

The GPO and Royal events

Eighty years ago in 1936/7, two significant events connected with the Royal Family occurred for the GPO^A.

The K6 Telephone Kiosk

The first was the introduction in 1936 of the K6 telephone kiosk, for the Silver Jubilee, celebrations for King George V. Giles Gilbert Scott^B designed the iconic red telephone kiosk and the GPO installed many thousands of them across the UK. The numbers rose from 19,000 kiosks in 1935 to 35,000 by 1940^C.

Coronation of King George the 6th

The King acceded to the throne in December 1936 with the Coronation taking place in May 1937. His accession followed the abdication of Edward VIII^D which in turn proceeded by the death of George V.

Televising the Coronation

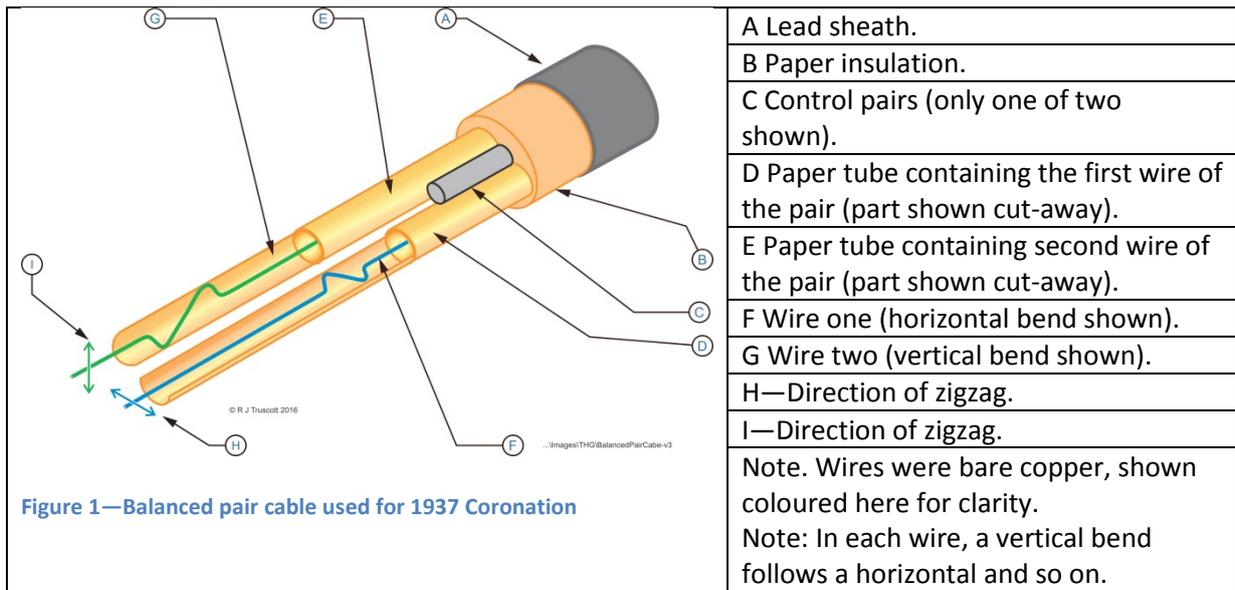
The BBC had started a test of Television using both the EMI and Baird systems in 1932. They chose the EMI system to start a service in November of 1936, which ran until the outbreak of WWII, resuming in 1946.

Eight miles (13km) of cable connected three cameras of the fledgling BBC television service to the control room and transmitter at Alexandra Palace. The BBC televised only the procession; however, the radio did broadcast the Abbey ceremonies.

Everyone will be familiar with coaxial cable from his or her home TV's aerial feed. However, before the GPOs use of co-axial cable for high bandwidth signals there was Balanced Pair cable. The GPO laid this type of cable for televising the Coronation procession.

An unusual cable

I first saw this cable in London when I was on PTO^E work at Faraday. This was in the early 1970's and it was still in use and had a fault on it near Buckingham Palace which me and my TO^F were tasked to locate. Arriving at the Palace, we drove our van across the forecourt to the Palace's Post Office to get the keys to cabinet housing the cable. Getting back in the van, we drove to the back entrance and across to the other side of the gardens passing under the rear of the Palace. Tucked away against the boundary wall was the cabinet. After locating the fault, we locked up, returned the key and went to find the jointers. Finding a joint at our location the jointers opened it and found the fault. The construction of the cable was something I had not seen before. The figure shows what they looked like. A series of alternating zigzag bends set at 90° to one another centralizes the wire within the tube. Staggering the zigzags in each wire ensured they did not appear opposite one another. There are two bundles of pairs used for control between the camera operator and the outside broadcast unit. These pairs could also carry sound transmissions.



There is a nice example in the Science Museum in the Information Age gallery in the exhibition about the 1937 Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

^A General Post Office.

^B 1880-1960. Notable works are the K2 and K6 phone box, libraries for Oxford and Cambridge Universities, Bankside power station (Tate Modern), Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, Battersea power station, Extension to City of London Guildhall, various war memorials and churches.

^C Wikipedia contributors "Red Telephone Box", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_telephone_box#K6, Accessed 03 Nov 2016.

^D He abdicated to marry Wallace Simpson, an American divorcee.

^E Precision Testing Office (Cable testing).

^F Technical Officer.