

Archive Information Sheet

Local History



Using our records for Local History

Many of the records held by The Royal Mail Archive are of potential interest to local historians. The records are organised into classes which are identified by the prefix POST and a class number. POST 1, for example, is formed of correspondence with the Treasury. Items within a class are identified by a piece number. There are over 100 POST classes, with catalogues available, which detail the records accessible in the public Search Room.

The sources on local history kept by The Royal Mail Archive are extensive and diverse. This information sheet is intended to direct local historians to the key sources when using these records.

Minutes

The minute books in POST 35 (1794 to 1920) and POST 38 (1921 to 1973) include many references to incidents at post offices.

Irish Minutes from 1831 to 1920 can be found in POST 36 and for Scottish Minutes from 1842 - 1920 see POST 37.

Minutes were submitted to the Postmaster General relating to all aspects of Post Office operations, including such diverse topics as letterboxes, mail routes, staffing problems and changes to buildings. Entries are found under the name of the post office, the department, a London region such as E, NW, or SE, or the subject (such as telegraphy or dismissals). Minutes can help to build a picture of what was happening in post offices around the country at a particular time.

Though brief, some entries supply useful information on individual employees. This may include detail on their wages and allowances. More information about individuals who were employed by The Post Office can be found in POST 1 and POST 58. For information on further potential sources relating to

individuals employed by the Post Office, please refer to our information sheets:

Family History: Postmen/women and Clerks

Family History: Postmasters/Sub-Postmasters

Publications

General Information about post offices may be found in POST 92, which includes the *Post Office Guides*. Dating from 1857, the period when crown post offices were first established, many of these guides contain lists of post offices around the country. They may be useful when trying to ascertain when a post office was founded, and contain information on postal charges and summaries of the services offered at each post office.

Also in POST 92 is the staff newspaper *Courier*. This was published on a regional basis and contains information of local interest. The earliest of the staff publications is *St Martins Le Grand* which dates from 1885.

Various publications produced by local postal history societies, such as *Yorkshire's Post* and *Sussex Post*, are available in our public Search Room and contain detailed information about local offices.

Portfolio Collection

The Royal Mail Archive has compiled several hundred files of information from primary and secondary sources on numerous topics. These include files on many post towns, aspects of postal history such as transport and innovation, working conditions, and senior figures within the organisation. Many include photographs, excerpts from publications, and information compiled by researchers.

Photographs

An extensive photographic collection is available in the public Search Room which includes pictures of Post Office buildings in London and around the country.

Reference Library

Our public Search Room contains a small reference library which encompasses postal history, developments in transport, significant individuals in the Post Office, staff, the Post Office in war time and local history throughout Britain.

Maps

Among our collection of maps, some have survived showing the 'walks' that postmen took on their daily routes. Others show the routes which mail coaches followed across the country. A number of maps have been photographed and copies can be viewed in the Search Room.

London History

A large amount of information held in the archive is connected with London, the capital being the location of the head office of the Post Office. The Minute Books in POST 35 and POST 38 include indexed volumes relating specifically to the London postal region.

A section of our reference library contains publications specifically related to London including books on the London postal service, photographic files on London post offices, and published works covering a range of subjects, from underground London to street names and topography. This section of the library is also home to bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News* (1845 to 1877) though this is not a complete set.

Also held in the Search Room are London Directories dating from 1776. The majority of these are *Post Office Annual Directories* (1801 to 1860), subsequently *Kelly's Post Office London Directory* (1865 to 1991). The content of these publications varies through the time of their production, but many list businesses, traders, officials, churches, some private residences and street arrangement. It should be noted that this series is not complete.

Establishment Books

The volumes in POST 59 list the personnel employed within a given department at a given time. The earliest of these produced by the Post Office dates to 1742. From 1857 this was a printed publication which gives name, dates of appointment to each grade held and salary. By 1916 the date of birth was also being included. These books include only senior officials and clerks, primarily those in London.

The Royal Mail Archive Search Room at Freeling House is open Monday to Friday, 10.00am - 5.00pm, and until 7.00pm on Thursdays. We are open selected Saturdays 10.00am - 5.00pm, please call or see our website for dates.

Please bring proof of identity to get an archive user card. In most cases there is no need to make an appointment, but please contact us in advance if you have any questions.

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