

THE BRITISH
POSTAL
MUSEUM
& ARCHIVE

Newsletter

www.postalheritage.org.uk

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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE

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Front cover: :A hand-coloured lantern slide of British soldiers inside an Army Post Office in London.



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Welcome

First World War Centenary: A Personal View

Readers may know that as well as leading the BPMA I am a keen historian and my own PhD thesis, completed nearly 10 years ago now, covered the political development of London in the period immediately after the First World War ended. It is impossible to do such a study without having a strong idea of how the legacy of that conflict affected every sphere of life. The buildings of London were not scarred in the way that they were after the Second World War – though of course there was some Zeppelin damage – but almost every other aspect of the capital's activity was scarred, including its people.

There was the enormous problem of what to do with all those returning servicemen. There were many who had employers to return to but many who did not, often as a result of their injuries making it impossible to work as they had done previously. Impoverished ex-servicemen with disabilities began to appear on the capital's streets begging, causing a scandal which led to campaigns to promote their better employment. The land 'fit for heroes to live in' promised by Lloyd George in 1918 was hard to achieve amid economic turbulence and the Post Office was to prove no exception to this.

You will know that BPMA plans to open Mail Rail to the public in the next couple of years, and will have seen from our publicity material that it was not until 1927 that the network could first open despite having been started in 1913, the lack of resources as a result of the First World War being mostly to blame. Many of the 30,000 women who came into Post Office employment left as men came back, modern developments like broadcasting came into the organisation's purview and it was a different Post Office that was to emerge following the structural Bridgeman review of the early 1930s.

The change the war brought about was not solely economic, nor solely political. There was immense social upheaval. It is often missed that a generation of young men had a great gap in numbers as a result of the near-million who were killed in the conflict. With another million-plus wounded too, a generation of young women had larger numbers single and unmarried as a consequence, with the worlds of work, home, politics and economics changing as a result. In my

own studies I covered the increase in spiritualism and séances that took place in society after the war, with bereaved loved ones desperate to contact those who had been killed. Geographically London began to change immensely, with the growth of suburbia sending the capital sprawling into surrounding counties. The new social fabric that built up as a result was to face its greatest test in the Blitz, which came just two decades later.

In commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, many people think of the memorials which were built largely in the first years after the conflict ended, those who fought, the battles, the technology of war, and the unremitting slaughter of the trenches. In addition to this I cannot help but remember what changes came to all of society as a result of the War, surely another strong reason why the conflict should be remembered. So much happened during 1914-18, but so much else was to change as a result that in remembering the outbreak of war we remember that it was to affect every corner of our national life. The significance of the war was not just one day's worth, one year's worth, or five year's worth, but the changes it wrought lasted a lifetime.



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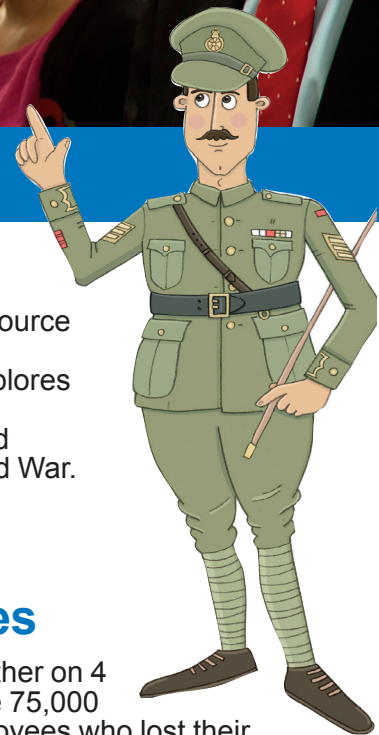
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News in Brief



New learning resource launched

Last Post: The Postal Service in the First World War is a new, free BPMA learning resource sponsored by Royal Mail. Released to coincide with the Centenary of the conflict's outbreak, it supports learning across the curriculum for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and explores the role of the General Post Office (GPO) on the home and fighting fronts. Guided by wartime characters (right), the pack uses archival documents, photographs, maps and museum objects to tell the story of the essential role the GPO played in the First World War.

To find out more about the pack or to see it for yourself please visit: postalheritage.org.uk/fwwlearning

Mount Pleasant service commemorates colleagues

Colleagues from across Royal Mail Group, Post Office Ltd and the BPMA joined together on 4 August, the Centenary of Britain's entry into the First World War, to commemorate the 75,000 employees of the General Post Office mobilised for the war effort and the 8,500 employees who lost their lives.

Dr Adrian Steel led a short service in front of the memorial to Western District Office workers outside Mount Pleasant sorting office (top). David Gold, Head of Government Affairs for Royal Mail and Alwen Lyons, Company Secretary for Post Office Ltd delivered readings and a two minute silence was held.

New objects for *Last Post* exhibition

The BPMA's flagship First World War exhibition *Last Post: Remembering the First World War*, is now more than halfway through its year long run at Coalbrookdale Gallery, Museum of Iron. In order to tell as many of the fascinating stories of the Post Office and the First World War as possible, the BPMA has introduced some new objects into the exhibition. For the first time the BPMA will be displaying a Princess Mary Gift Tin (below left). This was a gift from home containing items such as chocolate and tobacco, posted to all serving soldiers over Christmas 1914 to boost morale. The exhibition will also feature the diary of Post Office Rifle Thomas May. Written between March and July 1915 when the Post Office Rifles first arrived on the fighting lines, the diary is a first-hand account of life in the trenches, revealing not only the periods of fighting but also boredom and discomfort that were commonplace among soldiers.



Many of the objects removed from display to allow these new stories to be told will continue to be available on the BPMA's online *Last Post* exhibition through the Google Cultural Institute. Just search online for 'Last Post Google Cultural Institute'.

Find an ancestor through Royal Mail's War Memorials Database

Earlier this year, Royal Mail published a searchable database of the 300+ First World War memorials in its care and that of the Post Office. www.royalmailmemorials.com provides searchable information about each individual memorial, including the names of those that appear and the memorial's location.



Pop-up Field Post Office

The BPMA brought the role of the Post Office in the First World War to life over the October half-term through a pop-up Field Post Office at the Coalbrookdale Gallery in Ironbridge. Guided by wartime characters played by members of the Big Wheel Theatre Company, visitors were encouraged to use the Field Post Office to write and send their own postcard, experiencing how people communicated in war time. In addition, visitors could censor a letter, explore original wartime letters and discover the role pigeons played in delivering secret messages. As well as the Field Post Office, Big Wheel offered spotlight performances throughout the week, allowing everyone to participate in bringing the poignant personal stories of postal workers to life.

Right: Shropshire siblings meet our wartime postie

Below: A young visitor writes a letter from the Front Line

Bottom: Stories of First World War postal workers brought to life by Big Wheel in our Pop-up Field Service Post Office.



The Post Office at War

Every person in Britain was impacted by the First World War, as was every industry. For no industry was this truer than for the British Post Office, an institution which touched the lives of people at every level of society. During the First World War, the Post Office contributed to military operations on a scale never seen before, providing an essential means of communication between the fighting lines and the Home Front. As well as this it successfully maintained the postal service at home, despite sending over 75,000 Post Office workers to fight in the war, over 8,500 of whom were killed.

In this First World War Centenary edition of the BPMA newsletter we take a look at the wide reaching impact the Post Office had during the War, and tell the stories of some of its people.

Throughout the First World War men regularly wrote home to their loved ones but the content of their letters was greatly restricted. If intercepted, even innocent comments in letters could provide vital information for the enemy on troop positions, movements and plans. Signs of low morale could also provide a much needed boost to enemy spirits, not to mention lower the spirits of those on the Home Front. To ensure information was safe, letters were opened and read by officers on the fighting lines then censored again once they reached Britain. The censorship on the Home Front was the responsibility of the Post Office. At the beginning of the war only one person was involved in censorship, but by November 1918 5,000 people were undertaking this task, with approximately 375,000 letters a day censored at the height of war. On page 14 historian

Dominic Sandbrook looks at how some of the officers at the Front felt about having to read their men's personal correspondences.

The Post Office was also responsible for getting mail through to Prisoners of War. All countries involved in this global conflict set up reciprocal agreements that ensured mail was delivered to the prisoners, free of charge. Sending letters wasn't always as easy as that though, sometimes unconventional methods needed to be employed as Duncan Barrett, author of *Men of Letters*, explains on page 22.

BPMA Curator Emma Harper has also researched the issue of mail being sent to and from Prisoners of War. On Page 12 she tells the emotional story of Harry Brown, a British Prisoner of War held in Germany in 1918.

In this edition we also explore the bravery of the Post Office Rifles, the Post Office's own Battalion; explain how coloured lantern slides enable us to see the war in colour in the era of black and white photography and talk to Head of Collections Chris Taft about the opening of a First World War memorial time capsule put together by postal workers in the city of Dundee in 1921.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and, like those who have put it together, better understand the under-told story of the varied and vital role of the Post Office in the First World War as a result.

Below: Men sorting parcels to be sent to serving soldiers during the First World War c1916



Last Post

Remembering the First World War

11 April 2014 to 27 March 2015

Coalbrookdale Gallery, adjacent to Engineuity



© Royal Mail Group Ltd., courtesy British Postal Museum & Archive

This poignant exhibition explores the role of the postal service during the First World War

**FREE
EXHIBITION
OPEN MONDAY
TO FRIDAY**

THE BRITISH
POSTAL
MUSEUM
& ARCHIVE



LED BY IWM

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BIRTHPLACE OF INDUSTRY

The IRONBRIDGE GORGE MUSEUMS
Coalbrookdale Telford Shropshire TF8 7DQ
www.ironbridge.org.uk



Top: Men sorting parcels at the Home Depot POST 56_6

The Home Depot

During the First World War the post was the only effective way for people separated by war to stay in contact. The telephone was still in its infancy and the military was given priority use of the telegraph, which was only suitable for short instant messages. As war spread around the world so too did the job of the postal service to get mail to these far flung places. The British Post Office and its sister the Army Post Office had experience of sending mail to troops abroad from earlier conflicts, but the First World War was to expand this need in ways that were hard to imagine.

In times of peace, mail - like today - was simply addressed to the person at their location, stating a building name, street name and town. In times of war however, when troops were moving around regularly, this became impossible. Today we perhaps think of the First World War as being static, with soldiers spending years in trenches that rarely moved, but the reality was that troops would often be on the move, not only from one sector to another but to different parts of the world. Soldiers and sailors were instructed not to reveal their locations to friends and family in order to prevent military information getting into enemy hands. This meant alternative means of addressing were needed.

People writing to troops would have to address their correspondence to the recipient's military rank, name and unit and send it to the GPO in London for onward delivery.

At this point, being privy to the position of troops, the Post Office would sort the mail to the relevant military unit and dispatch it to the related theatre of war. Upon arrival abroad it was handed to the Army Post Office who further sorted the items to the particular sector where it was to be delivered.

Upon arrival at the postal depots in Northern ports such as Calais in France, areas known as the Advanced Base Post Offices, the Army Post Office would load the mail onto trains to be taken to any one of a number of different Rail Head Post

Offices, that connected the main coastal depots by the rail lines. From here it was divided further and sent, usually by lorry, to the relevant battalion headquarters where it would be sorted yet again before finally being delivered by postal orderlies to the particular sector where the men were based. As the War moved around so too did these Field Post Offices. The British Post Office's job was therefore an important one to ensure mail was correctly sorted so it arrived at the relevant sector.

Sorting by the GPO in London was initially done at existing buildings, such as Mount Pleasant, but as volumes of mail increased, these offices struggled to cope. To get around this problem, a new, temporary, office was built. Erected in Regent's Park, London, the Home Depot was to become the largest wooden building in the world. Here in this vast building in the centre of London, mail was sorted to the different units fighting across the globe. With the loss of huge numbers of men to the war effort, many of the staff of this sorting office were women employed on a temporary contract. They helped to keep this vital line of communication open and ensured that all important letters got through to their destination.

The importance of letters to the fighting troops and their families at home cannot be understated; they were often a life-line, essential to morale. Many soldiers were regular writers and by the latter stages of the war, the volumes of mail passing through the Home Depot peaked at 12 million a week.

Today very little evidence of the Home Depot survives, all traces of where it once stood in Regent's Park are now gone and few images exist. Even within the Royal Mail Archive there are only a small number of references and photographs. Despite this, it is clear that the building, and more importantly the people who staffed it, played a vital role in Britain's war effort. We will ensure that this story lives on when we open our doors at The Postal Museum.

Chris Taft
Head of Collections

Jobs for Heroes

The First World War brought massive changes for British society, and for the Post Office. One of these was the need to consider the issues around employing disabled ex-servicemen. From the very first days of the war men were being injured and discharged. There was a need to find suitable employment for these individuals to reduce the burden on the State and to help them reintegrate into civilian life. However, in the early stages of the war there was little demand on the Post Office to employ disabled ex-servicemen as the labour shortage meant that other opportunities were readily available.

In considering how to accommodate disabled ex-servicemen the Post Office took a number of factors into account. One was whether or not the individual concerned had been previously employed by the Post Office. Those that had been employed were favoured over 'outsiders'. The Post Office was reluctant to employ significant numbers of 'outsiders' due to the impact this may have on the employment prospects for both other staff returning from the Front, and Boy Messengers expecting promotion.

When offering employment, the Post Office had to take account of the severity of the injury and the extent to which this was likely to impair the candidate's ability to carry out their role. Consideration was given to what types of work might be suitable. Generally speaking indoor duties were regarded as more suitable than outdoor duties. Differences between rural and town duties were also identified. For example men with one functioning eye were approved to work in rural cycling posts but were not regarded as suitable for town posts due to the risks from traffic.

Some of the positions considered suitable were those previously filled by Boy Messengers or women. Disabled men were perceived as being less physically capable and therefore better suited to the lighter duties previously assumed by women and children. The Committee on the Employment of Disabled Ex-Soldiers in the Post Office noted 'the way has to some extent been paved for the employment of disabled men by the employment of women in far larger numbers than we have suggested in the case of disabled men'.

The Post Office's position as a Government department further influenced its attitude towards the employment of disabled ex-servicemen. A report in 1918 stated 'There can, we think, be no question that it is the duty of Government departments employing labour to set an example to private employers by taking a lead in providing employment for men disabled in the war; and the Post Office, as the Civil Service department having the largest number of employees, will properly be expected to



Above: French war wounded courtesy of The British Library
Bottom: Excerpt from *Advantages of Army Life* (POST30-1844)

provide employment for a considerable number of disabled men'.

After the end of the war, the pressure to employ disabled ex-servicemen in the Post Office appears to have abated slightly. A 1934 memorandum stated 'with the passing of the war period and absorption of a proportion of disabled ex-servicemen into industry, the need for taking special measures to employ disabled men is perhaps not now as urgent as it was in the period immediately following the war.'

Little did they know that just five years later the country would once again be plunged into the heart of a global conflict.

If you would like to learn more, you can hear Helen give a talk on 'Jobs for Heroes' on the BPMA website postalheritage.org.uk/podcast

Helen Dafter
Archivist

VIII.—EMPLOYMENT ON RETURN TO CIVIL LIFE.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT is offered to discharged Soldiers, and Army Reserve Men, in the Post Office, Royal Arsenal, Royal Army Clothing Department and other Government Departments; also in the Police Force, Railway Companies, Corps of Commissioners, and as Attendants, Caretakers, Messengers, Porters, Watchmen, Timekeepers, Park Rangers, etc.

A REGISTER FOR CIVIL EMPLOYMENT is kept at the Head-quarters of all Regimental Districts and Recruiting areas. THE CHIEF OFFICE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for the employment of Reserve and Discharged Soldiers, is at 119, Victoria Street, London, S.W., and numerous Branch Offices have been established in other large towns, where full information can be obtained.



The Post Office Remembers



In 1914, as captured perfectly in the words of Wilfred Owen, 'War broke: and now the winter of the world with perishing great darkness closes in'. The world was to change forever as a consequence of this 'darkness' and all parts of the country were affected. The British Post Office was no exception. In 1914 it was one of the largest employers in the world and had a global reach. It was a government department, headed by an MP and so was to be intricately involved in all aspects of the War. As the BPMA's 2014 exhibition, *Last Post* demonstrates, the impact on the Post Office was massive and the organisation played a vital role.

Arguably the biggest impact was that on the staff. In the region of 75,000 men left their jobs in the Post Office to fight for King and country and many were never to return. The Post Office instantly began commemorating those who went off to fight. Rolls of Honour were begun, listing the names of all those who enlisted. Generally these were being commissioned at a local level by the staff themselves. More formally however the impact on staff was being recorded through an official publication of the organisation. The Post Office Circulars were issued fortnightly to all staff. Traditionally this provided information on changing work practices or changes to services that the Post Office was offering to customers. With the coming of the War it began to recount the impact on the staff. Each fortnightly edition began by listing the staff that had been awarded commendations or awards and then went on to list those who had lost their lives. It recorded the name, military unit and office that the fallen men had been based at prior to the war. Each fortnight more and more names were being released and flicking through the pages of the bound volumes containing a year's worth of Circulars offers just a sense of the sheer numbers of men being killed.

The Post Office Circulars offer a valuable resource to this day for researchers looking into family members past and the BPMA are at present working to digitise the list of names to make this a much more searchable resource.

When the War ended the names of those who were not to return began to be immortalised on war memorials. The memorials themselves were commissioned on a local basis generally paid for by subscription from local staff. Each memorial was different and took a number of forms, from simple paper lists of

names to substantial bronze structures erected outside major postal buildings. Over 350 memorials were created in all listing thousands of staff names. Today these memorials take pride of place in Royal Mail buildings up and down the country. Each November many form the centrepiece of memorial services and poppy wreaths are laid. In 2008 the BPMA worked with Royal Mail to record the locations of all these memorials and in 2014 this was extended to include a full transcription of all the names, making this a fully searchable database. Working with Royal Mail, an interactive map was also developed which clearly showed the geographic spread of these memorials.

In association with this project Royal Mail also funded a full condition audit of memorials and invested in conservation of those most in need of attention. The conservation work was carried out by Accredited Conservators to ensure the best possible care was being taken.

Even during the War itself the staff of the Post Office were remembering and supporting their colleagues. The Post Office Relief Fund was established and staff voluntarily paid their own money into this fund to help support families of those who had suffered loss as a consequence of the War. By 1916 it had an income of £90,000 a year.

For those that survived the War but were left with lasting impacts, both physical and mental, support was also offered. Convalescence homes were established and after the Second World War the Post Office Fellowship of Remembrance was established and ran three hotels offering free holidays to Post Office staff, a luxury many were otherwise unable to afford. The Post Office Fellowship of Remembrance continues to this day and retains its ties with Post Office staff through the Communication Workers Union.

The Post Office also remembers its staff through national commemorations and has its own dedicated plot at the UK National Arboretum in Staffordshire. In 2013 Royal Mail laid a wreath at the Cenotaph in London on Remembrance Sunday, taking its place in the national act of remembrance.

While the War itself is now beyond the memory of any living person, 2014 has shown us it is far from forgotten.

Chris Taft
Head of Collections



The Importance of Post in War

Alan Johnson MP reflects on how he felt presenting BBC's iWonder Guide on the Post Office in the First World War

When the BBC asked me to present an iWonder Guide on postal services in the First World War I jumped at the opportunity to, in a sense, return to my original occupation (discounting the three years I spent after leaving school stacking shelves and trying to become a pop star).

I didn't expect to be so fascinated and moved by the experience. Fascinated by the sheer logistics of processing, transporting and delivering 12 million letters a week back and forth between the UK and wherever our forces were fighting. Moved because of the way these letters were cherished by sender and recipient.

Letters from home were handed out to front line troops with the evening meal. It's said that no matter how tired and hungry the men were they always read the letter before beginning their meal.

The postal service was virtually the only means of communication in 1914. Two years previously the GPO had taken control of the entire telephone network such as it was. Only Hull remained outside its reach, preferring to continue with its municipal service, hence the city's white phone boxes and the fact that it's still the only part of the country where BT has no presence. It would be many years before telephones were ubiquitous in British households.

When a soldier on the Western Front wrote to a London newspaper in 1915 saying he was lonely he soon received 3,000 letters, 98 large parcels and 3 mailbags of smaller ones. Had that soldier the time or inclination to respond, his letters back would have been delivered in a day or two.

At the British Postal Museum & Archive, as part of the BBC programme, I was shown examples of the letters and parcels that passed across the Channel.

I knew that the letters from soldiers were heavily censored but hadn't heard of the Honour Envelope which offered the benefit of a soldier's letter only being read in London, thus preventing deeply personal endearments being read in the trenches by an officer who knew the writer.

Neither had I heard of the Field Service Postcard, presenting a kind of multiple choice from pre-printed messages such as "Everything is fine here" or "I'm in hospital receiving treatment for an injury." The

sender simply had to cross out the sentiments that weren't relevant.

The parcels received at the Front contained useful items such as lice powder, snuff and chocolate. Soldiers would send back mementos such as bullets and uniform buttons.

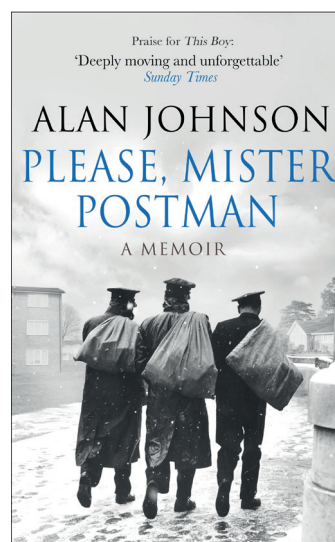
As I researched and related all this it struck me that the Post Office had changed very little in the fifty years between the end of World War One and the day I entered the Barnes office as a postman in 1968.

The only piece of machinery was the stamp cancelling machine. Mail was transported in sacks by train and sorted by hand into 48 box fittings made of mahogany. The men I worked beside had fought in the Second World War. Those who'd survived the First had just moved into retirement.

I hoped that the chain of international events which had led to a war every 20 years had been broken and that my stint as a postman would be a peaceful one.

See bbc.co.uk/guides/zqtmtyrd for Alan's full iWonder Guide.

Top and above: Alan Johnson in the BPMA collections store and researching in the Archive. Images courtesy of the BBC



You can now order Alan Johnson's new book 'Please Mister Postman' from the BPMA shop for only £16.99 with free P&P. Go to postalheritage.org.uk/shop or turn to the back page for details of how to order by phone and post and quote PLEASE14.

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

Correspondence was vital in the First World War for morale and conveying news from the Front. Here BPMA Curator Emma Harper looks at some fascinating items from our collections.

In this its centenary year, much will be written about the First World War and just as much was written during it. Every aspect of the war was communicated by letter and, for many, letters were a way of maintaining some semblance of normality. While accurate figures for the amount of mail sent during the war are hard to ascertain, at its peak over 12 million letters a week passed through the Post Office's temporary sorting office – the Home Depot. Some survive in the BPMA's collection and reflect the range of subjects that were written about. The weather, health and indeed letter writing itself, or lack of it, were the primary matters of discussion rather than the war itself, the effects of which were often played down as in this postcard from 'Fred' to his mother:

'Just a few lines hoping that you are in the very best of health Dear. I hope that you are not offended with me for not writing to you before now, but I know the one letter would do for the two of you. I am not very sound myself but you need not worry over me.'

Receipt of a letter was a huge boost to morale both for those at home and at the Front, the maintenance of that link was of vital importance and recognised as such by the Post Office. By writing 'On Active Service' at the top of their correspondence soldiers could write home for free.

On the Home Front in contrast to the wished for letters, telegrams (also the responsibility of the Post Office) were dreaded in case they brought news of a loved one missing or killed in action. Many letters also brought the same news but allowed for a much more personal communication than a telegram. One example is the letter received by a Mrs Brown from the British Red Cross reporting her son, Harry, missing in action after the battle of Nieuport le Bains on 10 July 1917. Although an official letter, the language and content is both realistic and reassuring.

'Some of those reported Missing may prove to be Prisoners but it is feared that the great majority were killed by the bombardment before the German attack began. We greatly regret to send you this distressing account and we assure you that if Rifleman Harry Brown's name should appear on a Prisoners List you shall be at once informed. With sincere

Far left: Leonard Eldridge's Battlefield Will

Left: Portrait of Rifleman Harry Brown

Over page: Letter from the British Red Cross to Mrs Brown detailing the battle in which Rifleman Brown went missing

Instructions for mother
to act on after I have
been called up.

All* moneys received from
Post Office to be entered in

book page 51 and then put in
box. * Overtime (Christmas)
balance of wages made up.

any money owing to me
any money I sent home

The money is not to be used
on any account except when
very hard pressed. I charge
you on your honour as my
mother to take strict care of
it, for I shall never forgive
deception. It is not to be lent
out. Only in the event of
my death is it to be used.
Then everything I possess
except the aspadastros
plant of mine, I give to you
The plant, I, with my last
wish, ~~leaves~~ leave it, and must
be given to,

the must be Miss Florence Smith
treated in my of 6 Aldebert Terrace
absence as my lover with
every respect 5th Lambeth

I the undersigned wrote
this in full possession of
my senses on this day
Dec. 9 1915

Leonard Eldridge



Telephone No.: REGENT 6640.
Telegrams: "NATIONALLY, CHARLES."

BRITISH RED CROSS
—AND—
ORDER OF ST. JOHN.

ENQUIRY DEPARTMENT
FOR
WOUNDED AND MISSING,

18 Carlton House Terrace, S.W. 1

98765 934 Rfn. Harry Brown,
2nd K.R.R.C. July 10th 1917.

Dear *Madam,*

15-8-17

In reference to your enquiry, we feel it our duty to send you a general account of the action of the battalion at Nieupart les Bains on July 10th. It seems, we fear, to show that further enquiries on this side of the German line will be useless so that we can only help you by watching with close care the Prisoners' Lists as they come in from Germany.

We are told, by one of the few officers who escaped, that on this occasion the fierce bombardment by the Germans lasted with only four short intervals from 8 a.m. till 7.15 p.m. At first our men took it to be a retaliation for a raid carried out by them the night before, but as the shelling continued with unabated violence they began to suspect that an attack by the enemy would follow. By the early afternoon, the Headquarters of both B. and C. Companies had been blown in by the shells, which were falling heavily on all the dug-outs, even in the reserve trenches; while communication between our front and rear had been interrupted before 10 a.m. by the cutting of the Fullerphone wires. When therefore at 7.15 p.m. the Germans attacked both in front and on the flank, which they had reached along the beach, further resistance was impossible. This eye-witness adds:- "By 8 p.m. the enemy had captured the whole sector." The River Yser lay between the 2nd K.R.R.C. and the rest of the British troops, and a few who had hidden in a tunnel till nearly midnight managed to swim across, dragging others over by ropes. Some of those reported Missing may prove to be Prisoners, but it is feared that the great majority were killed by the bombardment before the German attack began.

We greatly regret to send you this distressing account and we assure you that if *Rfn. Harry Brown's* name should appear on a Prisoners' List you shall be at once informed.

With sincere sympathy in your suspense.
Yours faithfully,

Mrs. E. M. Brown.

[Signature]
for THE EARL OF LUCAN.

sympathy in your suspense...'

Brown was indeed taken as a Prisoner of War (POW) and also in our collection is a postcard he sent from the POW camp on 31 August 1917. Harry ends the postcard with the sentence 'Don't worry about me as I am finished with the war...' Unfortunately that was all too true as whilst Brown did survive the war as a prisoner, he succumbed to inflammation of the lungs and died on 27 November 1918, just 16 days after the Armistice. Once again it was a letter that brought news of his death, but his mother did not receive it until 17 February 1919.

Many soldiers were encouraged to write last letters setting out their wishes in case of death; these were known as Battlefield Wills. Private Leonard Eldridge, a member of the Post Office's own regiment, the

Post Office Rifles, wrote his will out on a long strip of paper before posting it back home to his mother. It is surprisingly practical but ends with the instruction to his mother that his girlfriend 'must be treated in my absence as my lover with every respect'. Eldridge died during the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

Communication is an essential part of what makes us human and becomes doubly important when we are placed in a restricted situation such as a war. The Post Office in 1914 provided the circumstances by which that communication could be maintained.

The letters shown here are just a few examples of the remarkable individual stories from the First World War that we have here at the BPMA. Historian Dominic Sandbrook looks at some more of these touching correspondences on the next page.

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

In 2012 historian Dominic Sandbrook wrote and presented People's Post on BBC Radio 4. Here he tells us about some of the correspondences he discovered during his research.



If the First World War was a struggle of mud, blood and gruelling attrition, it was also a war of communications. On 17 August 1914, less than two weeks after the outbreak of the war, the British army established its first advanced Post Office at Le Havre. In the first letters home from soldiers to their relatives, there are only a few hints of the horrors to come:

'Dear Mother,

I think it is about time I wrote a letter to you ... We are being drilled pretty hard, and I expect to be through with the drill part of the training and get shooting and bayonet fighting and bombing. When we finish that, I will be ready for the front. It may not be long now ...

'My Dear Sister,

I am writing to you again this week, and I may say I have few things to say that may interest you. I will first remark upon the weather.

It is rotten. It has been raining hard all day and all last night ...'

'My dear Mother,

I can only write a short letter this time, but hope I will be able to do so soon. I have not written a letter for over a week and a half as I have been in the trenches for 9 days, and it is impossible to write up here ...'

Many soldiers were dedicated correspondents. Reg Sims, for example, worked out that 'in exactly twelve months I have received 167 letters besides paper and parcels and have written 242 letters.'

Parcels, often containing home comforts like tea, salt, biscuits, or even lice powder, meant an enormous amount to the men at the front. But men also sent parcels back, often containing gruesome

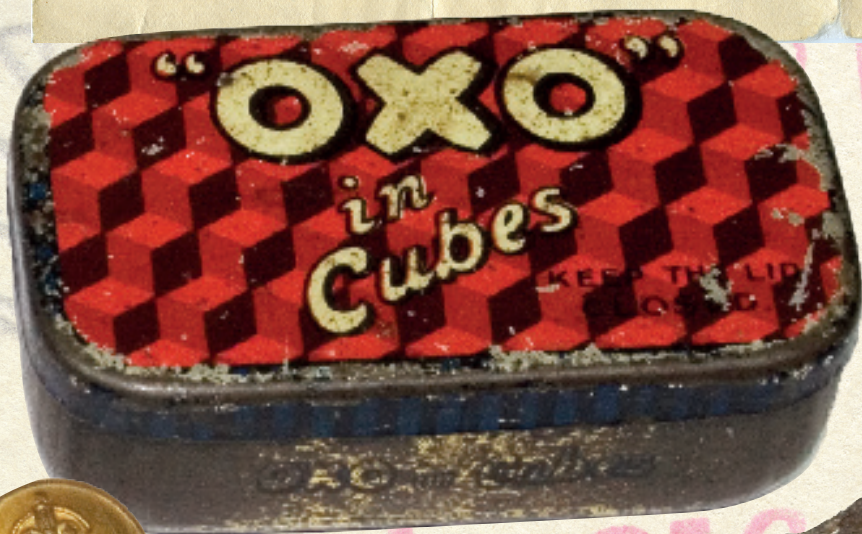
Top: Historian Dominic Sandbrook

Top left: Letter from William Cox to his family

Left: An OXO tin, button and shrapnel fragment sent home as relics from the Front by William Cox

and the trouncing the others got, I don't think they will venture to come again in a hurry.

One of our poor fellows was killed, and I am sending you one of his waistcoat buttons as a relic. He was struck by a shell before it burst and his body was blown to pieces. I am also sending you a small piece of a shell that burst over our Office, and dropped in the yard. It is only a small piece, but it will do for a relic.





souvenirs of the fighting. 'One of our poor fellows was killed, and I am sending you one of his waistcoat buttons as a relic,' wrote one William Cox in May 1915. 'He was struck by a shell before it burst and his body was blown to pieces. I am also sending you a small piece of a shell that burst over our office and dropped in the yard. It is only a small piece but it will do for a relic.'

While they were encouraged to write home, soldiers were under strict instructions about what they could mention. They were barred, for example, from writing about their position, general conditions or suspected enemy movements or plans for attacks. The irony, though, is that many were only too keen to spare their families the full horrors of life on the Western Front. Many letter-writers took pains to assure their relatives that they were enjoying fine weather and were in no real danger of getting hurt – even though this was very far from the truth. 'The weather is lovely, we are all enjoying the ride,' one soldier told his family. 'One night we were between our lines and the Germans attacked, but we all came out alright. It's a bit rough but it might be worse.'

In case soldiers were tempted to give too much information away, junior officers were charged with censoring their letters. Many officers – young men themselves, of course – found it difficult, even painful, to go through their men's letters. 'I was supposed to censor their letters home,' recalled John Reith, the future Director General of the BBC, then a lieutenant in the Scottish Rifles, 'but I informed them that they were on their honour not to say things they should not say, and I handed over the censor's stamp to the Sergeant.'

The historian Guy Chapman, looking back on his time in the Royal Fusiliers, wrote with poetic but understated emotion about his glimpses into his comrades' inner lives: 'Faces come back out of the past ... the face of this man dead, of that vanished for ever. Here and there rise memories of their habits, their nicknames, the look of one as he spoke to you, the attitude of another shivering in the night air, as he leaned over the parapet, watching with tired bloodshot eyes. Some of the faces have disappeared. Did I know you? I censored your letters, casually, hurriedly avoiding your personal messages, your poignant hopes.'

Sometimes, alas, letters came as a terrible shock. The



Left: Envelope of the letter from German soldier E F Gaylor to Captain Home Peel's wife.

Above: Captain Home Peel

wife of one British officer received a poignant letter from a German soldier, writing in broken English: 'On my way to the fighting lines I found the body of Captain H. Peel who I gather from the letters which were lying on his side was your husband. Although [we are the] enemy & sometimes deeply hurt by the ridiculous tone of your horrid press, I feel it is a human duty to communicate you these sad news.'

But there was joy in letters, too. They allowed people to transcend the barriers of distance, to keep relationships going, to give one another the emotional support they needed. There are few better examples than this embroidered Christmas card that the aptly named Private 'Holly' Christmas sent to his girlfriend in 1916:

'Ada Dearie,

Please accept of this card, rather sappy for people of our age, but thought you'd like it, do you?

I am just going down for the mail, and look out if there's no letter from you, will let you know on the next card if there is or not.

Au Revoir with fond love and no kisses, Yours as B.4.

Tooto'

Private Christmas survived the war, and the couple married two years later.

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

BPMA volunteer Cyril Parsons makes an interesting discovery at a BPMA talk.

During the First World War many millions of Field Service Postcards were sent by members of HM Forces on active service to family and friends back in the UK. The format of the card, on which the sender crossed through the options that did not apply, meant that they could be completed rapidly and did not require censoring.

I anticipated that the BPMA's Head of Collections Chris Taft would show examples of these cards in the course of the talk he gave on 10 July entitled "Last Post: Remembering the role of the Post Office in the First World War." He did not disappoint us but, to my great surprise, I was able to positively identify the sender and recipient of one of the cards shown. The addressee, William Crouch of Friarscroft, Aylesbury, was Clerk to the Buckinghamshire Country Council; the sender his elder son, Lionel.

Lionel was a Captain in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. Sadly he was killed in action on 21 July 1916, a month before his 30th birthday. He was leading his company in an attack at the Somme. His body is buried in Pozières British Cemetery in Ovillers-la-Boisselle.

Captain Crouch was a prolific letter writer. After his death his grief-stricken father collated and published privately a selection of Lionel's letters sent to family members between 4 August 1914, when he left Aylesbury with the Bucks Battalion of his regiment, and his death.

Lionel's letters include powerful descriptions of life in the trenches and bear witness to the often untold story of the toll of the war on the civilian population. In a letter written a few weeks before his death he described a deserted village where his company had been billeted. "Now it is like a village of the dead. All the houses have suffered. The church is unhurt except for the scars from flying pieces of shell."

In civilian life Lionel was a solicitor and in 1924, upon his father's retirement, he was to succeed him as Clerk to the Country Council. Instead, his younger brother Guy (1890-1956), who was also a solicitor and an officer initially in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, took on the role. By the end of the war Guy was a Major in the Gloucestershire Regiment and had been awarded the Military Cross.

Guy was a leading postal historian with particular interests in Forces Postal History and in British machine postmarks. He signed the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists in 1955 being one of the first postal historians to be so honoured. Guy probably passed on to fellow collectors several Field Services Postcards that he and his brother had sent to friends and family. It would be interesting to know if they are still out there, and what else they can add to this story.

Top: Captain Lionel Crouch

Right: Field Service Postcard sent from Lionel Crouch to his father William



NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

I am quite well.

*I have been admitted into hospital
{ sick } and am going on well.
{ wounded } and hope to be discharged soon.*

I am being sent down to the base.

*I have received your { letter dated _____
telegram " _____
parcel " _____*

Letter follows at first opportunity.

*I have received no letter from you
{ lately.
for a long time.*

Signature } Lionel
only. }

Date 10/10/15

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

My Favourite Object

We have over 100,000 photographs in our archive and each of them tells its own story. They cover a whole range of things from postal workers going about their daily duties to celebrity endorsements, each helping to reveal the history of the British postal service. In the end I chose one that was in keeping with the commemoration of the Centenary of the First World War. This photo shows a group of female postal delivery workers. While seemingly unremarkable the image is a significant part of the changes to the role of women that occurred during the First World War. These women were in fact some of the first urban female postal delivery workers in the country, one of the many tasks they had previously been prohibited from undertaking.

The role of women changed dramatically across all aspects of society during the First World War, including in the Post Office. Despite being one of the largest employers of women at the time, the story of women in the Post Office is often under told or missed out completely in the narrative of women in the First World War, but none the less is a very important part of the social changes that occurred.

Before the war female Post Office staff usually had to resign when they married, a rule that was met with mixed reactions. While many were greatly opposed to it as it perpetuated their inequality with men there were those who intended to resign upon marriage anyway and welcomed the payment the marriage bar entitled them to when they left. During the war however, the need for women to replace the 75,000 male postal workers who'd gone to fight meant the bar had to be lifted, albeit temporarily. This paved the way for the employment of over 30,000 women, many of whom would have otherwise been ineligible. Without them, and the thousands of single women who were also employed at the time, the postal service would have struggled to operate on the scale it ultimately did.

The shortage of men made it necessary for women to take on jobs they were previously considered too weak or sensitive to perform, such as working in the Returned Letters Office, censoring letters and driving horse drawn mail vans. In urban areas before the war women weren't even permitted to deliver mail, which is part of what makes the women in this photo so important. When this changed it was met with resentment by both men and women who didn't think such a physical task was suitable for women. Most of the female postal workers however relished the opportunity to prove themselves capable and useful to the war effort and did so in a way many could never have imagined. They proved themselves as capable as men and some were even asked to stay on after the war as their (male) managers were reluctant to lose such good workers.

A number of female postal workers were honoured with prestigious awards such as OBEs and MBEs for their "great courage and devotion to duty". They were never going to win a Victoria Cross but it was significant that women were still recognised and honoured for the work they had done during the war, both on the home and fighting fronts.

This recognition of how well women had worked during the war helped promote the idea of women's suffrage, which is something we often take for granted today. The women in this photo, perhaps unwittingly, helped make this happen and to me this is a fascinating window into history and warrants us telling their story. One they no doubt considered unremarkable at the time.

Sarah Carr
Communications Officer

Below: Female postal delivery workers in Barnet, North London during the First World War



The First World War in colour

The First World War is often seen by those today as a conflict fought in black and white, as much of the imagery from that time is only available in monochrome. But the war was very much one of colour, more colourful perhaps than many wars today. Armies still wore uniforms of different colours – at the start of the conflict, French infantrymen still wore blue caps, tunics and greatcoats and red trousers. The colours of the First World War are brought to life through a series of lantern slides contained within the BPMA's collections. While printed in monochrome, lantern slides were often hand-coloured giving the illusion of colour photography. Interestingly, this approach could lead to differences in colouration, meaning that they are likely not entirely historically accurate. A precursor to photographic slides, they worked in much the same way, with the image projected onto a wall using a 'Magic Lantern' Projector.

Here we highlight a selection of these original lantern slides providing a glimpse

into the First World War as it might have been seen by those who were there. The slides in this article have been chosen by the BPMA's Exhibitions Officer Dominique Gardner who was responsible for choosing many of the First World War objects on show in BPMA's flagship *Last Post* exhibition.





A selection of the lantern slide images here can be seen in our exhibition at Coalbrookdale Gallery, part of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust. The exhibition runs Monday to Friday until 27 March 2015.

A number of slides can also be viewed in a Google Cultural Institute digital version of our *Last Post* exhibition simply search online for 'Last Post Google Cultural Institute'.

Clockwise from top:

In wartime Britain, mail vans were still pulled by horses, and the same method was used to deliver mail on the Front Lines during the War. Here they are seen transporting the Christmas post of 1918 to serving soldiers who had remained in the theatre of war after the conflict ended. This is an interesting example of a Lantern Slide before and after it was coloured. (2012-0149/01 & 02)

The German forces also operated an army post office to get mail to their soldiers on the Front Lines, this service included Military Postmen, seen here carrying mounds of parcels (2011-0502/12)

Whether it was in a tent or on a table at the side of the road, temporary Field Service Post Offices were set up all along the Front to sort the mail for the soldiers. Here British soldiers unload mail bags from a lorry and distribute letters. (2011-0502/07)

Previous page clockwise:

Soldiers on the Front Line had to improvise in the absence of telegraph poles, using objects such as trees to support the telegraph wires (left) or creating human ladders for telephones (right) (2010-0423/1 & 2)

The post was a lifeline for soldiers from all over the world. Here Italian troops are seen writing home. (2011-0502/10)



THE BRAVERY OF THE POST OFFICE RIFLES. 8TH BATTALION CITY OF LONDON REGIMENT

On the 100th anniversary of the First World War this year it is a fitting time to look back and pay tribute to a stalwart band of men who formed the Post Office Rifles.

It is worth going back to the very beginnings of the troop and learning that they were first formed in 1867 in response to acts of terrorism by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who detonated a bomb in Clerkenwell, London.

The Government's response was to raise special constables to protect London buildings from future Fenian outrages. The men of the GPO Special Constables unit asked the Major of the Civil service rifles if they could form their own unit and permission was granted.

They were awarded their first battle honours when a detachment of two officers and 102 men volunteered for service in Egypt where they performed postal and telegraphic duties. They next saw combat in South Africa during the Second Boer War.

By 1914 they had become part of the new Territorial Army the Eighth Battalion of the London Regiment. The volunteers trained at weekends and during evenings. The Post Office was, at this time, the largest employer in the world with over a quarter of a million staff many of whom were reservists.

With the outbreak of the war in 1914 so many rushed to join that the Post Office tried to stop them but the Army hierarchy waded in and they soon backed down. The Post Office Rifles were oversubscribed and a second Battalion had to be formed.

The First Battalion was sent to Crowborough for training where they had to sleep 20 men to a tent but they were keen to get to France and be part of the action.

The Battalion was made up of four companies of 200 men each, a signal section, a band, a machine gun section, a transport section with 50 horses as well as grooms, a medical officer, a butcher, several cooks, a couple of farmers and a number of regimental policemen. Later they added a civilian blacksmith.

It was not until March 1915 that they eventually arrived in Le Havre to terrible conditions. Despite being trained by the Irish Guards for a life in the trenches it still came as a terrible shock with the

smell of death and rotting corpses. They also had to endure gas attacks and continuous shelling which led to heavy casualties.

Their first real engagement with the enemy was at the Battle of Festubert where the British were trying to take a section of the German trenches and men were ordered over the Aubers Ridge. The men of the Post Office were used in a second attack and had to pass the ruined village of Festubert, the scene of wholesale destruction and houses reduced to rubble. Their orders were to take the trenches and then hold out until orders came to move forward.

Initially they were fairly successful but the counter-bombardment unleashed by the enemy was devastating. After several days of continuous shelling they sustained losses at a rate unlike anything they had experienced before.

After the Battle of Festubert the Post Office Rifles were well under strength and so new recruits were drafted in from the Second Battalion in Sussex. Plans had been made to deploy the Second Battalion en masse to the Front Line which made it necessary to found a Third Battalion to take over the training of the new recruits.

Despite its losses the Post Office continued to function as one of the Army's staunchest recruiting sergeants. This meant women had to be trained to take over the men's jobs and laws changed to allow married women to work.

The Post Office Rifles understood the importance of writing letters to their families and many of the letters survive to detail the horror of their lives on the front line.

The letters to and from home gave strength and courage to those fighting on the front line but as they moved further into battle zones they were issued with Field Postcards which gave the option of crossing out irrelevant lines usually ending with just "I am quite well".

The Post Office Rifles played an integral role in the Battle of Loos in September 1915 where they succeeded in taking German trenches but overall the battle was a disaster and the sacrifice of the Rifles was for nothing.

They were also heavily involved in The Somme

when in July 1916, 14 British Divisions, 120,000 men went "over the top". It was the bloodiest day in the entire history of the British Army and 20,000 men were killed on 1st July.

The Post Office Rifles were lucky to have missed out on the first day as they had been caught in a box barrage at the foot of Vimy Ridge known as Hell's Valley. However, they lost 100 men with many more injured and a large number taken prisoner.

By August they were at the front line when the British first used the Caterpillar machine-gun destroyers, which came to be known as tanks, although they were not as effective as first hoped.

Conditions became even worse after weeks of heavy rain and then stifling heat. They had got used to the rotting corpses and half buried bodies but hated the infestation of rats, and the dismal failure of the battle made it harder to endure.

Passchendaele followed with horror after horror, but the brave men of the Post Office continued to fight until the end of the war in 1918.

Over the course of the War 12,000 men served in one of the three Battalions of the Post Office Rifles and over 1,800 never came home again. A further 4,500 were left with life changing injuries and many more with psychological damage.

Between them the three battalions earned 19 battle honours and its men were awarded a total of 145 gallantry medals. These included a Victoria Cross won by Sergeant A. J. Knight, making him the only Post Office Rifleman to win this honour.

A large number of the rank and file returned to their old employer and were surprised to be re-trained by women. The females were gradually weeded out and were deemed surplus to requirement.

The Post Office Rifles have their own Cemetery at Festubert, in France the site of their first major battle which can still be visited today. There are also Memorials at Paignton War Memorial; at St Lawrence Parish Church; Abbots Langley; and a plaque outside the Uckfield village church. A book of Remembrance is placed in the church traditionally associated with the Post Office Rifles at St Botolph Aldergate, London EC1.

This article first appeared in the August 2014 edition of NFOP Magazine, the members' Magazine of the National Federation of Occupational Pensioners. The author is Tina Foster.

Top left: Section of Post Office Rifles recruitment poster

Top: Victoria Cross awarded to Sergeant A J Knight of the Post Office Rifles OB1997.211

Below: Sergeant Alfred Knight (second left with pipe) and comrades courtesy of Anne Walsh



MEN OF LETTERS



BY DUNCAN BARRETT

My book *Men of Letters* tells the true stories of the men of the Post Office who fought in the First World War – and in particular those who served with the organisation's own battalion, the Post Office Rifles (POR). In peacetime the POR was a unit of the territorial army, and in practice it was as much a social club for Post Office workers to get to know each other over beers around the campfire as it was a serious military unit.

But when war came, all that changed – the postmen and telegram messenger boys who made up the POR were officially mobilised and put through the rigours of formal Army training. In March 1915 they arrived in France ready to fight, and throughout the next three and a half years they acquitted themselves well. One POR, Sergeant Alfred Knight, even won the Victoria Cross for his bravery.

Men of Letters is based on the personal recollections of the Post Office Rifles, as well as the letters and diaries they wrote on the front lines. Much of my research was conducted at the BPMA, as well as in the archive of the Imperial War Museum. Predictably I came across many

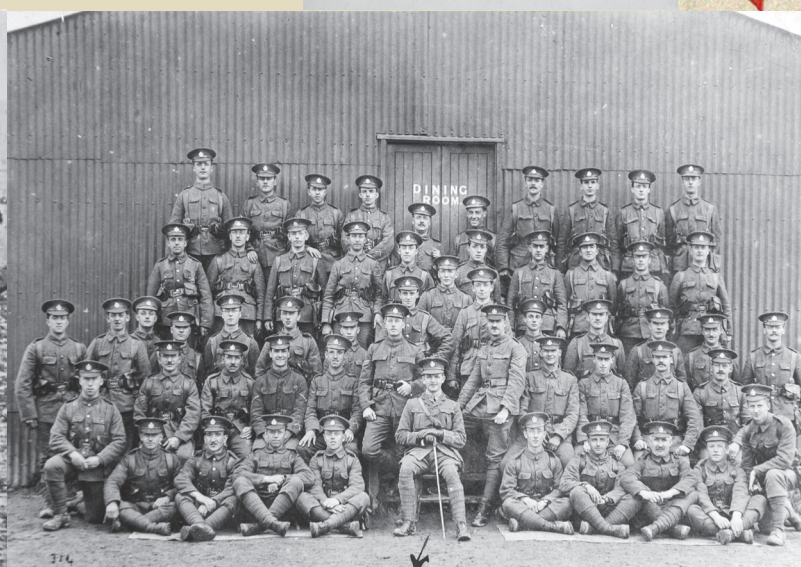
tragic stories – and the PORs certainly saw their fair share of horrors on the Western Front. But one thing that shone through in many of the accounts I read was their great sense of humour.

This extract from the book tells one of the lighter stories I discovered in the course of my research – about a rare occasion when the Post Office Rifles were called on to put some of their old skills to good use.

Right: Sketch of a Lieutenant Colonel, 1916, Post Office Rifles Calandar

Below left: Men sorting mail at the Front

Postcard featuring Post Office Rifles, June 1916



On the morning of Christmas Eve 1915, the Post Office Rifles left the relative comfort of Noeux-les-Mines for a rain-soaked trudge up to the front lines. They arrived to find a trench already two feet deep in water, and so muddy that their pumps got clogged up whenever they tried to clear it.

Fortunately, everyone had been provided with waders, although they still found their socks were soaked through within a matter of hours. Captain Gore Browne was sporting a hurricane smock sent out by his father-in-law, while one of the men had cut the bottom section off his greatcoat to keep it out of the water. His friends laughed at the sight of him in the roughly modified garment – he looked almost like a gentleman in evening dress, if you ignored the heavy coating of mud and the loose strands hanging down at the rear.

Keen to avoid a repeat of the Christmas Truce of 1914, in which Allied and German soldiers had met up in no man's land to sing carols, play football and exchange cigars, the Army had expressly forbade the troops from any kind of 'fraternisation' with the enemy during the course of the festive period. On 21 December, Gore Browne received a message from the headquarters of the 47th London Division:

CONFIDENTIAL

140th Infantry Brigade

The G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] directs me to remind you of the unauthorised truce which occurred on Christmas day at one or two places in the line last year, and to impress upon you that nothing of the kind is to be allowed on the divisional front this year.

Captain Lascelles at brigade HQ had added: 'With reference to the above, the Brig wishes you to give the strictest orders to all ranks on the subject, and any man attempting to communicate either by signal or word-of-mouth or by any other means is to be seriously punished. All snipers and machine guns are to be in readiness to fire on any German showing above the parapet.'

But despite the ban on friendly interaction, the Post Office Rifles had been given some peculiar orders in relation to the enemy. The Bavarian troops in the trench only 40 yards away from them were from one of the units that had fought in the Battle of Loos. Many of their comrades were now languishing in British prisoner-of-war camps and the Army had a large stash of the prisoners' letters that needed delivering across no man's land. Who better to attempt such a task than a battalion of former postmen?

Of course, this would be no straightforward delivery round. Even the bravest of posties wasn't about to risk being shot by a German sniper for delivering a letter, so the men from the Post Office decided that they would try to communicate their intentions first. Since no one was fluent in German, they took a large wooden board and wrote on it in capital letters:

DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?

Then they hung it on the butt of a rifle and gently

nudged it up over the parapet.

Within moments, both the board and the rifle had been shot to splinters.

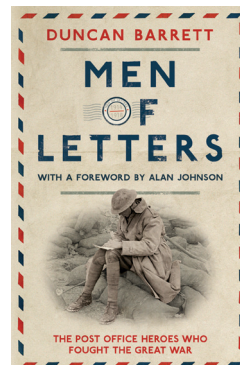
It was clear that the Bavarian soldiers across from the Hairpin were not going to accept their letters graciously, so the Post Office men would have to find another way to make the delivery. Bill Gibbs was one of the battalion's best sportsmen, and had distinguished himself in the summer's cricket match against the Civil Service Rifles, so he was selected as the most appropriate candidate to hurl them into the enemy trench.

The next problem was what to attach them to. By themselves, the letters weren't heavy enough to make it 40 yards through the air, but if the soldiers strapped them to the tin cans their food came in, they were liable to be mistaken for grenades.

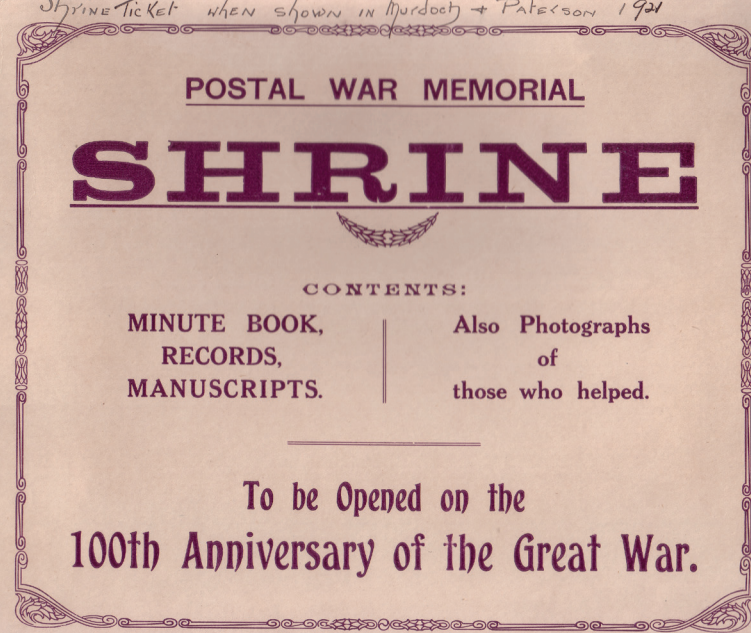
Then someone hit on an inventive solution. The battalion had a stash of extremely large, and rather unappetising, French carrots that the cookhouse boys were more than willing to spare. By making an incision in the side of each carrot, the men were able to slip the letters inside them – almost as if they were posting them through a letterbox – and thanks to the tuft of greenery protruding from the top of each one, it was possible to work up a good swing. The Germans might be puzzled by an unexpected deluge of vegetables, but they were unlikely to mistake them for a real attack.

Once the carrots had been stuffed with the German letters, Bill Gibbs began his work. He grasped one of the oversized vegetables, feeling the weight of it in his hand. Then he drew his arm back and released it with the precision of a master bowler. The carrot soared through the air, before landing with a satisfying plop – bang on target in the German trench. The men from the Post Office did their best to stifle their sniggers.

Bill didn't wait to see if the Germans would respond. One by one, he hurled the remaining carrots across no man's land, until every one of the bright orange missiles had reached its intended destination. What the Bavarians made of the sudden downpour was never recorded – perhaps they feared that a new and mysterious form of warfare had been developed by the Allies, to rank alongside the invention of chlorine gas. In any case, the letters got through in one piece. After nine long months on the Western Front, the Post Office Rifles had finally lived up to their name.



You can now order Duncan Barrett's new book *Men of Letters* based on his research at the Archive from the BPMA shop for only £8.99. Go to postalheritage.org.uk/shop or turn to the back page for details of how to order by phone and post.



REVEALED:

TIME CAPSULE TREASURE TROVE

Memorials are perhaps the longest lasting visible sign of remembrance, but they were not the only way the Post Office chose to remember its people after the First World War. One of the most touching tributes was made in Dundee where, in 1921, the staff of the Dundee Head Post Office put together a time capsule in remembrance of their fallen comrades, leaving specific instructions to those that were to come after them. The capsule was sealed into a wooden casket and a plaque fixed to the front reading "To be opened on 4th August 2014 by the Postmaster in the presence of the Lord Provost", 100 years after Britain entered the War.

The time capsule was discovered by a local amateur historian, Janice Kennedy in 2012. Janice came across a reference to the memorial in a diary that was passed down through her family while she carried out research into her grandfather, a postman in Dundee during the Second World War.

It emerged that the casket had spent many years in the city's Head Post Office before being moved to a Dundee Post Office when the building was sold off to the High School of Dundee. It finally came to rest in Royal Mail's Dundee East Delivery Office, where Janice found it. Once located, preparations began to honour the wishes these postal workers laid out almost 100 years ago. An opening ceremony was organised at the city's Council Chambers and Dundonians were asked to help track down descendants of the 1921 workers so that they could also be in attendance when the capsule was opened.

In the end, due to the age and condition of the sealed lead container housed within the wooden casket, and fears of the possibility of contamination, the capsule had to be opened under controlled conditions prior to the ceremony to ensure the safe removal of the contents without damage. The contents themselves were left untouched until the full ceremony could take place.

And so it was that on 4th August 2014, 100 years since the start of the First World War, I was fortunate enough to attend the opening of this very special time capsule. As the postal workers of Dundee wished, the Lord Provost of Dundee was in attendance along with senior representatives from Royal Mail and Post Office Limited, the position of Postmaster no longer existing. A moving poem, written to accompany the time capsule by a present-day student was read by the Head

Boy from the Dundee High School and a minutes silence was observed in remembrance of all those who gave their lives. The contents were laid out in display cases giving those in attendance a first look into the lives of the people of their city 100 years ago.

The capsule proved a treasure trove of artefacts, giving a window to a period beyond the memory of those alive today. There were a collection of photographs profiling the people of Dundee covering all walks of life from local dignitaries to soldiers and postmen. The images also



showed scenes of Dundee, giving people a view into how their city used to look. Special events were commemorated in the photos including visits by Princess Mary in 1920 and Winston Churchill in 1921. Alongside the photos were a number of documents relating to the period including publications, newspaper cuttings and letters from soldiers. The capsule also contained a number of sealed envelopes including a letter from the 1921 Lord Provost to his 2014 successor, a letter to the 2014 Postmaster of Dundee from the 1921 Postmaster and an essay on the League of Nations to the youngest member of the Education Authority in 2014.

While major historical events are documented by historians through published books, academic texts and television programmes, there is nothing quite as moving as hearing the voices of those that lived through a certain period. This time capsule gives us a unique insight into those that lived through the First World War, undertaking their day to day jobs while the world around them threatened to crumble. They understood the importance of what they were witnessing and chose to preserve it so it could not be forgotten. Seeing their photographs, and reading their handwriting gives us not just an insight into this period of history, but also their lives and emotions. Afterwards, you almost feel like you know them.

The time capsule and its contents have been placed in the trust of the McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum..

Chris Taft
Head of Collections

Clockwise from top left:

Field Marshal Haig visits Dundee, 1920. Courtesy Great War Dundee Partnership

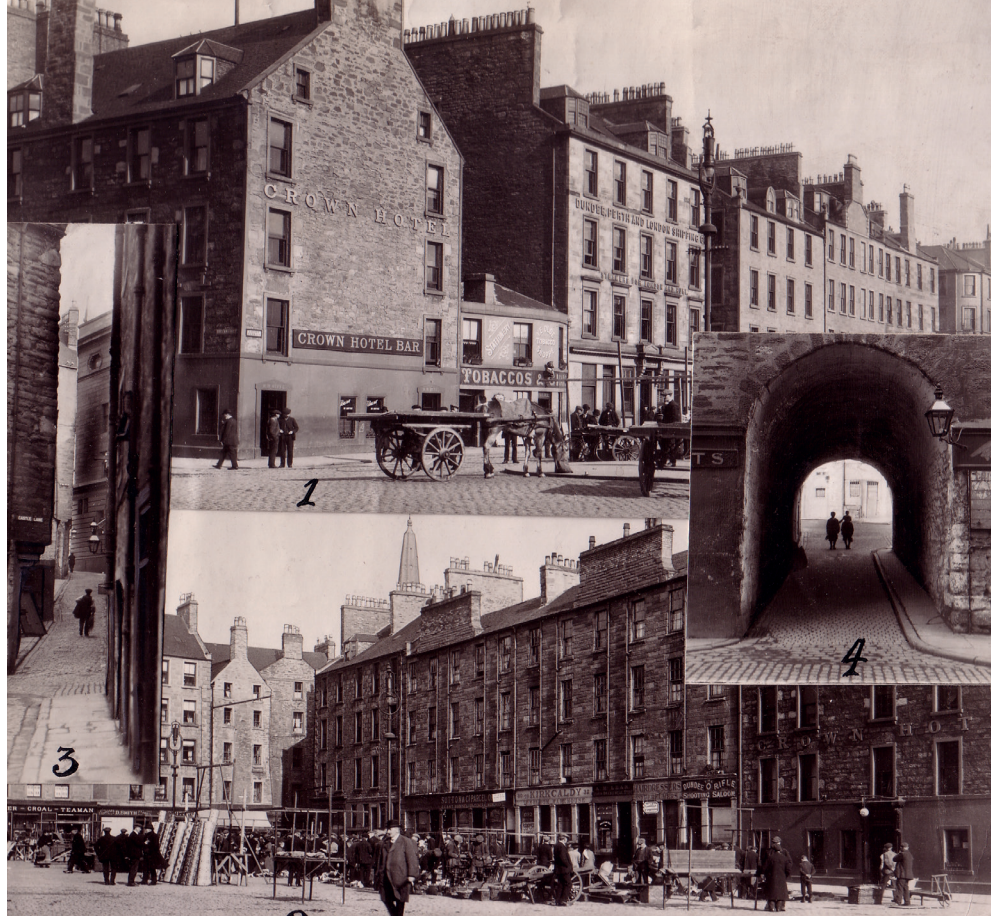
Ticket to see the contents of the Postal War Memorial Shrine. Courtesy Great War Dundee Partnership

Old Dundee. Courtesy Great War Dundee Partnership

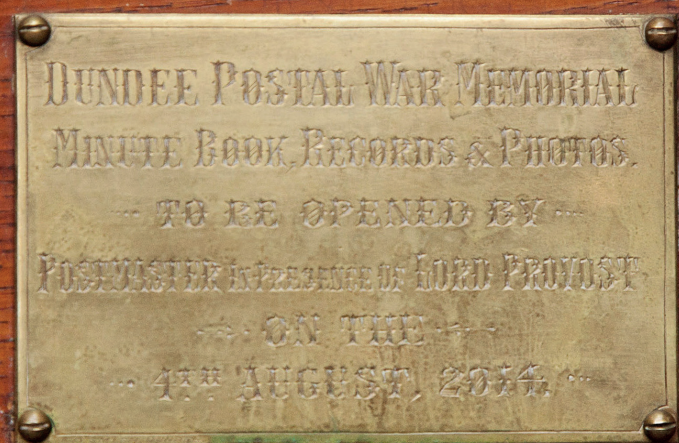
Dundee Postal War Memorial Committee. Courtesy Great War Dundee Partnership

Plaque on front of the time capsule. Courtesy of Royal Mail Group Ltd 2013

Pte W Barry, London Regiment. Courtesy Great War Dundee Partnership



Dundee Postal War Memorial Committee.



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Email us on peoplespost@postalheritage.org.uk or write to People's Post, The British Postal Museum & Archive, Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London, WC1X 0DL

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BPMA-PC-5d



Sorting of mail by the Army Post Office c1916
BPMA-PC-5a



Medals awarded to Sergeant Knight
BPMA-PC-5f



Embroidered card
BPMA-PC-5c



Women mending parcels, c1916
BPMA-PC-5b



Letter passed by censor on ship
BPMA-PC-5e



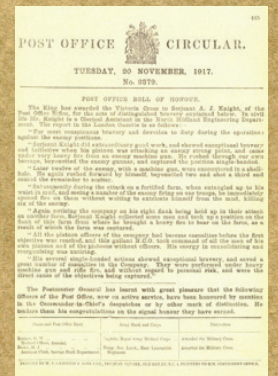
Four members of the Army Postal Service,
Western front c1914-18
BPMA-PC-4a



Sorting the mail from home, c1914-18
BPMA-PC-4b



Portrait of a Post Office
Rifleman, 1917
BPMA-PC-4c



Front page of Post Office
Circular, Nov 1917
BPMA-PC-4d

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