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THE ROYAL MAIL 1547 to 1635. LETTERS AND WARRANTS IN THE REIGNS OF EDWARD VI, QUEEN MARY, QUEEN ELIZABETH, JAMES 1, & CHARLES 1

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The arrangement of this display has been guided by the need to place some larger documents on the top rows. As most letters of the period are written on paper larger than A4 many of those in the other rows have been folded to fit the space available. The handwriting is mainly in secretary hand so I have provided transcriptions. A few letters were carried by Heralds and Pursuivants with the majority by Chamber, Exchequer and Chancery messengers.

FRAME 1. The first letter is from the Privy Council of Edward VI, the boy King. It gives instructions to the Exchequer and is signed by the Lord Protector and nine Councillors. It is polite but firm. The second relates to the former Queen Anne of Cleves and on two pages describes her household. John Mason, joint Master of the Posts, is a signatory. The HAST POST HAST LETTER to the President of the Council in the North contains another Privy Council letter, which is photographed, about moving Scottish hostages from Carlisle to York.

FRAME 2. The letter from Queen Mary's Privy Council shows a new set of Councillors from the previous reign. Sir William Paget who signs was the other Master of the Posts. The letter from Mary's husband, King Philip, was written at Hampton Court. The Privy Council letter to Sir Richard Verney is so large that I show the address panel and a reduced photograph of the contents. The letter signed by Queen Elizabeth with her splendid signature appoints a Protestant Marshall of Berwick. It is on very wide paper. The placard from the President of the Council in the North authorises every person to accept commands from Bunny who is bringing troops during the insurrection of the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland in the North.

FRAME 3. The first Privy Council letter authorises payments for packets of letters from the Marshall of Berwick. The second Privy Council letter relates to the expedition for the relief of English troops to Ostend in 1601. The Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth's great favourite, executed for treason, writes to the Sheriff of Staffordshire. The letter signed by King James 1 gives his instructions to the Earl Marshall of Scotland regarding his only return visit to Scotland. King James' favourite, The Earl of Buckingham, later a Duke, who was assassinated, signs an authorisation to pay the Postmaster of Chester for bringing his letters.

FRAME 4. The Privy Council letter authorises payment to the County of Lincoln for supplying troops in the Irish campaign. One of the ten signatories is Lord Stanhope, Master of the Posts. There is a joint personal letter from the Lord Treasurer and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1584 and a letter from the Secretary of the Privy Council to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Then follow four warrants detailing payments to royal Chamber messengers.

FRAME 5. The Earl of Suffolk, the Lord Chamberlain, arranges the furnishing of the palace at Oatlands for King James's daughter, Elizabeth. The Earl of Nottingham, who as Lord Thomas Howard had commanded the fleet against the Armada, also makes an arrangement at Oatlands. The Lord Chancellor Sir Christopher Hatton, and he and Sir Walter Mildmay, Chancellor of the Exchequer, write about two legal cases. Davison, Secretary to the Privy Council, gives details of the cost of sending packets (letters) while the Queen's Agent in the Low Countries.

FRAME 6. James 1's Privy Council writes in 1612 regarding the Royal Hunting Lodge near Southampton. Wylson, Secretary of State, writes to the Lord Treasurer regarding a pirate and the Lord Mayor of London writes to Judge Sir Julius Caesar. Four warrants relate to journeys on Privy Council business including the 1592 military campaign in Brittany.

FRAME 7. The Household Accounts of the Prince of Wales in 1617 show costs of carrying some letters. A group of four letters from Sheriffs, all from Norfolk, includes one marked HAST HAST HAST to the post. A warrant shows that senior clerks could carry letters when royal messengers were not available. A warrant with detailed itinerary signed by the Lord Treasurer in 1596 concerns collecting a Parliamentary subsidy granted to the Queen.

FRAME 8. A warrant authorises payment for a royal messenger's lengthy journey through southern England to Cornwall in 1588. Other warrants pay royal messengers travelling to Sussex and Wiltshire. Another warrant concerns the lands of Anthony Babington, late attainted, whose plot to assassinate Queen Elizabeth led to his death and that of Mary Queen of Scots. Thomas Conway, Secretary of State writes to the Lord Treasurer in 1623 about King James's hunting plans, arranging the transfer of deer between royal parks.

FRAME 9. A group of royal messenger warrants for journeys to Essex, Kent, Suffolk, Norfolk, Chester, and two general warrants pay messengers to travel to all the shires, principal cities and towns in England. One concerns sales of armour by the army which had been unpaid after the defeat of the Armada. Letters are from Admiral Palmer who had led the attack by fireships on the Armada, and another is from the Comptroller of Works at Windsor.

FRAME 10. Two writs from Chancery to the Sheriff of Derbyshire. A very detailed messenger warrant of 1602 concerning lengthy journeys in England. A warrant for payment of a journey between Westminster and the Court. A warrant concerns the distribution of papal Bulls in 1588 when the Pope had excommunicated Queen Elizabeth. A letter is from Privy Councillor Sir Thomas Knyvett, Master of the Mint at the Tower of London, who arrested Guy Fawkes.

FRAME 11. A letter from Charles 1's Privy Council concerns a royal pension. One signatory is Archbishop Laud, executed by Parliament in 1645. A warrant summons the Parliament in 1588. Two warrants pay for the vellum skins, ink, parchment, boxes for commissions, paper books, laces and silks, used by Chancery clerks and for buckram bags, used by the royal messengers and for storing tallies. There is the stationer's receipt.

FRAME 12. A letter from the Privy Council of Charles 1st, signed by eleven Councillors, relates to the musters of troops who formed most of the national army: the two Secretaries of State, Coke and Windebank, who became the first two Postmasters General in 1635, sign at the foot. Juxon, Lord Treasurer, authorises payment for the staff of Queen Henrietta Maria's household. Warrants pay for letters sent by the Prince of Wales and James 1st. Letters from the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset to the Privy Council and from Naunton, Secretary of the Privy Council to Lord Zouche, Privy Councillor and Warden of the Cinque Ports, end the display.