dictated that this would be for a period of six months.

From a collecting viewpoint, this manifested itself in the form of mourning stationery. Some government departments also used mourning stationery, both here and in overseas outposts of the Empire. Another obvious impact related to The King's Flight, which was, not surprisingly, renamed The Queen's Flight and the stationery required updating to reflect this.

The Royal Household must have been a hive of activity at this time. There was a funeral to prepare for, a new Monarch was on the throne and there was an eventual Coronation ceremony to enact. Like a well-oiled machine, they rose to the occasion by dusting down the 'How to...' manuals last used back in 1936 and set to it.

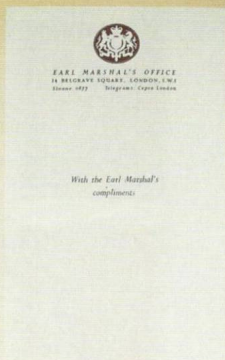
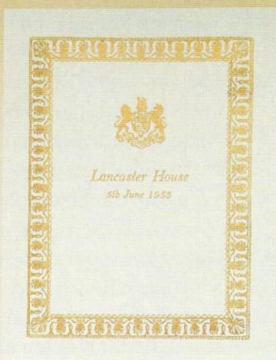
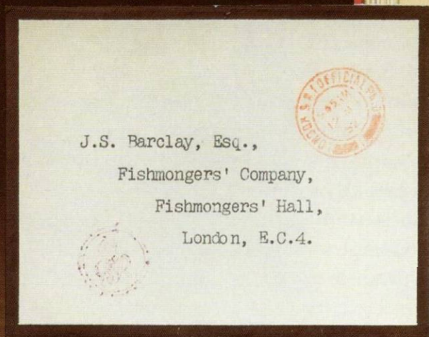
Postal history I will not dwell on the funeral, as this is a Coronation anniversary issue of the *Bulletin*; suffice to say that there would have been invitations to send out, acceptances to process and letters of thanks for the condolences expressed to despatch. These will all have created collectable items of postal history. Preparations for the Coronation will again have created many opportunities for collectors. It must be remembered, though, that the interest in postal history collecting at that time was nowhere near as popular as it is today. That does not mean that there is not a lot of collectable material available, for then, as now, an item of mail from the Royal Household would very often have been saved and handed down through the generations, eventually reaching the philatelic market.

Black Coronation stamps The printing industry's Penrose Annual was published each year to showcase the best of print. In 1954, this volume was not only the source of the black, perforated Coronation stamps from Harrison and Sons, it also contained a large selection of Coronation official stationery and ephemera. Much of this material will not have a direct philatelic link, but should be of interest to readers at this time, 50 years on from the event. It will be especially useful to collectors interested in the recently formed philatelic discipline of social philately. This branch of the hobby positively encourages the incorporation of ephemeral items alongside traditional covers and stamps and is gaining in popularity every year.

The special markings used at Royal residences were some time in gestation. I presume it is not correct protocol to prepare for a new Monarch until the previous one has died, even when imminent death is expected. Indeed, the use of the certifying stamps of King George VI continued for almost five months, from early February through to about the end of June.

Opposite Mourning envelope (top left) for King George VI – the border is always wider for a Monarch than for other members of the Royal Family. The Penrose Annual of 1954 (top right) is the source of the black perforated Coronation stamps printed by Harrison & Sons, and a large selection of Coronation material. Special markings were used at Royal residences (bottom right).

by Glenn H Morgan



SUPERIOR
DUTY PASS



Background
to the
Coronation

EARL MARSHAL'S PRESS BUREAU
1953



Design: E. G. Fuller



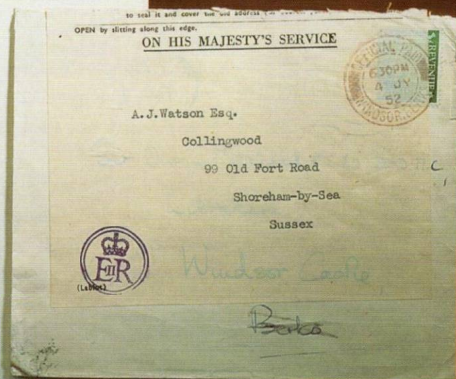
Design: M. Gossman



Design: Edmund Dulac



Design: M. C. Farrar-Bell



Printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons Ltd,
by permission of Her Majesty's Postmaster-General



It is interesting at this point to consider how stamp-printing techniques have advanced in the past 50 years, as work on the new definitives and Coronation issue took over a year. Compare this to the speed with which the issue mourning the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales, was completed. The stamps were on press before her funeral had even taken place although, as readers will recall, the issuing of the stamps was subsequently delayed. Royal Mail's 'fast-track' printing process is even quicker a mere five years on, such is the pace in printing technology.

Royal visit Harrison and Sons held the Royal Warrant for stamp printing, and the new Queen paid them a visit to see her forthcoming Coronation stamps on press. A commemorative presentation card was subsequently produced for publicity purposes. Harrisons had previously produced a similar card with the 1½d and 2½d Wilding portrait definitives – the first of the new reign. Both items are available from auctioneers and dealers occasionally and make an interesting addition to a Royal or British collection.

This short survey of postal arrangements in the first few months after The Queen came to the throne reveals how long it took to effect change. Let us hope that it is many years hence before we learn how quickly the process could be acted on nowadays ●

Glenn Morgan is Librarian of the National Philatelic Society. An interview was published in the February 1998 *Bulletin*.

Right and below: Harrison & Sons' presentation card and wrap-around folder marking the new Queen's visit in 1952. They had earlier produced a similar card containing the first two stamps of the new reign (bottom right). Bottom left: Coronation stamp with a Balmoral Castle postmark.



THE ROYAL VISIT

On November 16th, 1952, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited the High Wycombe works of Harrison and Sons Limited, to witness the production of the first postage stamp of her reign. In her visit Her Majesty became the first reigning monarch of Great Britain to assert, even though the privilege of a visit.

Mean, Harrison have been pressed to successive sovereigns since the reign of George II. The manufacture of postage stamps by the photogravure process now averages 12 million per day.

