

Royal Proclamation of Elizabeth I

Greenwich, 26th April 1591 (33 Elizabeth I)

Whereas heretofore sundry ways have been devised to redress the disorders among the posts of our realm in general, and particularly to prevent the inconveniences both to our own service and the lawful trade of the honest merchants by prohibiting that no persons whatsoever should take upon them publicly or privately to procure, gather up, receive, bring in, or carry out any packets or letters to or from the countries beyond the seas except such our ordinary posts and messengers for those parts as either by our master of the posts, or the masters of the posts general of those countries reciprocally, should be found nominated for that kind of service, or otherwise be able to show sufficient warrant for their voyages and dispatches under the hands of our principal secretaries, any ambassadors, or others sufficiently authorized; which notwithstanding, divers disavowed persons have used to intrude themselves contrary to all good order.

In consideration of which inconveniences past, we do hereby straightly prohibit and forbid all persons whatsoever, directly or indirectly, to gather up, receive, bring in, or carry out of this realm any letters or packets without the allowance or ordinary address and dispatch of the said masters and comptrollers of the posts reciprocally, or their deputies, or shall be sufficiently authorized as is aforesaid. And therefore our will and pleasure is, that you the Lord Treasurer of England and the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, together with our trusty and well-beloved servant John Stanhope, esquire, master and comptroller general of all our posts, cause public knowledge to be given hereof unto all merchants, both strangers and others, of our city of London, and all others whom it may or ought to concern, that neither they nor any for them do hereafter take upon them, openly or underhand, to employ any such disavowed person in the carrying of their letters, but to use such only as shall be found lawfully appointed for that service.

To which effect also we do expressly will and command by these presents all mayors, sheriffs, justices of peace, bailiffs, and all special commissioners, and more specially all searchers, customers, and comptrollers of our ports, and all other our officers and ministers wheresoever in their several jurisdictions and offices, to make diligent search of all mails, budgets, and other carriages of all such disavowed couriers, messengers, or suspected persons coming in or going out of the realm with packets or letters; and all such so discovered to apprehend and stay, keeping them in safe custody until by the view of their writings sent up to our Privy Council it be seen and advised what shall be further done with them.