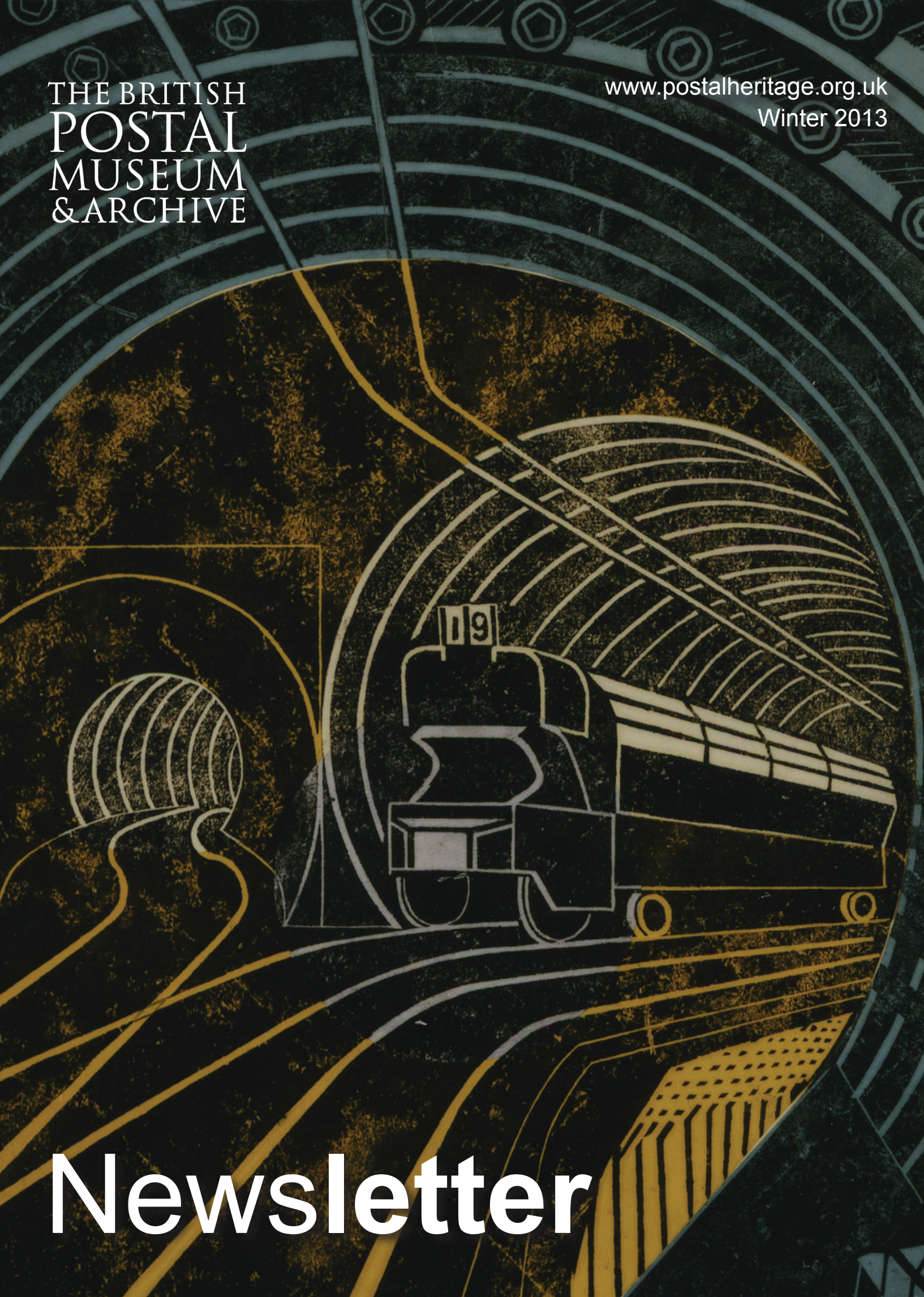


THE BRITISH
POSTAL
MUSEUM
& ARCHIVE

www.postalheritage.org.uk

Winter 2013



Newsletter

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The BPMA *Newsletter* is designed and edited by Jana Harnett. Contributions come from all members of the BPMA staff and some members of the public. No part of this *Newsletter* may be reproduced without seeking permission from the BPMA at the address below.

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The *Newsletter* is produced three times a year. It is available free to anyone who joins the BPMA mailing list and to the Friends of the BPMA.

The BPMA e-newsletter is sent every month to everyone who has signed up for free at

www.postalheritage.org.uk/mailling

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The BPMA is the public identity of the Postal Heritage Trust.

Registered as a charity in England and Wales
 Charity No. 1102360, Company No. 4896056

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Loading the Post Office Underground Railway trains – three impressions

from top:

Black/white photography from 1927 (POST 118/5067)

Artwork for a poster by Lili Rethi, 1937 (POST 109/331)

Artwork for a poster by Richard Ziegler, c.1939 (POST 109/328)

Front cover:

Artwork for a poster advertising the Post Office Tube Railway by Edward Bawden, 1935 (POST 109/515).

This poster design, commissioned in March 1935, was one of several that was initially approved by the Poster Advisory Group in February 1936, but which was then rejected outright by the Public Relations Department in 1937. This action ultimately resulted in the disbanding of the Poster Advisory Group.

Making Britain's postal heritage open to all

In this first Newsletter edition of 2013 we will give you an outlook of BPMA's exciting plans to provide a new home for Britain's postal heritage and to make our collections open and accessible to more and more people across the country.

The news about the progress towards a new postal museum and archive certainly is by far the most exciting feature in this edition. BPMA Director Adrian Steel talks about the milestone we have achieved since the last Newsletter edition and the new opportunity this has created (page 4). Campaign Director Jeanette Grose presents more details about the BPMA's plans to assess the viability of opening a section of the former Post Office underground railway line, Mail Rail, as a visitor attraction (pages 10-11). Mail Rail is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating and exciting parts of our postal heritage and we are now hoping to tell its story as part of the new postal museum.

Finally, Access & Learning Manager Andy Richmond provides an update on the feedback he has received since we asked Newsletter and BPMA blog readers in the autumn to send us their suggestion for objects for our new museum exhibition space (page 6).

In the last edition of this Newsletter we also asked readers to help us improve our work by completing a survey. We are very pleased about the number of forms returned to us and would like to thank everyone who took part and sent us their comments. We will endeavour to incorporate your ideas and suggestions in our future work and to maintain the quality of this Newsletter and our services that the majority of you were very satisfied with.

Many Newsletter readers who took part in this survey told us that they may not be able to visit the archive or a future museum here in London and would like to see our collections also in other locations across the country. Increasing access to our collections has always been one of our key objectives and we have therefore included articles on our touring exhibitions and objects on loan to other UK museums in this Newsletter edition (pages 7-8). We hope for those of you who cannot make the journey to London, this might be an opportunity to see parts of our collections.

Reading the human story of postal communication is of great interest to a large part of our Newsletter readers and many of you loved Jim "Dusty" Miller's account of his time as a young telegram messenger boy (pages 14-17 of the Autumn 2012 Newsletter edition).

To acknowledge the role of these (mainly) young men in the history of the postal service and to celebrate our messenger heritage, we have produced a new Telegram Messenger postcard set. It features four striking images of messengers from the 1930s and 1940s, a souvenir greetings telegram and a GPO poster. You can find more information on the postcard set on the back inside cover of this Newsletter. We also hope to include more personal stories by former postal workers in future Newsletter editions.

One well-known postal worker was Sergeant Alfred Knight who fought bravely as a Post Office Rifleman in the First World War, for which he was awarded a Victoria Cross. Our Curator Emma Harper had the opportunity to attend a reunion event of the British Forces Post Office and to learn more about the story behind the Victoria Cross which is part of the BPMA's collection (page 9).

In further articles we look at some of our iconic or lesser known postal history artefacts such as oil paintings (pages 12-13), the first pillar box (pages 14-16) and telephone kiosks (pages 18-19). Members of our curatorial and archive teams give a behind-the-scenes look at an audit of our Museum Store (page 17) and another interesting 'snippet from the archive' (page 22).

We also celebrate the 80th anniversary of the GPO Film Unit in a short review of its achievements (page 21) and asked stamp enthusiast Chris West to tell us how he came to write "A History of Britain in 36 Postage Stamps" (page 20).



Jana Harnett
(Marketing & Development Assistant)

Newsletter Editor

newsletter@postalheritage.org.uk

Image below:

A telegram messenger on his motorcycle, part of our new Telegram messenger postcard set (POST 118/69)



From the Director's Chair



Adrian Steel

Director - The British Postal Museum & Archive

adrian.steel@postalheritage.org.uk
Twitter: @UYE706M



Early concept visualisation of the Mail Rail visitor experience (courtesy of Preconstruct 2012).

A Happy New Year to all readers and friends of the BPMA. 2013 is another big year for us.

Since the last issue we have reached a significant milestone in our plans to build a new Postal Museum & Archive, to be located at Calthorpe House in Central London. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has passed our first-round bid as part of a two stage funding application process to help move our world-class collections into a new, accessible and permanent home. Initial HLF support has been confirmed for an application of £4.25m and development funding of £250,000 has been awarded.

The first-round pass means that the BPMA can now move ahead with the planned development and work up detailed proposals ahead of a round two application later this year to secure the remaining £4m. Further activities to generate funding to create a state of the art museum and visitor facility are taking place throughout 2013. Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, and Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, have voiced enthusiastic support for the project.

Furthermore, our first round success with the HLF will allow us to carry out a feasibility study and assess the viability of opening a section of the former Post Office underground railway line, Mail Rail, as a visitor attraction. Mail Rail would offer an exceptional opportunity for the general public to discover this hidden gem of Britain's postal and railway heritage, across the road from Calthorpe House. For further information on Mail Rail, please see the feature article on pages 10-11.

In recent months, we have also been working with creative designers Haley Sharpe Design on initial concept designs and scheme designs for the main exhibition space at Calthorpe House. The permanent displays will explore different eras of our postal heritage starting with the early days of the Royal Mail, extending across the First and Second World Wars and into the 21st century. Temporary exhibitions will enrich the visitor experience and make each visit unique.

2013 also promises to be a big year for the British postal service. The privatisation of Royal Mail Group is being progressed and there is speculation that it could be sold any time from late this year. There also is continued political interest in the BPMA and we had a visit from deputy Mayor of London Kit Malthouse just before Christmas.

Royal Mail plans to issue a wide range of special stamps this year, starting with the 150th anniversary of the London Underground in January, which was marked with an event at the London Transport Museum in which we participated.

Although we do have a clear aim to prepare our collections and service to move, and to set ourselves up in our new home, we have a full programme of events planned for 2013 including one of our evening talks which I will give myself towards the end of the year – more details to follow!

I hope that I will see you at a talk or open day and thank you for your continued support of BPMA and our work.



LOTTERY FUNDED

News in brief

Post & Go Machine

A fully functioning Royal Mail Hytech Post & Go machine entered service at the BPMA on 3 December 2012; it can be found in the foyer of the Royal Mail Archive. The machine produces self-adhesive stamps on demand with a special overprint reading "The B.P.M.A.". Our Post & Go machine holds two different stamp designs which may be changed 3 – 4 times a year. The machine takes payment by credit and debit cards, and is only available to visitors.

Official first day covers featuring first class stamps of the two designs (the Christmas Robin and the Machin head) have been produced with the official BPMA covers and cancelled with the official British Postal Museum & Archive cancellation stamp dated 3 Dec 2012. Only 50 copies have been produced and they are available for £7.50 (plus P&P) from the BPMA shop www.postalheritage.org.uk/shop (subject to availability).

Sign-up to the BPMA e-newsletter to receive the latest updates on the Post & Go machine and other news:

www.postalheritage.org.uk/mailing.

Masters of the Post wins award

The Business Archives Council (BAC) has announced that the winner of the 2011 BAC Wadsworth Prize for British Business History is Duncan Campbell-Smith for his book *Masters of the Post – The Authorized History of the Royal Mail*. The prize was presented to Mr Campbell-Smith by the Chairman of the BAC, Dr Terry Gourvish, on 8 November 2012.

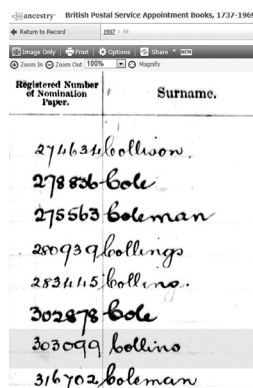
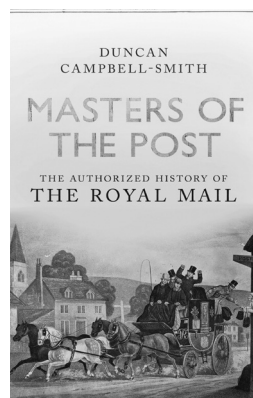
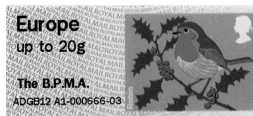
Masters of the Post is the first complete history of the Royal Mail up to the present day, made possible by comprehensive research at The British Postal Museum & Archive (as described in a previous issue of this Newsletter). It presents the whole story of Britain's postal service — how it was built, how it led the world for two hundred years and how it has struggled to survive in the face of mounting odds since the arrival of the internet.

Masters of the Post is available for £30 (plus P&P) from the BPMA Shop

www.postalheritage.org.uk/publications.

Online resources popular with researchers

The British Postal Museum & Archive Search Room saw 2716 visitors in 2012, a slight decrease on 2011, whereas email and letter enquiries remained at the same level. Part of the fall in visitors can be attributed to the greater availability of our resources online. Particularly our family history sources, such as the appointment indexes, are searchable online via www.ancestry.co.uk allowing people to search for their ancestors from the comfort of their home rather than visit in person.



Images, from top:

The two current Post & Go stamp designs.

Douglas Muir, BPMA Curator of Philately, was the first official user of the Royal Mail Post & Go machine.

Cover design of *Masters of the Post – The Authorized History of the Royal Mail*, by Duncan Campbell-Smith.

Post Office appointment records available online on www.ancestry.co.uk

Events Jan–June 2013

Event	Date & Time	Venue
From Pillar to Post – GPO London Walking Tour	26 Jan, 11am-1pm	Farringdon Station
Tour of the Archive	13 Feb, 3pm-4pm	BPMA Search Room
Talk: First Class: A history of Britain in 36 postage stamps	21 Feb, 7pm-8pm	Phoenix Centre
From Pillar to Post – GPO London Walking Tour	24 Feb, 11am-1pm	Farringdon Station
Tour of the Museum Store	6 Mar, 1pm-3pm	Museum Store, Debden
Talk: Illness and absence in the Victorian Post Office	21 Mar, 7pm-8pm	Phoenix Centre
From Pillar to Post – GPO London Walking Tour	23 Mar, 11am-1pm	Farringdon Station
Tour of the Museum Store	3 Apr, 10am-12pm	Museum Store, Debden
Tour of the Museum Store	3 Apr, 1pm-3pm	Museum Store, Debden
Pillar Box Perfection – Museum Store Open Day	6 Apr, 10am-4pm	Museum Store, Debden
Tour of the Archive	10 Apr, 3pm-4pm	BPMA Search Room
Talk: Postal Mischief	18 Apr, 7pm-8pm	Phoenix Centre
From Pillar to Post – GPO London Walking Tour	21 Apr, 11am-1pm	Farringdon Station
Tour of the Museum Store	1 May, 1pm-3pm	Museum Store, Debden
Museums at Night	16 May, evening	Museum Store, Debden
From Pillar to Post – GPO London Walking Tour	18 May, 11am-1pm	Farringdon Station
Tour of the Museum Store	3 Jun, 6pm-8pm	Museum Store, Debden
Tour of the Museum Store	5 Jun, 1pm-3pm	Museum Store, Debden
Tour of the Archive	12 Jun, 3pm-4pm	BPMA Search Room
Talk: The Curious Culture of Letter Writing	20 Jun, 7pm-8pm	Phoenix Centre
From Pillar to Post – GPO London Walking Tour	23 Jun, 11am-1pm	Farringdon Station

BPMA Search Room, Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DL

Open Monday-Friday, 10.00am-5.00pm (7.00pm on Thursdays) and selected Saturdays (9 Feb, 9 Mar, 13 Apr, 11 May, 8 Jun) 10.00am-5.00pm.

Please note that the BPMA Search Room will be closed for the annual stock-take between 13–24 May 2013.

BPMA Museum Store, Unit 7, Imprimo Park, Debden Industrial Estate, Lenthall Road, Loughton, Essex IG10 3UF

Put your stamp on the new museum exhibition space – Update

Access & Learning Manager Andy Richmond presents some of the responses following our call for your ideas for our new museum exhibition space

Many thanks to all those who sent in suggestions for museum objects and archive records that they would like to see included in the new centre gallery displays. The most popular object, by far, was the BPMA's 1930s Mobile Post Office GPO2. One of the largest road vehicles in the BPMA collection, it was introduced following the success of GPO1, which entered service in 1936. The registration index letters 'GPO' had been allotted by the Ministry of Transport for exclusive use by the Post Office on special vehicles.

Both vehicles provided full mobile counter facilities, which made them ideal for working at temporary sites such as shows and race meetings. During the Second World War GPO1 and GPO2 were transferred to war service. First used as mobile recruitment offices, they were later used as emergency wireless receiving and transmitting stations.

On 13 November 2010 GPO2 took part in the Lord Mayor's Show parade, accompanied by a group of staff and Friends of The British Postal Museum & Archive, and members of the Postal History Society. The vehicle proved very popular on that day, and obviously remains a special object for many of our readers!

Moving on from the museum collection to philatelic items, another reader suggested a timeline of postal covers ranging from 1600 to the present day, illustrating the changing nature and look over the years – from stampless covers on creamy rag, through conventional mail, to today's electronic markings.

A relative of Rowland Hill got in touch to suggest a display of the famous postal pioneer's silverware, currently being cared for as part of the collections; whilst a blog reader put forward the idea of including an area given over to the philatelic community "where they can apply, or even compete, to mount an exhibit for say three months at a time".

The winner, however, is Stan Goron, former manager of the National Postal Museum. Stan took the time to write us a splendid letter, in which he relates an amusing story about the perils of sending delicate items through the post:

"During my period of tenure, we made a concerted effort to build up both the museum's 'postal history' and arte-

fact collections. Staff would travel round the country in a van picking up all sorts of items that offices alerted us to. Some of it, inevitably, was less than worthwhile, but I suspect much of it is still in store in one place or another.

Sometimes offices offered to send items to us, not always successfully. I well remember being contacted by the Aberdeen office who asked whether we were interested in an old typewriter they no longer needed. They said they would send it to us. I said ok, assuming they would pack

it appropriately. When it arrived at my office, in a mail bag and with some rattling sound, I feared the worst. And sure enough, it was more like a typewriter jig-saw puzzle than a typewriter.

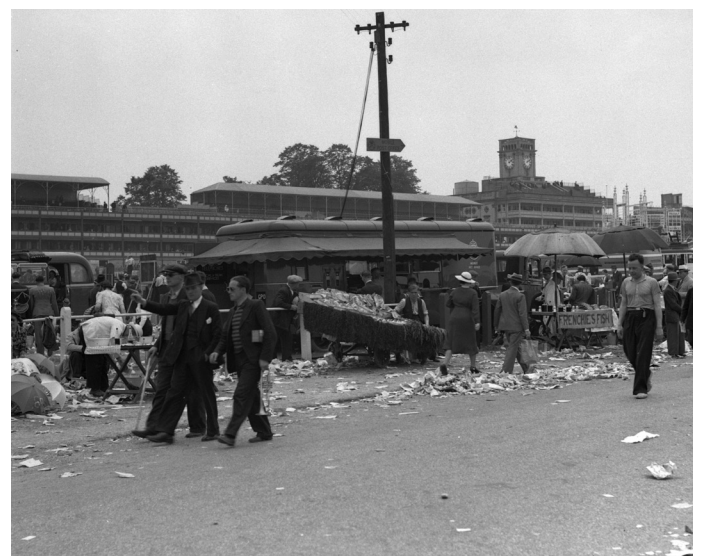
I was once in charge of the Post Office's two packaging consultants, who would visit customers to advise them on how best to package items for the post. I can only assume they never made it to Aberdeen Head Post Office!"

Stan's suggestion was for items related to the British Post Offices abroad. He recalled a

handstamp from the office in Constantinople that could be used as a basis for display all about British tourists and their travels to the Ottoman Empire of the time. Stan wins a signed copy of Julian Stray's book *Mail Trains*.



The GPO2 at the Lord Mayor's Show London 2010 (above) and situated in the grounds of Ascot racecourse, 1938 (below, POST 118/873)



Our collections out and about

Objects from the BPMA's collections are currently on loan in museums across the UK. Curator (Move Planning) Emma Harper has recently visited two of the venues that have these postal history artefacts on display.

Current work at the BPMA is focussed around our plans for our New Centre at Calthorpe House and especially for the design of a permanent exhibition space in which to show the many different objects in our collection. This will support and expand on the work we already do through our accredited museum at the Museum of the Post Office in the Community and our touring exhibitions (see following page). Another aspect of our work, however, is our loans to other museums as far apart as Scotland, Norfolk and Cornwall to name but a few. Recently I have visited BPMA loans at two museums, which I am going to share with you in this article.

A Messenger uniform in Glasgow

The Riverside Museum in Glasgow is Scotland's Museum of Transport and Travel, which opened in 2011 after a major development project. The museum includes many innovative ways of interpreting transport collections such as a 'car wall' and a suspended bicycle velodrome display. Amongst the displays is one on the role of the Telegram Messenger boy. The focus of the display is a motorcycle used by messengers on delivery. It was the thought of riding one of these that often encouraged boys to join the Post Office.

However, the role of the Telegram Messenger involved far more than just this, as is explored via a series of touch-screens where visitors can play a game to see who can deliver their telegrams most efficiently. Next to this is a manikin dressed in a Telegram Messenger boy's uniform complete with waterproof leggings, motorcycle goggles, helmet and gloves all from BPMA's collection as well as the standard issue jacket and pouch. These objects provide a wider context to the display of a vehicle, helping to bring the object and the stories connected with it to life. Indeed, the display has provoked the memories of many visitors, just like those Jim Miller has shared with us in the previous edition of this Newsletter.

Pistols and handstamps in Falmouth

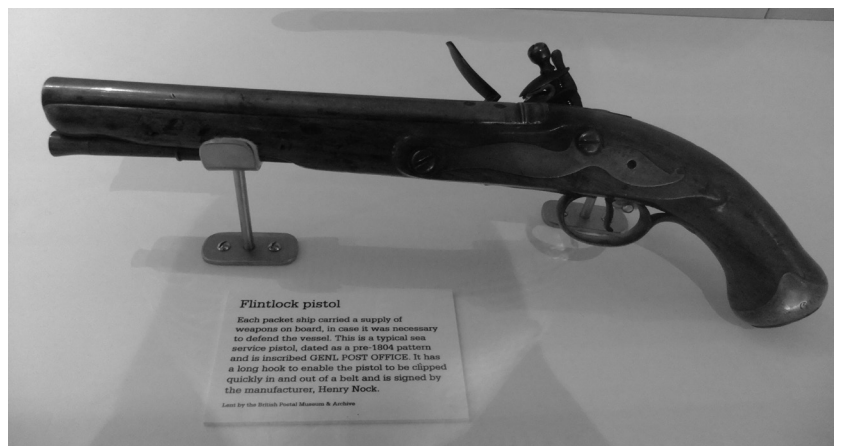
Objects loaned from the BPMA can also be seen at the opposite end of the country at the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth. The museum's collections consist of a range of objects from boats to art, as well as extensive archives that help tell the maritime heritage of Cornwall. An important part of this is a



Images, from top:

Display of a Telegram Messenger Boy Uniform at the Riverside Museum, Glasgow

A Flintlock Pistol at the National maritime Museum in Falmouth (pre-1804, OB1995.326)



display on The Falmouth Packet Service, 1789-1851, which is where the objects from the BPMA can be found: two Flintlock Pistols issued to help protect the ships and the mail they carried, and two Maritime handstamps, one for the Falmouth Packet Service itself and the other for postage paid at St Ives port for a Ship Letter. These objects help tell the story of how Falmouth became a central hub of communication for over 150 years. They sit alongside objects from the museum's own collection such as a mail bag from HM Packet Ship Crane and letters sent via Packet Ships.

By lending objects to other museums the BPMA increases access to its own physical collection and conveys the important human story of communication that is shared by everyone.

Touring exhibitions 2013

In 2013 Exhibitions Officer Dominique Gardner is pleased to announce that two of the BPMA's touring exhibitions will be exhibited at a selection of locations across the country: Last Post: Remembering the First World War and Designs on Delivery: GPO Posters.



Dispatching sacks of wartime mail (POST 56/6)

Last Post: Remembering the First World War

Last Post, curated by the BPMA and the Churchill Museum & Cabinet War Rooms, explores the vital role played by the Post Office during the First World War. It tells the stories of postal workers at war and on the Home Front, and examines the essential role played by postal communications.

Museum of Army Flying

25 March–27 September 2013

Daily 10.00am to 4.30pm
(Last admission at 4.00pm)

Middle Wallop, Stockbridge, Hampshire, SO20 8DY; Tel. 01264 784421; www.armyflying.com.

Admission price to the Museum includes entry to *Last Post*. The Museum of Army Flying is home to a unique collection of military aviation history.

Aysgarth Station Heritage Site

4 May–8 May 2013

10.00am to 4.00pm

Free admission.

In the heart of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Trains no longer run from this charming Victorian station but a group of volunteers from the Wensleydale Railway welcomes visitors. Tel. 07779 658315; www.wensleydalerailway.com/html/aysgarth_station.

Designs on Delivery: GPO Posters

Designs on Delivery explores the crucial role design played in promoting social progress and technological change across Britain between 1930 and 1960. From the 1930s onwards the Post Office became a leader in the field of poster design, commissioning some of Britain's best artists and designers.

Designs on Delivery is being exhibited in 2013 through an exciting partnership with Paintings in Hospitals. Paintings in Hospitals is a registered charity that uses visual art to create environments that improve health, wellbeing and the healthcare experience for all.

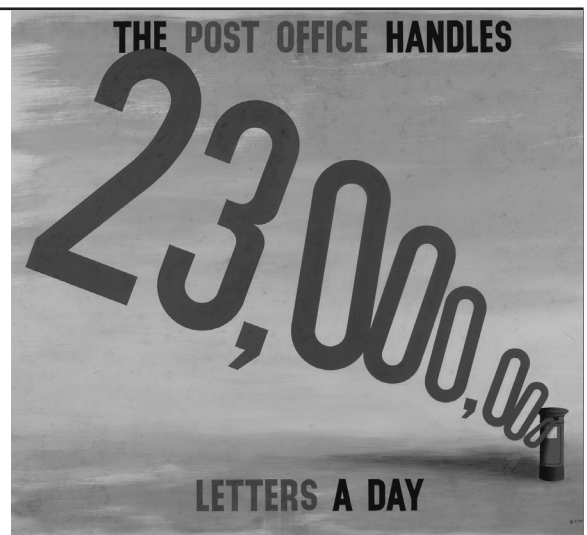
Great Western Hospital Swindon

19 March–27 June 2013

Free admission

Great Western Hospital, Marlborough Road, Swindon, SN3 6BB, Tel. 01793 604020

A selection of images from Designs on Delivery will be exhibited within a purpose designed display area at the Great Western Hospital. For opening hours please contact the Hospital or visit the website www.gwh.nhs.uk.



The Post Office handles 23,000,000 letters a day.
G R Morris, 1947 (POST 109/195)

The BPMA has three touring exhibitions available for hire that cover the depth and breadth of content and innovation within postal history. Our aim is for as many people as possible to see our exhibitions. For more information on any of the BPMA touring exhibitions please contact Dominique Gardner, Exhibitions Officer: dominique.gardner@postalheritage.org.uk or Tel. 020 7239 2105.

Remembering the Post Office Rifles

Emma Harper, Curator (Move Planning) attended a reunion event of the British Forces Post Office and met the granddaughter of the Post Office Rifleman and Victoria Cross recipient Sergeant Alfred Knight

On Saturday, 3 November 2012, I was fortunate enough to attend a reunion event at the home of the British Forces Post Office (BFPO). This was held to commemorate the organisation as a whole but specifically the Battle for Wurst Farm Ridge, Ypres, Belgium, in which the 2nd/8th Battalion London Regiment, known as the Post Office Rifles, took part. Many serving members of the modern day British Forces Post Office and Postal and Courier Services Officers' Association were also present to remember their predecessors' actions.

In 1917 the company was sent to Ypres and in September they began training for what was to be the Battle for Menin Road Ridge. Their objective was to capture a portion of this ridge, known as Wurst Farm, in an attempt to cut the Germans off and force a surrender. One of the prominent individuals in this battle was Sergeant Alfred Knight, from the Engineers Department of the Post Office. Knight had joined the Post Office Rifles at the outbreak of World War One in 1914 and served throughout the war along with other Post Office volunteers.

Mrs Ann Turrell, granddaughter of Alfred Knight, was also present at the lunch and gave a vivid and detailed account of his actions that day. There was also a reading from Charles Messenger's book *Terriers in the Trenches*:

He rushed through our own barrage, bayoneted the enemy gunner, and captured the position single handedly. Later, twelve of the enemy with a machine gun were encountered in a shell-hole. He again rushed forward by himself, bayoneted two and shot a third, causing the remainder to scatter. Subsequently, during an attack on a fortified farm, when entangled up to the waist in mud, and seeing a number of the enemy firing on our troops, he immediately opened fire on them without waiting to extricate himself from the mud, killing six of the enemy.

It was these actions that earned Sergeant Knight the Victoria Cross, the only Post Office rifleman to achieve this, the highest British Decoration for Gallantry. The medal is now in the BPMA's collection along with other medals won by Knight throughout his service. As part of the day, the BPMA arranged for



the Victoria Cross to be displayed alongside BFPO's painting by Terence Cuneo, showing Knight in action at the battle. These, coupled with Ann's account of her grandfather, really made the day a very special one and many thanks to both her and Major Chris Violet at the BFPO for making it so.

The Post Office Rifles were a remarkable unit and it is important that their role, and stories such as Alfred Knight's, are remembered. It is perhaps one of the lesser known aspects of the history of the postal service and really highlights the breadth and depth of BPMA's collection. It is treasures such as these that we hope to be able to share with the public in our new home in Calthorpe House.

Images, from top:

Sergeant Alfred Knight's Victoria Cross on display at the BFPO event.

Present day members of the BFPO and Ann Turrell, granddaughter of Sergeant Knight (second from left), with the Victoria Cross.

Mail Rail plans: opening up London's best kept secret

Campaign Director Jeanette Grose presents the BPMA's plans to make the former Post Office underground railway accessible to all as a visitor attraction

The BPMA is delighted that development funding of up to £250,000 was awarded from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2012. This tremendous boost to our fundraising is enabling us to now carry out a feasibility study to assess the viability of opening a section of the former Post Office underground railway, 'Mail Rail', as a heritage railway and visitor attraction.

London's Best Kept Secret

The opening of the Post Office Railway in 1927, the world's first driverless electric railway, revolutionised the delivery of mail in the UK. Mail Rail was a solution to carrying mail quickly and efficiently across London, as congested and polluted streets meant road transport was slow and very unpredictable. A two foot gauge railway was built, which transported mail underground.

The railway consisted of six and a half miles of tunnels, dug by hand, which ran at an average of 70 feet below ground. It connected the West and East ends of London and followed part of the existing London Underground route.

There were eight stations in total, situated at Paddington District Office; Western Parcels Office (Baker Street); Western District Office (Rathbone Place); Western Central District Office (High Holborn); Mount Pleasant; King Edward Building (St Paul's); Liverpool Street railway station and Eastern District Office (Whitechapel Road). 1930 and 1931 were key milestones when 51 trains were built, each 27-foot long; and at its peak, 34 trains ran 22 hours a day along 23 miles of track.

Progressing to the 1980s, trains travelled at an average speed of 35 mph and the time taken to run trains from Whitechapel to Paddington was around 30 minutes. By the late 1990s more than six million bags of mail were carried below ground each year – four million letters every day! The network closed in 2003 after almost 80 years' service and still remains the world's only dedicated underground mail transport system in existence.

Opening Up Access for All

Few people have had access to this unique part of our heritage. However more and more people are learning of its significance and place in world history. Michael Portillo, for example, popularised Mail Rail in his TV programme, *Great British Railway Journeys*, and BPMA focus group research revealed that the majority of people questioned would love to take a ride on a train.

Having a visitor attraction would be a major means of encouraging people to come to both the new postal museum and Mail Rail; however to achieve this we need to raise the majority of funds by November 2013 to make it a reality by 2016.

We would like to share with you our vision for a first-class attraction which would creatively convert the Mail Rail depot at Mount Pleasant into a museum exhibition space and introduce a fascinating 15 minute ride on the Mail Rail network. Newly designed battery-operated trains will journey through the existing tunnels under the mail centre – an unforgettable experience. The fully narrated tour will describe the construction of the system from 1915, its opening in 1927 and operation until 2003.

The old car depot will be transformed into a lively exhibition, tracing the history of moving the mail both above and below ground. Vehicles will include pneumatic rail cars from the 1860s, which were once propelled by air through specially designed tunnels. Video projections, objects and interactive displays will offer personal insights into the daily lives of the Post Office engineers who kept the system running – a service that shaped the modern world and touched the lives of countless generations.

Further details about the railway heritage attraction will be developed over time and posted on our website www.postalheritage.org.uk or sign up to our e-newsletter to receive regular updates and news on our activities www.postalheritage.org.uk/mailing.

The BPMA is a national treasure of global importance.

Mayor Boris Johnson

Images page 11:

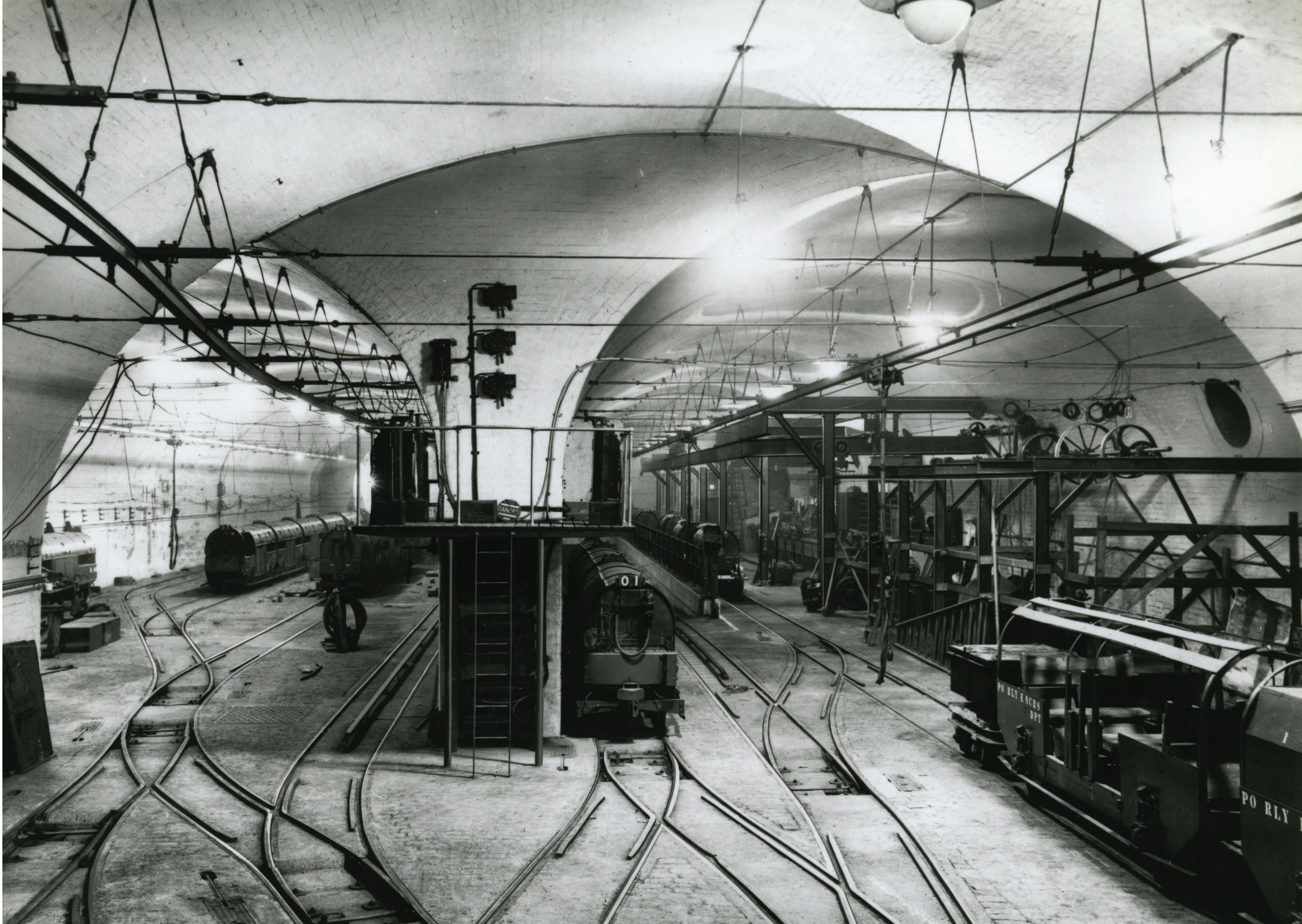
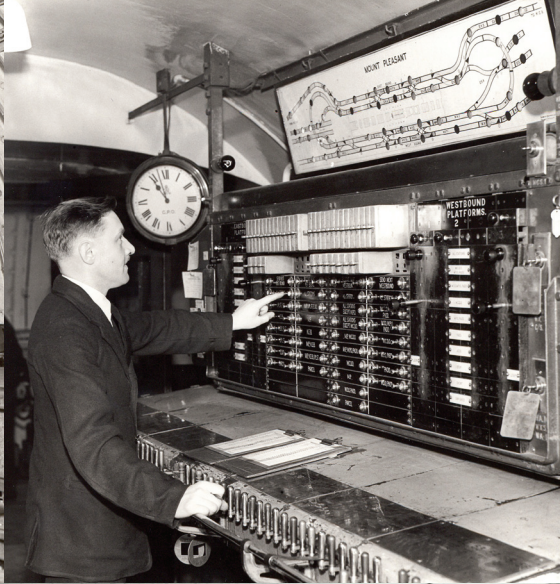
top – Early stage concept images of the Mail Rail visitor attraction with the Mail Rail ride (left) and embarkation zone in the car depot (right) (courtesy of Preconstruct 2012)

centre – black/white photographs of the Post Office underground railway in operation in 1935: A train in a tunnel (left, POST 118/382); Postman operating underground mail route control panel (centre, POST 118/385); Postmen loading bags from conveyor into containers to use on the Post Office underground railway (right, POST 118/381)

bottom – photograph of the Post Office Underground car depot in 1927 (POST 118/5066)



LOTTERY FUNDED



The BPMA Paintings Collection

The BPMA's collection of paintings is part of the UK's national collection of oil paintings on the Your Paintings website. Web Officer Alison Bean gives an overview of these works.

Images below, left to right:
Portrait of a Postman (Alex Buchanan) by Thomas Patterson, ca. 1900-1912 (2004-0077)

Mobile Post Office, Henley by Adrian Keith Graham Hill, 1937 (POST 109/203)

The BPMA is the custodian of two main collections: the archive of the Royal Mail and the BPMA Museum Collection. The vast influence the postal industry has had in shaping British society, and the world, is reflected throughout our collections. They include photographs, films, ephemera, weapons, uniforms, vehicles, trains, letterboxes and artwork, including a number of works in oil.

The artists represented in the collection include artists from the 18th to the 20th centuries, for example Charles Jervas, James Pollard, Charles Cooper Henderson and Henry Alken (Senior and Junior), and Lynton Lamb.

The subject matter of our oil paintings includes portraits of people who had a significant impact on postal services, such as Sir Rowland Hill, past Postmasters General or Secretaries of the Post Office, as well of those of unnamed postal workers.

In some paintings specific historical events are depicted, such as the bombing of Mount

Pleasant Parcel depot in the Second World War, while others are more general scenes of times past, including extensive representations of the Mail Coach era.

Changing transport methods, from the seas to the skies, and road to rails, are also captured in these works.

Landmark buildings such as the GPO Tower and the old GPO building in the City of London, sit next to depictions of local post offices and more domestic scenes; the excitement of receiving a letter is portrayed more than once.

Recently our collection of oil paintings was made available on the Your Paintings website, a partnership between the BBC and the Public Catalogue Foundation which aims to show the entire UK national collection of oil paintings. Paintings from thousands of museums and other public institutions appear on the site.

Our paintings on Your Paintings

Visit the BPMA page on Your Paintings website

www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/galleries/locations/the-british-postal-museum-archive-6467 to see our collection of works in oil, or search the site to view postal-themed paintings from other institutions.





Image above: *St Martin's Le Grand* by James Pollard, c. 1840 (2004-0151)

This painting shows, on the left, the General Post Office (East). This was the main Post Office building, which moved to St Martin's Le Grand from Lombard Street in 1829.

The building opposite is a coaching inn, possibly at this time called the 'Queen's Hotel', but previously known as the 'Bull and Mouth'. It is thought that the name 'Bull and Mouth' came from 'Boulogne Mouth' commemorating a battle won by Henry VIII in 1544.

James Pollard was a Victorian engraver and painter of sporting and coaching subjects.

The GPO Headquarters building only became known as GPO (East) when the Headquarters expanded to further buildings in this area. The coaching inn itself was demolished in 1888 to make way for one of these buildings, which became GPO (North).

Image left: *Sir Rowland Hill*, Oil on canvas, attributed to Mary M Pearson, 1836 (2004-0154).

A half length portrait of Sir Rowland Hill as a young man. His postal reform changed the face of the British postal service and led to the introduction of the first postage stamp, the Penny Black. He is seated at his desk, holding a sheet of paper, with a quill and book resting on the desk.



“Well adapted for the purpose...”

The 23 November 2012 marked the 160th anniversary of the first roadside letter box in the UK. Curator Julian Stray looks back at this trial run and the emergence of letter boxes in Britain.

In November 1840 Rowland Hill proposed an experiment whereby letter boxes would be erected throughout London and other towns. He felt that this would “add greatly to the public convenience”, however little came of his proposal beyond the use of sacks and baskets being placed at letter receiving houses and main railway stations.

Following postal reform there was an explosion in the use of the Royal Mail. The volume of letters rose as did the complaints of a populace starved of an efficient system of collecting letters now prepaid by the sender. The 1850s was a decade when the Rural Letter Post System underwent radical change. It was Rowland Hill’s wish that the free delivery of letters be extended to all villages and hamlets where it could be justified. Post Office Surveyors were instructed that any place that received 100 letters each day should be awarded a delivery. However, the revision did not proceed as fast as Headquarters wished, and one particularly resourceful and efficient Surveyor’s Clerk, Anthony Trollope, was given the job of speeding things up in several districts.

In 1851, Trollope was heavily involved with his review of the postal services of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Worcestershire, the six southern Welsh counties, and the Channel Islands. In November 1851 Trollope was sent to the Channel Islands to make recommendations on how to improve their postal service. His reports were then assessed by his superior George Creswell, the Surveyor for the Western District of England, and passed to postal headquarters in London.

There had been many complaints from the islanders regarding the



delay to their mail, and the efficiency of the clerks charged with sorting the mail for delivery on Jersey quickly came under Trollope’s scrutiny: he was scathing in his assessment of their work. They were advised that if a great improvement in their work did not take place then they might be discharged. Each of the five letter carriers was receiving 8/- per week for an average walk of between 30 and 40 miles. If the amount of mail delivered was particularly large following the arrival of a packet boat, they could not complete their delivery on the same day and a reply via the same packet was impossible.

Trollope’s proposals originally centred on keeping the same number of delivery staff but pre-sorting correspondence at the head office and then despatching it to rural offices where each messenger would collect it. As part of the revision, horses were provided to the five letter carriers, the workforce was increased to eight and the walks sub-divided. Unfortunately this also meant a reduction in their pay to 7/- per week.

However, it was another of Trollope’s proposals to his superior Creswell that is of particular interest to anyone with an interest in street furniture:

“There is at present no receiving office in St. Heliers, and persons living in the distant parts of the town have to send nearly a mile to the principal office. I believe that a plan has obtained in France of fitting up letter boxes in posts fixed at the road side, and it may perhaps be thought advisable to try the operation of their system in St. Heliers – postage stamps are sold in every street, and therefore all that is wanted is a safe receptacle for letters, which shall be cleared on the morning of the despatch of the London Mails, and at such times as may be requisite.

Iron posts suited for the purpose may be erected at

the corners of streets in such situations as may be desirable, or probably it may be found more serviceable to fix iron letter boxes about 5 feet from the ground, wherever permanently built walls, fit for the purpose, can be found, and I think that the public may safely be invited to use such boxes for depositing their letters”

Pillar boxes had been in use on the continent for just a few years previous. It is fairly obvious from the surviving correspondence that the use of pillar boxes by the British Post Office was already being considered within the upper echelons of postal headquarters. However, beyond a few wooden boxes or bags hung in railway stations and apertures in windows, the introduction of anything more substantial had not occurred in Britain. Trollope recommended the experimental use of pillar boxes at four sites in St. Helier in Jersey.

The Secretary to the Post Office, John Tilley (also Trollope’s brother-in-law), stated that their use on Jersey would be a “good opportunity to try the system”. Creswell also agreed with Trollope’s proposal, adding that “... no better opportunity of trying the experiment of ‘roadside’ letter boxes could be selected.” Within the month, the Postmaster General had approved the experimental introduction of the pillar boxes. Trollope immediately followed this up with a request to extend the trial to St. Peter Port on neighbouring Guernsey, and another three boxes were approved.

“I beg to recommend that similar road side letter boxes may also be trialled at St. Peter Port in that island”

In December 1851, Tilley wrote to the Postmaster General regarding Trollope’s findings and proposals in Jersey; he finished his letter:

“Mr. Trollope appears to have given much attention to the subject and your Lordship may perhaps think it right to inform him that you are much satisfied with the manner in which it has been treated.”

The Postmaster General agreed. Certainly, it was Trollope who, aside from revising rural posts and pushing for efficiency, also had the vision to see the potential for the first use of pillar boxes by the British

Post Office and to actually recommend and see through their introduction.

In a letter to the Postmaster General, Tilley referred to the proposed pillar boxes as being “well adapted for the purpose.” A local contractor, John Vaudin, was engaged in July 1852 to construct the boxes for both Jersey and Guernsey at a cost of £7 each. Trollope’s roadside letter boxes, referred to as ‘assistant post offices’ by the *Jersey Times*, came into use on 23rd November 1852.

The pillar boxes were hexagonal, cast-iron, about four feet high and red in colour (though red as a standardised colour for post boxes was not settled on until 1874). The Royal Arms appeared on three sides, the words ‘Post Office’ on two sides, and on the remaining face, the words ‘Letter Box’ beside the vertical aperture. Boxes were mounted on a granite block, two feet deep and raised four inches from the ground. The boxes were “very favourably received by the public.” One box at the head of Bath Street in St. Helier was found to be too small for the amount of correspondence posted and was resited in Five Oaks, to the North-East of St. Helier.

A replacement larger box was authorised in July 1853 but was too large and would have caused too much of an obstruction. Not to be put off, the Post Office simply arranged for a wall to be knocked down and rebuilt to make

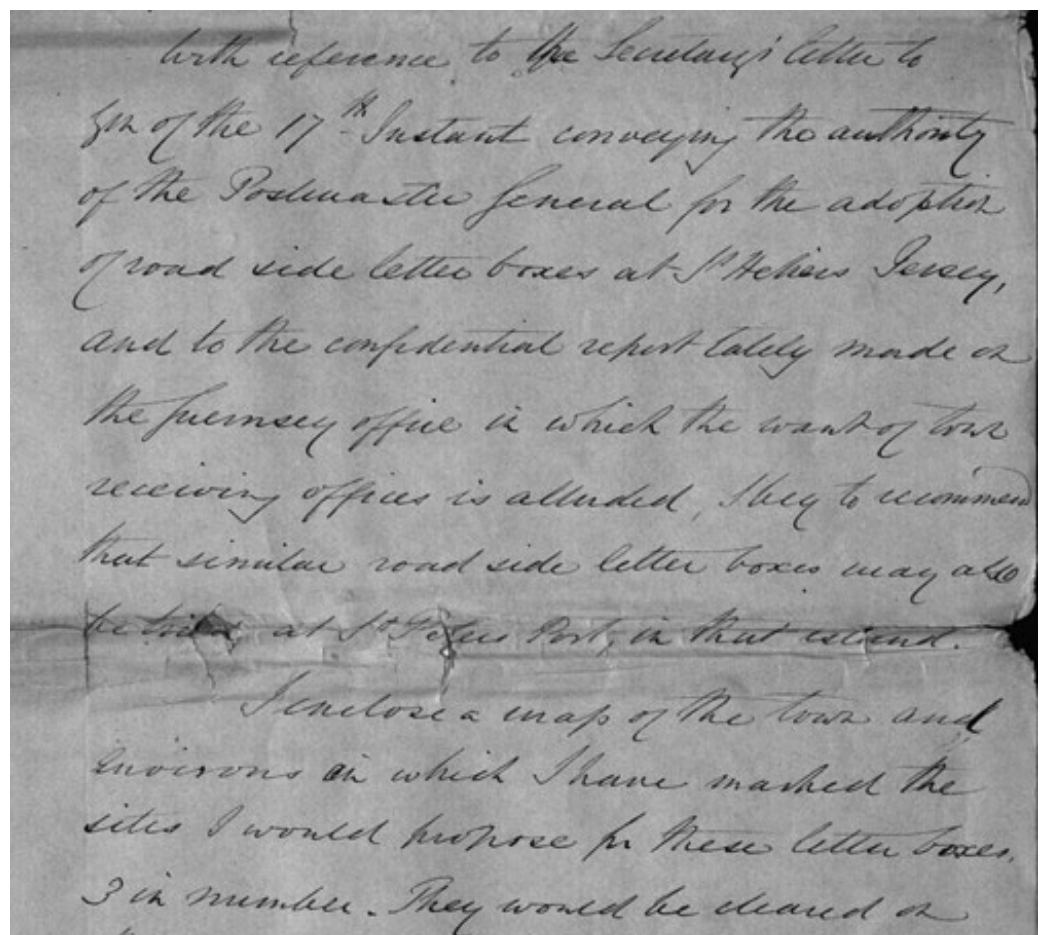


Images:

Above – 1853 Guernsey pillar box, still in use today. (P5856)

Below – Introduction of pillar boxes. (POST 14/35)

Page 14 opposite – Pillar box erected on Guernsey, Channel Islands, 1853. (OB1996.653)





room for it. In 1853, Creswell was already proposing another eight boxes for rural districts on Jersey.

BPMA collection as does one of the first mainland boxes erected the same year.

Trollope also carried out similar revision of the rural posts on Guernsey and Alderney. On 8th February 1853, the boxes on Guernsey opened for business. The authorities in St. Peter Port had been so approving of the new pillar boxes that they had agreed that if the Post Office provided another box then they would meet the cost of construction of another two, making six in total.

The first box on mainland Britain was manufactured by Abbott and Company and was erected at Botchergate, Carlisle around September 1853. That box too has not survived the intervening years. Soon after, approval was given for Trollope's proposed installation of pillar boxes in Gloucester while he was revising the rural posts there. It appears to be the case that each District Surveyor then became responsible for the establishment of pillar boxes in his district, sourcing not only the manufacturer but also frequently being responsible for the design. A National Standard design of pillar box was approved in 1859 but development in design carries on to this day.

Images:

Left – Post Office notice: Letter Boxes, Jersey, 1852.

Right – Group of Penfold Pillar boxes, part of the BPMA Museum collection. Introduced in 1866, the Penfold remains a well loved design. It spanned the adoption in 1874, of red as the official colour for all boxes. (OB1994.32, OB1994.30, 2007-0068)

Sadly, none of the boxes erected in Jersey in 1852 survive today, however one of those on Guernsey, first erected in 1853, is still receiving mail today. Another of the 1853 boxes originally in use on Guernsey survives in the



Pillar Box Perfection Open Day at the BPMA Museum Store

Saturday 6 April, 10.00am-4.00pm

Discover pillar boxes in more shapes, sizes and colours than you ever expected, as the BPMA opens the doors of its museum store to celebrate a British icon. See the Jersey pillar box from 1852, enjoy guided tours of letter box alley, and – especially for family visitors – have a go at designing your very own peculiar pillar box.

This is a drop-in event – no booking necessary.

The British Postal Museum Store, Unit 7, Imprinto Park, Debden Industrial Estate, Lenthall Road, Loughton, Essex, IG10 3UE

Museum Store audit: objects, boxes and pink tape

A look behind the scenes at the Museum Store: Curatorial Assistant Sarah Jenkins is currently auditing our vast collection of larger objects

As many of our readers may already know, our large object Museum Store in Essex holds many fascinating items in the BPMA's collection, including items such as pillar boxes, telephone kiosks and vehicles. Over the past 6 months or so I have been working out at our store carrying out an audit of the collections, focussing mostly on those stored on the mobile shelving.

The audit of the material held at the store is a necessary exercise and a vital part of good collections management. As part of the audit, I have been systematically cross-checking items on the shelves with the listings on the BPMA's collections database, checking that the recorded details and locations are correct.

At the same time I have been assessing the storage and packing of each item, replacing any packing materials which are no longer suitable (often due to age, which can mean they are no longer effectively protecting the object from the external environment). This can be a time-consuming task but planning for the long-term, sympathetic storage of an object means that the collection can be kept stable and in the best condition for future audiences and researchers to access and enjoy in years to come.

As you might imagine, the auditing and repacking project is no small undertaking so a methodical approach is essential – which is handy, because I'm rather fond of a good process! In summary, each box is given a unique 'Mus' number (printed on green labels) and following completion of the repacking, the database records for each object in that box are updated to include this new box reference. This allows a list to be produced of all the items found in a particular box, a copy

of which is included with the contents. To provide a good visual marker, each box (or indeed large item) is tied with pink cotton tape to indicate that it has been audited and re-packed. If anyone had told me at the start of the project that I would find the sight of rows of shelves filled with pink tape heartening, I wouldn't have believed them – but it's true!

It is not possible for me to talk about the store audit without a special mention for two wonderful BPMA volunteers, Don and Barry, who both give their time to assist with the project and have been invaluable, not least because they are a bit taller - I am rather vertically challenged - and can therefore help me reach the higher shelves! With our combined efforts we have recently reached our latest milestone of over 120 audited shelves.

Another very enjoyable element of the project is that during the audit I have been able to gather information on items being considered for display at the new postal museum at Calthorpe House which has been great – and provides an excellent excuse to follow up on research for an intriguing item.

There is still a lot of work to do as part of the audit, but much has been achieved in six months and the increasing number of shelves stacked with boxes tied with pink tape continues to bring a smile to my face on a rainy Monday!

If you are interested in getting involved with this or similar work, please contact Sarah Jenkins on sarah.jenkins@postalheritage.org.uk or call 020 8502 2673.

Images from left to right:

Sarah unwrapping a Post Bus ticket machine for auditing and carefully re-packing the ticket machine ready for re-boxing

A view from inside the mobile shelving, showing shelves containing audited objects with lots of lovely pink tape....



The ringing red icon – A whistle

Exhibitions Officer Dominique Gardner takes Newsletter readers on a short tour of the history of telephone kiosks – an interesting part of the BPMA’s museum collection



You may wonder why this Newsletter by The British Postal Museum & Archive features an article about telephone kiosks. The reason behind it is that 100 years ago, in 1912, the General Post Office (GPO) took over the majority of the UK’s private telephone services and were responsible for the telephone service until this was taken on by the newly formed British Telecom in the 1981.

Street furniture

With the increasing popularity of the telephone in the early 20th century, it was only a matter of time before telephone kiosks were seen in the street. Telephone kiosks based inside hotels, stations and other handy places already existed and were known as Silence cabinets.

so that their conversation could not be heard outside, whilst still providing fresh air. Another design feature included was a sloped floor – to offset possible unsavoury use as a urinal. Many K2s remain in the street today, predominantly in London. This was partly the downfall of the K2 – it was too expensive to produce in bulk to send out across the country. All K2s today are listed by English Heritage.

Everything to everyone

Let us pass swiftly by the K3, the cream concrete version of the K2, (although there is one still inside London Zoo), and only briefly mention the K4, designed in 1925. The K4 tried to be everything to everyone – a combination telephone kiosk, stamp-vending machine and post box. Sadly, it was not practical. Making a phone call in a kiosk that was next to a noisy road (enabling a quick collection of letters by the postal worker) simply did not work. An ideal site for a kiosk was not necessarily the same for a post box. Only 50 K4s were made.

Images:

Above and below right – Two views of the K4 telephone kiosk, currently on show at our Museum Store.

Opposite page 19, top – The K8 telephone kiosk

bottom – K2 telephone kiosk and pillar box in London.

Those placed on the streets took on various, often ornate guises. The GPO needed to develop its own street furniture in order to open up the service to the general public but also advertise the GPO simultaneously. In 1920, the first telephone kiosk under the GPO was introduced, the K1 (Kiosk 1). Whilst K1s remained on our streets for many years they were made out of concrete, rather than the GPO’s preferred medium of cast iron. Although relatively cheap to produce they were not seen as an attractive addition to the streets. Some councils even tried putting thatched roofs on top of K1s to improve their appearance! Though the K1 was never a permanent solution thousands were produced with a handful surviving today.

Grand style statement

The GPO’s quest for a telephone kiosk that was hard-wearing and aesthetically pleasing was answered in 1924 when architect Giles Gilbert Scott designed the cast-iron K2. GPO officials deemed that the now iconic K2 was to be red – standing proud as the colour of pillar boxes.

The K2’s domed roof was believed to echo the ornate design of the tomb of Sir John Soane, a fellow architect. The K2 was beautifully designed and functional. Rain water was directed off by vertical grooves down its sides. The ventilated crown at the top was handily placed far enough away from the speaker



Close-up look at telephone boxes

Triumphant (and cheaper)

I will also miss out altogether the prototype K5 and come instead to 1935 when the now Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designed the K6. The triumphant (and cheaper) alternative to the K2 had been found.

The K6, designed in King George V's Silver Jubilee year and referred to as the Jubilee Kiosk, eventually hit our streets in 1936. At least 60,000 were produced and can still be seen up and down the country today. Many councils disliked the red colour and as long as the bars across the doors remained red, the box itself could be painted a more muted colour such as grey or green.

The K6 was a slimmer, less fancy version of the K2; and, of course, it was practical. The central horizontal panes of glass on the doors of the K6 were elongated – to allow internal advertising to be viewed through the doors. In short, the K6 was a triumph.

Reflecting a newer, post-war era

The K6 stood the test of time. It was not until the early 1960s that another prototype, the K7, was introduced; and it was 1968 when a successor, the K8, was introduced as an alternative. The K8, the last of the cast-iron kiosks, was designed by Bruce Martin.



Glazed on 3 sides with a large single glass panel per side, it reflected a newer, post-war era. Gone is the crown, coinciding with discussions about whether the Queen's head should be removed from stamps, and also with the crown being removed from pillar boxes.

An end to kiosks under the GPO

From 1981 BT took over the telephone communication service and the GPO's involvement ceased. The kiosks and the telephone service still remain an important part of the BPMA's story, however, highlighting the visible face of the GPO and its importance in the fabric of communication.

The BPMA's treasure trove Museum Store in Debden holds examples of many of the kiosks discussed in this article. The only way to easily distinguish between the kiosks is to come and view them side by side at our Store! Come and decide on your favourite – mine is the K2.

Where to see the icons:

BPMA Museum Store Tours

Our schedule and booking details for guided tours of the Museum Store in Debden are available in our Events Guide leaflet and on our website:

www.postalheritage.org.uk/museum-tours.

The tours are free of charge (donations are welcome) but bookings are necessary. Call 020 7239 2570 or go to the web page above to book your place.

For enquiries about bespoke tours for groups please contact Curator Emma Harper by email (emma.harper@postalheritage.org.uk), or phone (020 7239 2114).

The National Telephone Kiosk Collection

This collection of telephone booths, a stationary exchange and two mobile exchanges from the 20th and early 21st century is held at the Avoncroft Museum near Bromsgrove, Worcestershire
www.avoncroft.org.uk



A cup of tea and its consequences

Author and stamp obsessive Chris West recounts how he came to write his new book *First Class: A History of Britain in 36 Postage Stamps*.



Images:

Above – Chris West

Inset, top – British Empire Exhibition 1924 stamp, 1d value.

Inset, bottom – The 'Seahorse' stamp.

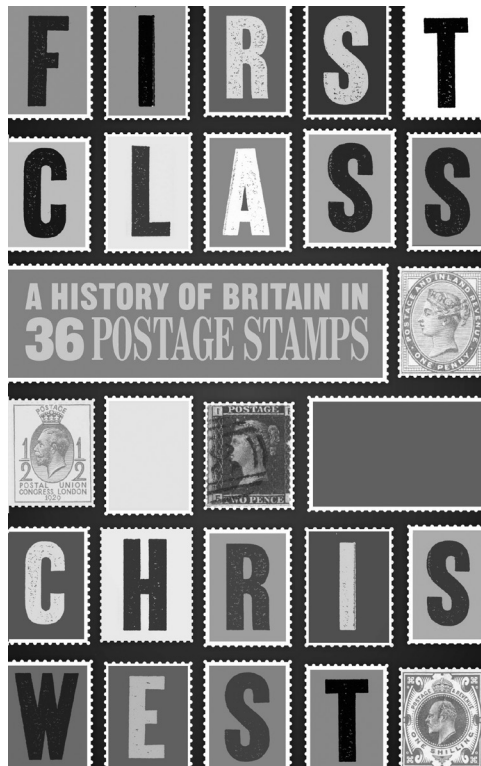
Like many of us who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, I had a stamp collection. A rather mediocre one... But one Sunday, I went to tea with my great uncle.

I happened to mention that I collected stamps, and Uncle Frank said he'd done that too. He disappeared and came back with a dark blue 'Lincoln' album. Inside was a treasure-house of stamps featuring Edward VII and Queen Victoria – including a Penny Black (it had a corner missing, but still...) Frank then said that he didn't really bother with them any longer – did I want them? The album became my pride and joy. I even took it to school to show everybody. Sadly, one viewer was so impressed that he stole half the stamps. The collection never felt the same afterwards, and vanished into an attic. Forty years later, I was cleaning out the attic when I came across the album. For a moment an old fury came back, but then I decided that a much healthier reaction was to reassemble the collection.

As I did this, I found myself ever more intrigued with the stamps, as items of beauty but also as tiny pieces of history. Who stuck this Penny Black on an envelope, and what was in the letter? More generally, what was Britain like at the time?

I found envelopes that had been sent in Ireland around the time of the appalling famine, a Sea Horse stamp sent just before World War One, a stamp celebrating the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 (an event I had never heard of, but which was as big as the Olympics in its day), an envelope that had enclosed a censored letter from World War Two, the classic 4d stamp celebrating the 1966 World Cup win... Stamps, I realised, tell stories.

Finally, I assembled these stories into a book, that would tell the nation's tale through its stamps – or 36 of them, anyway. It's been a joy to research and write. And all thanks to my great uncle and a cup of tea one Sunday afternoon.



Talk – First Class: A History of Britain in 36 Postage Stamps

Thursday 21 February 2013, 7.00pm-8.00pm

Join Chris West as he explores British history as illustrated by 36 of our most expressive, quirky, beautiful and sometimes baffling stamps. From the Penny Lilac which united a nation in 1881; through the controversial schoolboy-designed Edward VIII stamp of 1936; to the first non-white Briton to grace a stamp in 1982 – the stamps chosen by Chris tell us the story of Britain, through Dickens and the potato famine to Thatcher and punk.

The talk takes place at the Phoenix Centre, next door to The Royal Mail Archive, Phoenix Place, LONDON, WC1X 0DL.

Tickets cost £3 / £2.50 (Friends of the BPMA & concessions)

Call 020 7239 2570 to book your ticket or buy it online at www.postalheritage.org.uk/events

The book is available from the **BPMA Shop** for £16.99 (plus postage & packaging)

www.postalheritage.org.uk/publications-firstclass

80th anniversary of the GPO Film Unit

Based on research by Scott Anthony and other experts, we take a look at the achievements of the Unit that was founded in 1933.



The GPO Film Unit's existence is credited to Sir Stephen Tallents, who transferred it with him when moving from the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) in 1933, where he had been working to modernise Britain's image, to the General Post Office (GPO), where he set about doing the same. Tallents retained John Grierson to head up the Unit, and commissioned work from him and other artists as part of an extensive rebranding exercise for the GPO. It was Grierson and later Cavalcanti who were responsible for negotiating many of the complexities of working for a government department. Budgets were small and rigorously enforced to the extent that an overspend on *Night Mail* (1936) nearly signalled the end of the Unit.

Until its demise in 1940, many now celebrated talents of cinema and the arts worked for the Unit. The films produced during the relatively short existence of the Unit had a major impact on British film, especially in relation to documentary film making. Benjamin Britten, W. H. Auden, William Coldstream, Humphrey Jennings, Alberto Cavalcanti and John Grierson are just some of the names that appear in the credits.

Today the films provide a fascinating insight into the history of communications in the 20th century and, of course, postal history. They include documentary, animation, advertising, public information films, drama-documentary and satirical comedy on a range of subjects, from postal rates to working class pastimes. Some of the films are a reminder of a bygone era and some are still strangely relevant; documenting the difficulties of delivering mail to a flooded village or promoting the Post Office Savings Bank which was secured by government backing in a money-sensitive post-depression age.

The films were shown in cinemas and other venues including schools and community halls, reaching a very wide audience. As a result of the popularity of stamp collecting, *The King's Stamp* (1935), commissioned as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of King George V, is apparently one of the most watched films of all time alongside *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Gone with the Wind* and *King Kong*.

The documentary style saw its high point in the celebrated *Night Mail* (1936), where the journey of the overnight postal express for Euston to Glasgow is told through the eyes of those who work on the train: making the working man the screen hero. But the realism gives way to drama as the now famous lines of W. H. Auden's poem are read to Britten's score and the story of those who will receive the mail comes into play with the words 'This is the Night Mail crossing the border...'

Grierson's documentary vision at the Unit gave rise to drama-documentary, and the seeds of our modern day soaps can be seen in films including *The Saving of Bill Blewitt* (1936) – seen as the first 'story' documentary – and *Men of the Lightship* (1940).

In 1939 the Unit began to document and produce films to support the war effort, creating an often poignant portrait of Britain during the early years of World War Two. Films included *Britain Can Take It!* (1940), produced to provide US President Roosevelt with help in securing American popular opinion for Britain's war effort, to *Men of the Lightship* (1940), which was a dramatic reconstruction of the bombing of the East Dudgeon lightship – significant as lightships and lighthouses had previously been considered neutral.

In 1940 the GPO Film Unit became part of the Ministry of Information as the Crown Film Unit and with that the GPO Film Unit was no more.

GPO Films Anniversary Offer

The BPMA Shop offers a set of 3 DVDs from The GPO Film Unit Collection at a special anniversary price. Please see the back cover of this Newsletter for details.

Images: Scenes from *Night Mail* 1936 (above) and from *Men of the Lightship* (1940) (below).



Meet the BPMA Volunteers

Get to know *Therese Avedillo*, one of the BPMA's cataloguing volunteers



Therese Avedillo,
BPMA Volunteer

What is your general background?

I grew up in South Africa and have a background in Broadcast Journalism. I worked in TV production in America and wanted a change of career. I then got my MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester.

How long have you been volunteering with the BPMA?

I have been volunteering at the BPMA for two and a half months.

What are you currently working on?

I am working on sorting and re-housing of POST 110 duplicate posters, identifying those to be retained, disposed of or retained for sale in accordance with a disposal strategy. I am also cataloguing uncatalogued material I come across.

Why did you get involved?

I am interested in Archives.

What is it that interested you in the BPMA?

I wanted to gain some practical experience in documentation.

What do you think you have gained from, or what difference to your life, has volunteering or being involved with the BPMA?

I've been introduced to CALM, the Archive management system, and I am learning how to process archival material.

Has being involved with the BPMA benefited you personally? If so, how?

Yes, my confidence in handling historical objects has been boosted, as are my spirits.

What do you think would attract others to get involved?

Attaining a sense of doing something worthwhile.

What particular elements of postal heritage is it that interests you?

I like the vast subjects covered in the artwork on the posters.

What is your favourite item in the BPMA's collections?

I really like the medieval art on various posters.

Snippets from the Archive: Oh, Doctor Beeching!

Archive Catalogue & Project Manager *Gavin McGuffie* looks at the controversial Beeching report that was published fifty years ago

2013 marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of Dr Richard Beeching's *The Reshaping of British Railways*, which led to a major reduction and restructuring of the country's railway network (these measures became popularly known as the Beeching Axe). Two long-term effects of Beeching on mail transport were increases in transport by road and routing via London.

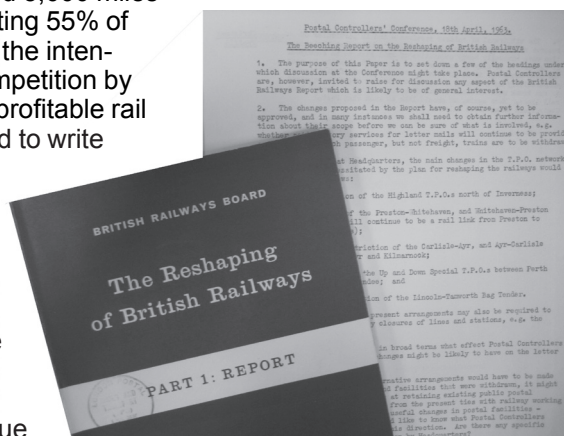
Controversial both at the time and subsequently, Beeching's first report (he followed up two years later with a second, *The Development of the Major Railway Trunk Routes*) identified 2,363 stations and 5,000 miles of railway line for closure, representing 55% of all stations and 30% of route miles; the intention being to address increased competition by road transport through cutting less profitable rail services. Beeching had been tasked to write the report by a former Postmaster General, Ernest Marples (who had moved to the Ministry of Transport).

There are a number of files in The Royal Mail Archive which reflect the impact of the report on the General Post Office, some of which have recently gone on our online catalogue

among the last batch of files from the decentralised registry POST class, POST 122. 18 April 1963 saw a special Postal Controllers' Conference held at GPO HQ to discuss the effects of Beeching's report (see image below of POST 73/183 with a copy of the Beeching report, from POST 18/208). A Steering Group within the Post Office had also been set up, meeting regularly throughout 1963. At a wider level, the Post Office was represented on an inter-departmental Working Party.

Despite these arrangements, Director of Postal Services Brigadier K S Holmes made this assessment at the April Conference: "It did not seem that Dr Beeching's proposals would be likely to cause us grave difficulties from a service angle."

For those interested in matters concerning the transport of mail by rail these files should give an insight into a period of great change in the British railway network.



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BPMA-PC-17a Souvenir Greetings Telegram design for the Post Office Exhibition Portsmouth & Southsea, 1936

BPMA-PC-17b A London telegraph messengers' despatch room, 1948, Grace Golden

BPMA-PC-17c Messenger on Motorcycle, 1934

BPMA-PC-17d Businessman sending telegram at Paddington Station, 1935

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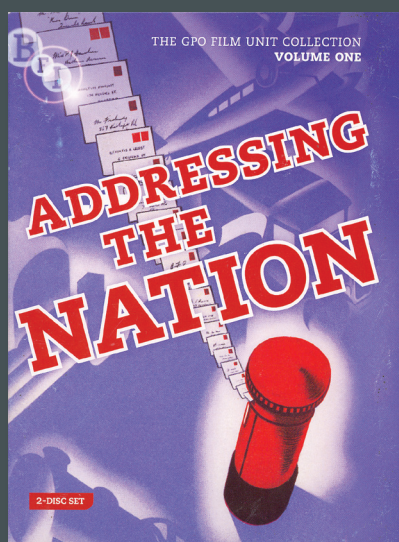
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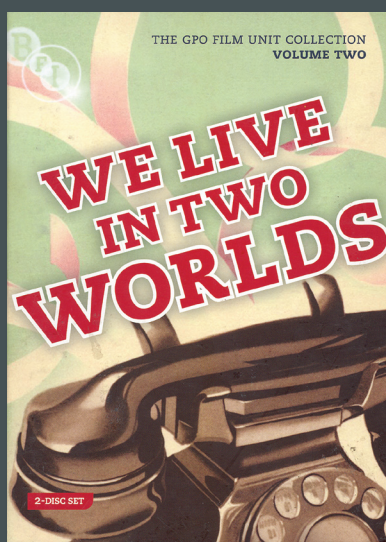
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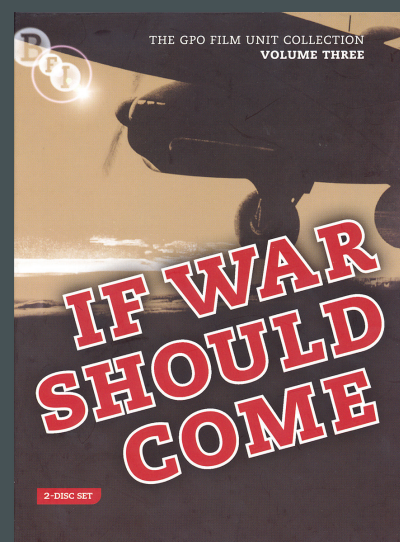
Addressing the Nation contains 15 films from 1933 – 1935 and provides a fascinating exploration of the Unit's early experimentation with sound. Featuring the award-winning *Song of Ceylon* and *A Colour Box*, the critically acclaimed *Weather Forecast*, *Coal Face* – Auden and Britten's precursor to *Night Mail* – and other neglected works many of which will be available for the first time since their original release.

2 DVDs, 140mins, special features: booklet (76 pages) including introductory essays, selected biographies and film notes.



We Live in Two Worlds covers the period 1936 – 1938 and represents the Unit at its creative height. It includes much-loved classics such as *Night Mail*, more experimental films including the experimental animations of Len Lye and Norman McLaren and early drama-documentary with *North Sea* and *The Saving of Bill Blewitt*. It also features less well known films many of which will be available for the first time since their release.

2 DVDS, 257mins, special features: booklet (96 pages) including introductory essays, selected biographies and film notes.



This volume of 18 films covers the period 1939-1941 and sees the Unit at its most technically sophisticated, with directors such as Watt and Cavalcanti spearheading the use of documentary film in support of the war effort. The films provide a fascinating and poignant insight into a nation on the cusp of war, with masterpieces included *Spare Time* and *London Can Take It!*.

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