



All About Postmarks

THE ROYAL MAIL GUIDE TO POSTMARKING SERVICES

Introduction

This is both a comprehensive guide to Royal Mail's postmarking services, and an explanation of the rules which apply to them. For many philatelists and, indeed businesses wishing to personalise their mailings, the postmark can be at least as significant as the stamp it cancels. This Guide summarises the key elements of postmarking and answers many frequently asked questions.

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What is a Postmark?

A postmark is an official mark applied by, or on behalf of, a postal services provider to items of mail. Postmarks are most commonly used by Royal Mail to cancel postage stamps affixed to items of mail; principally to ensure that the stamps are not re-used.

Postmarks are also applied to items of mail that do not bear any stamps at all but instead have postage printed on them to show that the appropriate rate of postage has been paid. Items such as this are known collectively as 'preprinted postal stationery'.

Postmarks are also known as 'cancels', 'cancellations', 'obliterations' or 'handstamps'. Postmarks used by Royal Mail may contain

words or devices at Royal Mail's discretion. However, postmarks always include a date and corresponding post town to give an indication of when and where a particular item of mail was posted or sorted.



Royal Mail only applies postmarks to genuine items of mail. This means that any item submitted for postmarking should conform in all respects with postal service conditions: it should be addressed and bear at least an amount of postage appropriate to the postal service being provided.

Postmarks In General Postal Use

Counter Datestamp

These datestamps are usually circular in shape. They are used at Post Office® branches for purposes such as validating pension docketts and road tax discs.

They are also used to cancel postage stamps (or preprinted postal stationery) on items of mail posted in a branch using premium services such as Special Delivery. As mail requiring Counter Datestamps is handled separately and is not sorted by machine, Post Office® branches are the most convenient place for it to be postmarked. It also gives the customer the opportunity to see that their special items are properly postmarked before they are given a certificate of posting.

These datestamps are not used to cancel ordinary items of mail or philatelic items. Once an item of mail has been postmarked, it cannot be handed back to the customer but becomes the responsibility of Royal Mail until it is delivered to the addressee.

As the mail services for which standard Counter Datestamps are used require the customer to be given a certificate of posting, this datestamp is only available through the Post Office®. This postmark is not available from Special Handstamp Centres.



Parcel Datestamp

These datestamps are only used to cancel stamps that are affixed to items being sent by Royal Mail standard parcel service. They have a rubber die, and are rectangular in shape. Again, these datestamps are only available through the Post Office®.

Counter and Parcel Datestamps are used exclusively by Post Office® staff for specific purposes only. Therefore Royal Mail does not offer a philatelic postmarking service using either of these datestamps.



Meter Marks

Strictly speaking, these are not postmarks at all as they do not cancel postage stamps but are in themselves indicators of prepaid postage (similar to preprinted stationery). They are used by a company or organisation that owns or leases a franking machine which prints a design approved by Royal Mail. However, they can be seen on many letters that drop through the letter box every day and have some of the characteristics of a postmark.

Meter Marks are postage indicators printed on envelopes (or on adhesive labels which

can then be affixed to items of mail) They are however easily distinguished from postmarks.

Meter Marks are usually printed in red, and show the value of postage paid, the date and place of posting and very often incorporate an advertisement for the organisation concerned. As Meter Marks are generally used by independent organisations no reposting facilities are available.

Machine Cancels

These are the postmarks most often seen on the stamped letters that are delivered to an estimated twenty million addresses throughout the United Kingdom every working day. Stamp cancellation machines feature a circular element, which incorporates the sorting location and the time and date information, known as a 'town die'. Machine Cancels, however, are printed at high speed on individual letters that pass through Mail Centres. They cannot currently be printed on large and bulky packets (which cannot be fed through the cancelling machine). Most of the larger offices now apply postmarks using ink-jet technology.

Packet or Operational Handstamps

These postmarks are applied to items of mail that cannot be passed through a cancelling machine. They are also used to cancel stamps on standard envelopes that the cancelling machine has missed. This can happen when stamps are placed on an envelope out of position or when there are several stamps affixed to the same envelope that the cancelling machine cannot strike.

It is therefore possible to have both Machine Cancel and Packet Handstamp postmarks on the same item.

Packet Handstamps usually have a rubber die but some operational handstamps have a die made from steel.

As with Machine Cancels, Royal Mail cannot guarantee that postmarks will be applied to a philatelic standard.



Collectors may wish to know that the only way to obtain the postmarks described on these pages is to send an item through the postal system.



Royal Mail
London
South
18.10.06
02:44 pm
A62900949





Special Handstamps

These are handstamps applied with great care, for philatelic purposes. The word 'handstamps' is used as a term to describe the various types of philatelic postmark Royal Mail provides. Indeed, hand-held handstamps (which are in principle not far removed from those used to cancel the Penny Black in 1840) are still occasionally used to apply these postmarks. However, technology has advanced over the years, so the word handstamp should not be taken literally to mean that a hand-held device is always used.

Whatever equipment is used, the greatest care is taken by our staff when applying

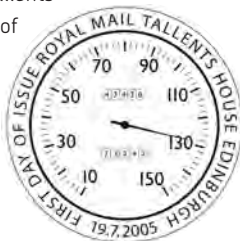
handstamps which is seen as a specialist function within Royal Mail. When sponsoring a Special Handstamp postmarks can be applied in a variety of colours although only one coloured ink can be applied to an envelope at any one time. The colours available and relevant prices are seen on page 12. Special Handstamp designs can be seen in the Royal Mail publication *British Postmark Bulletin*. Philatelic postmarks are collected more than any other. See page 7 for postmarking services offered by Royal Mail to philatelic customers.



How to Obtain Different Postmarks

First Day of Issue Postmarks by Mail Order

Royal Mail First Day Covers can be ordered for any new stamp issue. Customers may request individual issues or set up a Regular Order by phoning 08457 641641. These covers bear each stamp from the stamp issue, the Tallents House First Day of Issue Handstamp and the customer's name and address in print.



First Day of Issue Postmarks at the Post Office®

These are available from Royal Mail on the day of issue of new postage stamps. Customers buying First Day Envelopes and the new stamps from main Post Office® branches can post their addressed covers in special posting boxes, or hand them in to be forwarded for a First Day of Issue Postmark.

First Day of Issue Postmarks with a pictorial design can be obtained upon request (see next paragraph) from Royal Mail Tallents House and also from a designated Special Handstamp Centre (see inside back cover).

Special Handstamps by Reposting

Special Handstamps, which are sometimes referred to as Special Postmarks, normally incorporate a pictorial design, and are used to mark particular events and anniversaries. There are usually a number of different Special Handstamps complementing each new set of stamps on a First Day of Issue. Advance details of new Special Handstamps can be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin*, all of which can be used by anyone who requests them.

Customers may post covers for handstamping on the actual date of the handstamp. Care should be taken to ensure that it is made clear which handstamp is required. This can be done by marking on the outer envelope which contains your covers the wording and date of the handstamp required, or the reference number. The outer cover of items sent for cancellation must bear normal postage.



Permanent Pictorial Postmarks

There are a number of permanent philatelic postmarks depicting different towns and cities around the UK that are in daily use. These postmarks are obtained from the Special Handstamp Centres, details of which can be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin*.



Please note: all postmarking facilities are made available under Royal Mail's statutory schemes.

Postmark Rules

STAMPS. Postmarks may only be used to cancel valid Royal Mail postage stamps and preprinted stationery: e.g. stamps affixed to bona fide items of mail, and airletters/aerogrammes that bear a preprinted postage impression incorporating the Queen's head. No other postage paid impression will be accepted for handstamping.

ADDRESSING. All items to be handstamped must bear a postally- valid address even if the customer collects the covers from the handstamp office.

CANCELLING. Postmarks must cancel each stamp and are applied so that they 'tie' the stamp to the cover by being partially impressed on both simultaneously, with the exception of miniature sheets (see pg10).

VALUE. All items to be handstamped must bear valid Royal Mail postage to the value of at least the current First Class postage rate – with the exception of the first day of issue of Second Class stamps. In this case, the new issue stamp submitted in isolation for cancellation with an issue day postmark will be acceptable. Combinations of smaller value stamps will not be acceptable where used to make up the Second Class value.

If addressed to a destination outside the

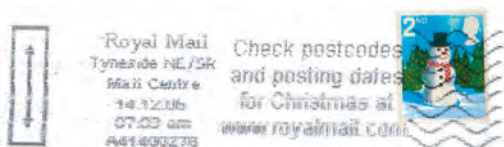
United Kingdom, each item must bear stamps of at least the current minimum postage rate to that destination.

POSITIONING. Stamps should be affixed only on the address side of the cover, except for postcards upon which the stamp may be applied to anywhere on the picture side.

DATE. Covers submitted for cancellation should bear a postmark date on the outer envelope no later than that of the handstamp applied for. This condition does not apply to overseas collectors, who may submit covers within 28 days of the issue date.

DECIMAL CURRENCY. All decimal currency Royal Mail postage stamps are valid for postage in the United Kingdom and should show at least the equivalent of the First Class postage rate. This includes the £1 value stamps bearing the head of Queen Elizabeth II that were issued before the introduction of decimal currency. It does not include any stamps issued by the Isle of Man, Jersey or Guernsey post offices.

RETAIL STAMP BOOKS. Special handstamp centres will not apply handstamps to stamps on retail books, where the retail book has been glued to a cover.



Dual Post-marking

Collectors can submit covers for cancellation through the Special Handstamp Centres. Special Handstamps applied to uncanceled British stamps on a cover which already bears cancelled British or foreign stamps. The following conditions apply:

All requests for an additional handstamp must relate to current Special Handstamps as announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin*. Requests should be sent to the appropriate Special Handstamp Centre or Royal Mail Tallents House as advertised. All covers should be enclosed in an outer envelope. A self-addressed envelope must be included for covers that will be returned by First Class post.

A Special Handstamp will not be applied to a cover which already bears more than one postmark design: the maximum number of postmarks of a different design allowed on any cover is two.

Stamps should be affixed to covers in such a manner as to ensure that the second handstamp can be applied without overprinting any stamp previously used or postmarked. Only the following are acceptable for Dual Postmarking:

- A cover which bears foreign stamps and postmarks of any date.
- A cover which bears British stamps cancelled with a postmark of an earlier date than that being applied for.

Special Handstamps applied to a British stamp that is valid for postal purposes at the time when the request is submitted. The total value of the stamps cancelled must be at least equivalent to the current rate of postage for a First Class letter, with the exception of First Day of Issue Second Class stamps.

Please note: Royal Mail cannot guarantee to replace covers sent for Dual Postmarking.



Maximum Cards (or Maxi Cards)

Usually, postcards with postage stamps affixed to their picture side are not acceptable for transmission by Royal Mail because the postage stamp could very easily be missed when the card arrives at the sorting office. Items which do not have stamps (or appear not to have stamps) or have insufficient postage affixed will be marked 'postage due'. Postage (plus an additional fee) is charged to the addressee when the item is delivered.

However, because philatelic handstamping is a manual operation, this type of item, known as a Maximum (or Maxi) Card, is accepted for philatelic handstamping, as long as it complies with the following service conditions:

Customers must provide a self-addressed cover for the return of Maxi Cards. This is to avoid the possibility of a Maxi Card being mistakenly

identified as not having any postage affixed, subsequent to handstamping.

- The postage stamp(s) may be affixed anywhere on the picture side for philatelic purposes only.
- The cards must have a delivery address on the reverse side.
- Stamps must not be affixed to both picture and address side.

Miniature Sheets

In the case of miniature sheets, and stamp panes from Prestige Stamp Books, customers may request an alternative method of tying the stamps to the cover. For these products a postmark may both clip the border or selvedge adjacent to the stamps as well as be impressed on the cover. This is instead of a postmark tying a stamp to a cover in

the usual way. Of course, all

stamps must be cancelled. The least number of handstamps required to cancel all stamps, be they PSB panes, miniature sheets or individual stamps will be used. The layout and number of handstamps remains at the discretion of the handstamp centre.





Process

Customers may obtain their cover in one of the following ways:

- Mail Order
- Reposting
- Post Office®

After handstamping, covers are returned to customers in a prepaid, clear plastic envelope, except where the customer has provided their own self addressed envelope.

In cases of seriously damaged covers or cards, poor quality postmarking (except where applied to self-adhesive or glossy surfaces) or non-delivery, every effort will be made to provide customers with a replacement cover. Any damage which may be considered to be in the nature of a normal hazard of postal transmission, such as slight creasing of the corner

of a cover, does not constitute a reason for replacement. In the event we are unable to provide a replacement, compensation will be considered. Compensation limits are the same as those standards for ordinary items lost or damaged in the post, details of which can be found in the inland postal rates leaflet which is available from most Post Office® branches. A receipt for the purchase of the missing items must be submitted to Royal Mail. In any of these circumstances contact Customer Services on 08457 740740.



Sponsoring a Special Handstamp

A Special Handstamp can be sponsored and a postmark produced to the design of the person who is sponsoring the handstamp. This can be an excellent way to publicise special occasions such as anniversaries, exhibitions or various other events providing opportunities to produce a unique 'souvenir cover' that can be sold to raise funds or given away as a corporate gift. The current charge for this service is:

£195 + VAT for a handstamp to mark a single date.

£195 + VAT up to 6 months & £240 + VAT up to 12 months using a handstamp with an interchangeable date.

See page 4 for information on coloured handstamps. The prices are:

Brown, Green, Red, Blue, Bordeaux Red, Chrome Yellow - £200 + standard charge

Gold & Silver - £300 + standard charge.

Service Provision

Royal Mail produces the handstamp to the design and artwork provided by the sponsor. This must be sent to Tallents House at least 6 weeks before the date on the postmark.

The handstamp will be announced in the fortnightly publication *British Postmark Bulletin*. All items submitted by the sponsor will be handled by a Special Handstamp Centre.

Please note that it is the handstamp sponsor's legal responsibility to ensure that designs do not infringe an other's Intellectual Property rights. Intellectual Property, or "IP", is a group of legal rights and remedies that enables people to prevent others stealing the expression of ideas. These rights include copyright, patents, trademarks and design rights. For stamps and postmarks, the most relevant rights are copyright, registered and unregistered trademarks and designs.

If you copy or use in your postmark all or part of another design, text or logo that are not yours, you are likely to be using someone else's IP. It is your responsibility to obtain permission to use it and comply with any terms and conditions that the intellectual property owner sets. Royal Mail may require proof of such IP permissions prior to printing your Special Handstamps and reserves the right not to use your handstamp if there are questions around the use of another's IP.

To sponsor a Special Handstamp contact Handstamp Liaison, Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB, or telephone 0845 071 2000.

Royal Mail reserve the right not to cancel mail that it deems inappropriate or offensive.

Royal Mail Standards

Royal Mail aim to fulfil the following services subject to standard conditions:

Sponsors and Dealers Covers:

Covers returned within 7 working days

Repost Covers:

Covers returned within 14 working days

Post Office Limited Covers:

Covers returned within 5 working days

British Postmark Bulletin



Binders and box files are available for storing copies of the British Postmark Bulletin.
Call 08457 641 641

Royal Mail's magazine for postmark collectors is published every two weeks and contains advance details and illustrations of new postmarks and where they can be obtained.

The Special Handstamps used by the British Forces Post Office (BFPO) are included. The *Bulletin* also contains feature articles and book reviews of interest to postmark collectors.

Royal Mail aims to announce all new postmarks in advance of their first use, in the *British Postmark Bulletin*. If this is not possible, every effort will be made to assist collectors to obtain their desired postmark, and details will be published in the next edition of the *British Postmark Bulletin*.

This publication is available on subscription from Royal Mail Tallents House. Please refer to the form on the reverse for ordering instructions. Alternatively, you can request a free sample copy from the Editor at the following address:

British Postmark Bulletin
Royal Mail
4th Floor
148 Old Street
LONDON
EC1V 9HQ



British Postmark Bulletin

Subscription order form

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION	CODE	PRICE	QUANTITY	TOTAL
Annual subscription to <i>British Postmark Bulletin</i> UK / Europe rate	BG001	£12.25		
Annual subscription to <i>British Postmark Bulletin</i> Rest of World rate	BG001	£24.95		
TOTAL COST OF ORDER:				£

My Royal Mail account number

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 04AAR

Title: Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Miss ☐ Ms ☐ Other: _____
(Please tick appropriate box) (Please state)

First name(s): _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ Daytime tel: _____

Please complete, sign and return this order form to the address below with payment.

Please tick this box if you have recently changed address ☐

My payment of £_____ is made by:

☐ Cheque payable to Royal Mail☐ Debit from my Royal Mail account (includes Variable DD or CCC Charge)

Please debit my ☐ Switch ☐ Delta ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa

[illegible]

Expiry Date

My Switch issue number My Delta Start Date is

Signature _____ Date _____

Please write your account number on the back of your payment, (if you have one) any overpayment will be left in your account.

For gift subscriptions, include information on a separate sheet.

The information you provide will be held under the Data Protection Act 1998 and will be used by Royal Mail Group Ltd and other businesses in its group, including Royal Mail, Parcelforce Worldwide, Post Office Ltd. We may want to contact you from time to time with details of other products or services available from us. If you do not want this, tick here ☐ All artwork remains copyright of Royal Mail. Please allow 21 days for delivery of your items. Prices quoted are correct at time of going to print.



UK TELEPHONE ORDER
AND ENQUIRY LINE

08457 641 641

From overseas

+44 131 316 7483

on to Fri 8.30am to 5

Mon to Fri 8.30am to 5pm

or Text Talk on

18001 08457 641 641



FAX US ON:

Mon to Fri

0131 316 7392



Royal Mail

Tallents House

FREEPOST EH3647

21 South Gyle Crescent

EDINBURGH

EH12 9PE



Special Handstamp Centres

London Special Handstamp Centre
Royal Mail, Mount Pleasant, Farringdon
Road, LONDON, EC1A 1BB

Northern England Special Handstamp
Centre South Shields D.O., Keppel Street,
SOUTH SHIELDS, NE33 1AA

Midland Special Handstamp Centre
Birmingham Mail Centre, St Stephens
Street, BIRMINGHAM, B6 4AA

Wales & The West Special Handstamp
Centre Royal Mail, 220-228 Penarth Road,
CARDIFF, CF11 8TA

Tallents House
21 South Gyle Crescent
EDINBURGH, EH12 9PB

British Forces Post Office
Philatelic Officer, PCD RLC, Inglis Barracks,
Mill Hill, LONDON, NW7 1PX

And from Autumn 2007

HQ British Forces Post Office
RAF Northolt, West End Road,
Ruislip, HA4 6DQ

British Forces Postal Service operate their
own Special Handstamp Centre.

However, some restrictions apply to the
services offered:

- The number of re-posted covers is limited
to a maximum of 10 items per person.
Requests for larger postings will be charged
at 5p per cover/postcard. Any cheques
should be made payable to 'Central Bank (BFPO) a/c'.
- Special Postmark sponsorship is generally
limited to serving forces personnel only.

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