Speaker 1:

Thank you for coming to this interview.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

My pleasure.

Speaker 1:

What is your full name?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

My full name is Allen Jeffrey Ryell.

Speaker 1:

It's a wonderful name. What year were you born?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

I was born in 1947. The baby boom years after the war.

Speaker 1:

Where were you born?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

I was born in St. George's Hospital Hyde Park Corner, Westminster.

Speaker 1:

What did your parents do for a living?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

My mom used to make parachutes during the war. She made parachutes and was a tailoress. My father, he was on the Water Board. Before, he actually was an engraver. He was in the jewelry business of engraving, but as soon as the war started, he enlisted in the army and joined the Royal Marines. When the war ended, he left, obviously, Euro Demobbed from the army. He joined the Metropolitan Water Board. He was with the Metropolitan Water Board until he retired. It would've been in about 1980, when he was 59. Once you had done 40 years in the business, you could retire before you were 65. He actually retired when he was 59 to a life of leisure.

Speaker 1:

Okay. These three questions are about your family and childhood. Number one, please tell us why you decided to work for Royal Mail?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Well, I decided to work for Royal Mail because one, I was a motor mechanic for a number of years and governor decided to retire himself. He sold, closed the garage down. In closing the garage down, we all became unemployed. We all worked for ourselves. Self-employed motor mechanic, I was and then I

noticed that I could do with more time and money. There was an advert in the paper and on the TV, Royal Mail were looking for casual workers for Christmas Pressures, it's called. You would work for about two weeks in the December time to help out with the Christmas postage. After that, during that two weeks, I found out what a wonderful job it was. After that, I applied to join full-time. In the end, eventually, I became a full-time postman.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about any family members who worked for Royal Mail.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Well, my nan's brother, he worked for Royal Mail at the Mount Pleasant sorting office. Unfortunately, he was killed during the war when a bomb landed on the Mount Pleasant building in 1941, but apart from him, my older brother worked for Royal Mail in the Rathbone Street office just off Oxford Street until he moved out of London to buy a house in Sittingbourne because he couldn't afford to live in London then. He ended up living in Sittingbourne, but obviously stopped being a Royal Mail worker then. He joined a different business, locally.

Speaker 1:

Sorry to hear that.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

That's all right. Don't worry.

Speaker 1:

What did your family members think about your decision to work for Royal Mail?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

They were very happy. I thought it was wonderful because I was doing ... because of Royal Mail's times of jobs, I've got so many different opportunities for people to work early shift or late shift or a night shift. It came together that I could actually carry on being a motor mechanic, traveling motor mechanic, and do the shift work at the post office. I encompassed both jobs. That way, I became very rich person.

Speaker 1:

These questions are about your early work. Tell us how you started working for Royal Mail.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

How I started working for was when I went to the sorting office at Nine Elms doing a two weeks, what they call the casual work. It was to do, just to help at Christmas time. You just helped out, whereas the normal amount of staff wouldn't be enough to cope with all the mail, the letters, the parcels, the packages and all sorts of things. You just became a helper for a couple of weeks. During that time, you learn quite a lot about what else there was in the job, which is why I ended up by applying to join afterwards properly.

Speaker 1:

Describe the training you did.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

The training was very interesting. The different jobs that you were allocated were either tipping bags of mail that would come off the lorries that were going around clinching all the post boxes. They would tip the mail into a great big area, a manual area, where you picked out the package and the letters and the large flats. You put the large flat letters like the size of a newspaper. You had what they called jumbos. We called them jumbos, but they were called auto levels, a big, round, green basket-like thing but plastic with a sprung-loaded base. As the items filled up, the base drop down and you got an amount of parcels and letters and everything in. That went to one side. You separate the parcels from the letters into what we call a drop bag frame, a metal frame with bags attached to about eight bags. They had different labels on the top; foreign mail, inland mail, London mail, all sorts of things like that, large items, small items.

That's, basically, what we were taught at the beginning. There were a lot more than that to do. Each person were put in different areas to do different things. Well, that's what I was doing.

Speaker 1:

What was the first job you did for Royal Mail?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

The first job I did for Royal Mail was exactly that, sorting out those items into different bags and then, let's say, one bag that you were sorting that wasn't the parcels and wasn't the large flat, let's say, it had letters in. Once that bag got filled up with letters, you would take the bag off, put an empty one on for someone else to carry on. You would take that bag away to a big table. You'd tip all the letters because that was the bag that you'd allocated. You tip all the letters out and you'd sort second class, first class, international mail, damaged items, items that didn't have anything on them. You had a different pigeon hole to put them in. It was very interesting. You didn't know what you were going to come across from one day to another. Sometimes there would be letters with no addresses on where someone has forgotten to put writes on it. That went into the broken packets and section where they would have to delve into what was inside, which was a different department. Yeah, it was interesting.

Speaker 1:

Tell us how you felt on your first days at work.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

First days at work. Well, it's a bit daunting because you don't know what to expect. You walk through a reception area which they would have given you address. You would go into a waiting room where there was lots of us, about 20 or 25 of us. We're all the same. Someone at work from the scene says, "You go over there. Wait in there until we come and collect you." We were just waiting to be and we all started talking to each other, finding out, "Oh, yeah, you're doing this, you're doing that. All right. Where are you from?" Very friendly atmosphere. When, eventually, you were taken out of that room to an area where they might have processed your name and address and all the hierarchy, what particular paperwork you had to supply, forms like that had to be filled in. There was lot of hierarchy like that, lots of information to be given, because they want you to know what your addresses were, make sure that you had the proper paperwork and that was how we got to meet some of the people first off. Yeah, it was good.

Speaker 1:

Describe your work in those early days.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

My work in those early days. Well, as I've said lots of times, interesting. You wouldn't believe, everything was all new. I never realized what a post office or this was a massive sorting office. The office that I was at was at the Nine Elms sorting office. It was opened in about '83. I was there until it closed in 2012 when they knocked it down and they built the new American Embassy on the site. That was one of the reasons why I retired, but that particular office was one of the main sorting offices in London. It wasn't a small local delivery office, which there are hundreds. I think there used to be about eight main mechanized sorting office. MSO was the shortening of the offices and Mount Pleasant had always been the largest.

We were near Battersea, near the Battersea Dogs Homes. That was a local for the Southwest London area. I'm living only around the corner in Westminster. It was my local office. It wasn't far for me ago, but all the same. The particular jobs that we were doing were sorting letters, sorting packets, mixing with people to find out, you learn, you have to learn where the parts of the country the items go. It was a teaching process. They sent you on a course into King's Cross, very soon. You were only there for probably weeks. When they got the new people together and we all went off to the King's Cross sorting office, it was learning. It was a school. All of us were there. You had to pass the test of sorting. Each of us, there would have been about 100 of us.

We all had a frame like this with 50 pigeon holes of different places of destination. They would give you a block of cards like this, like 10 packs of cards, like playing cards, but they all had address on. The teachers would come around and you'd go, "I don't know. The LF goes in that one. WC1 goes in there. EC2 goes in there. Cheshire goes up there. Foreign goes up there." You had to learn that on the day. You had to. There was a time limit. You learn it during the day and then there was a test at the end of the day. You had to get 500 of these cards in the right places within about five minutes. I can't remember exactly the times now, but there was a timer. We were all lined up. "Right, go." You'd go, "[pfpfpf 00:12:38]." If you weren't sure, you'd put one down on the side and you'd go, "pfpfpf." Then you'd get to the ones that you weren't sure about and you'd have another go, "Oh, yeah, that goes there, that goes there."

At the end of the day, you passed. You did it with the amount of time to spare. Or if you didn't pass, then you have to go away. You could come back in a couple weeks time, but you were told the frame what you had and what you had to do to learn it properly. When you were sorting letters, which was in the sorting office, you were getting real people's letters. If you put a letter in, let's say, for instance, Kent and it was Essex, it would be put in a bundle, put in a bag to Kent. It'll get to Kent and it's got Essex on it, so it come all the way back. That was what we called a missile. They didn't want that, which was, obviously, no one did. You had to learn the sorting frame. That was just one of the duties, sorting the letters.

Speaker 1:

Well, what was the atmosphere like at your working booth in the early days?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

In the early days, lots of fun. Everyone locked about, but you did your job. We used to say, talk and sort. You couldn't sit next to somebody because you were all lined up in base of. You couldn't just sit there chatting to someone about football if you weren't doing the work. You'd have supervisors walking around. They used to say, some people were a bit more chatty, a bit like me, "Talk and sort. Keep

sorting. If you're talking, keep sorting." That was trying to keep all the mail going, otherwise. Things would get delayed and that wasn't on the cards. It doesn't do that, but it was lots of fun. Everyone with a big massive big canteen. You'd meet for breaks, lunch and chat to people, "How are you getting on?" You'd quiz each other, "Oh, yeah, where's Wiltshire. Where's Wiltshire. What county is Brighton in?" So suggest or something like, "What county is Brighton and Kent? No." You'd learn. You learn from your friends. Yeah, it was lots of fun. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

What kinds of people are you working with?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

All sorts of people. Everybody. What do you mean by sorts of people? We were all looking for a job. We all had ambitions of staying there because we all liked it. I don't remember anyone saying, "Oh, I don't like this," because you didn't have to. You could leave, but you look forward to going to work because you were socializing as well as working at what you like doing. You've got fitted out with clothes. They supplied you with all the clothes you want. You wouldn't need to buy anything. It was all free. There were social side. There was lots of things; a canteen, there was a locker room to put, hang all your stuff up. They supplied you with everything you wanted. If you want ambition, there was charts on the wall for you if you want to do this. How about trying out that? Yeah, it was a good opportunity, for me. Particularly, a young person. Yeah, I liked it.

Speaker 1:

How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

How what?

Speaker 1:

How diverse.

Speaker 3:

Diverse.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Diverse. All right. Well, that's an interesting question because at the time, you don't really know the kind of people. When I joined, it was in about 1986. A lot different to the years before. The diversity blossomed as the years progressed. More and more people, particularly people from the Philippines. We got lots and lots of new people from the Philippines and they fitted in lovely. Everybody worked together. There was no problems, although you would see on the TV or on the news about racialism and all that. I never came across it. Lots of banter people used to laugh about. I think, possibly, it might not be so acceptable nowadays, but it was in front. No one ever got upset about things or I never knew that ever happened once, but it was fun. It made the atmosphere light and friendly to work in. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

What sort of equipment did you use in your work?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Well, the equipment came later. The equipment was, everything was on rolling, what we called, coffin. A coffin would've been somewhat like about ... like these benches, slightly these benches, that long, but I'd say just twice as wide, on wheels. When you tip bags of mail onto these great big tables like this but lots of them and big and wide. You'd tip the bags. You'd have a coffin for, let's say, a national mail, a bit lightly drop bag frame. The drop bag frame was more specific for East One, East Two, West One, AC1. The coffins were for more packets and parcels inland and separate for international mail. The jumbos, all levels as well called them. They were on wheels. You'd move these about. There was lots of equipment like that, but the mechanized side, when they started to introduce the flat sorting machine, I think that was the first machinery that came in that you would get a flat. The size of your A4 paper there. They were called flats.

Let's say, when you've tipped a bag, you had flats going in the auto level. They'd wheel that over to the flat sorting machine where you'd pick up a load of flats like this, put them on in the ... I've got a photograph of that. I was on the flat sorting machine. I've got a photograph which would explain it, a bundle of these flats. You'd have them tidily like this. They would be on a rotate, a moving table about as long as that. You put it on that end and you add a little. Like you go in the supermarket, when you put your stuff on the moving belt, it gets to the end and the thing, the little light, comes across and it stops it. Well, that's what we had. You'd put the flats on there and it would move along to, let's say, me as the machine. There's a slot there and you'd pick the item up.

You had an electronic pad, finger pad of not to 10 or not to nine with a zero, and that had a coding on it. This was something else that you learned in the classroom, but that took a bit longer. That took about, I think, a week to learn the codes. You'd pick the item up. CM1 Chelmsford. You put that and you press CM1. That goes to Chelmsford. That would go "[inaudible 00:20:04]." It will come to a mechanized part of the machine which would have the Chelmsford box and it would drop into a plastic box about this size. There was rows of these plastic boxes. There was the old tow level there, the jumbo. The operator, if you won't code in, there were seven of us, four coders, one putting the items on, one taking the items off that side and the machine went right around the other side. An operator was out there taking the items when the boxes got filled up, into the jumbo for Chelmsford or that kind of thing. They all had different trays, the trays for the jumbos filled in.

Once the jumbo was full, you likely put an empty jumbo on. That was a very interesting job. It took a while to learn that, to learn all the different codes of the country or the old one was the foreign and that went in as foreign books. They have lots of equipment to learn. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Can you describe your uniform?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Uniform. This is uniform. This was lovely. All sorts, all types of weathers. There were so many different jobs. You might be on the job on the platform as we called it. The lorries would go around and collect them, empty the pros boxes, come back with their lorry, back on the platform. The lorries, where the platform was, let's say, from here to that wall, the concrete and that was the building, the lorries would back right up to the wall, drop their tailboard and then they'd throw these bags off. The bags, there would be workers on the platform. That might be your job, not sorting letters but sitting and standing there, picking up the bags. There would be where the door ... that door, let's say, that door, that would have been an opening. The other side of that, I've got a picture of that in the background of one of my photos in there.

You'd throw the bags through that and it was in a moving floor, a moving escalator. It was above ground. Right. We are up here on the platform. Everybody else is down there, but when you see this, it goes around. The base go around to a shoot. They come flying down the shoot. There will be two, three or four of us all picking the bags up and the bags would have a label on. Whatever the label said, it was Boucher. It goes into that tray or rather, trolley. Boucher or [Cheshire 00:22:47] or foreign. You needed a lot of space. This was enormous, this building. You pick the bags up. Sometimes the bags would open. All the stuff would come down the shoot and make loud noise. You had to pick up quick. Just shove it all back in the bank and find where the label was, put the label back on and then those bags then would be pushed to the area where they were just sorting that area. That place like Boucher, for instance, or Cheshire or wherever.

They all had, in the office, different places for that particular specific destination. That would get sorted out there, but yeah, you've got experiences. Well, worth a day to have a look what should be working.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about the skills you needed for your job.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

The skill you needed. Well, spelling was a good one. Spelling, particularly. When you're reading letters, the times that you get a letter and you think, "What does that say?" Writing in particular. People, you learn spelling better. You learn to write clearly. I'm always, even now, telling my family, "That could be an E. That G could be an E." That's going to go to a machine that's going to try and read that. In fact, E is not really ... Probably a G and E could get this and it's going to go somewhere else. The machine won't read it and it will get put to one side. That's a delay in the mail, for someone who's waiting for their letters, but the skills you've learned and really, you learn where the places were in the country, so you need it.

I think, after a while, you start realizing you need a pair of glasses because that makes things a lot clearer and a lot quicker. Speed comes with experience. You don't want to be going fast when you don't know what you're doing because things go all over the place. Take your time. Do things slowly and speed comes with it. In that speed, you get quality with speed as well. What else do we need? Really, the reading and the writing, that was probably the biggest qualities that you needed. Not everybody could read properly. It weren't like for the first. Sometimes it would take a while for that to show up in somebody and then they could probably ... where someone would say, "You know, you need a pair of glasses." Problem solved, glasses. In fact, I think there was a time when they were partly paid for. Royal Mail paid a percentage for you to get a pair of glasses. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Describe a typical day at work.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

A typical day at work. Typical day, well, how can I say? First of all, you'd be rushing to get there. You'd get there. You got a sign on. We had a system that you got to drop to the sorting office. You partly buy a cup because I'm ... I buy a cup in the bay. I'd go tearing in at the office. Usually, stop every five minutes, chatting to people. "Hang on, I've got to go sign on." You'd go to the destination and where you've got your sign in on sheet where all the people are doing what you're doing. All your names were on this sheet. You go with the time on it. You need to make sure you were there before time. You signed your

name like everybody else and then you would then go to the destination. Oh, no, you'd take your coat off, first of all.

You go to the locker room, take your coat off and then go down to ... so you're ready to work and sign on. You would then go to the area that you were and meet everyone that you were working with, if you're working with people, which most of us were when we were there early days and then carry on working, talk about the day, talk and sort. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

What were your favorite things about your work?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Favorite things about my work was the company, it was the staff, working with people that you had lots of fun with while you work. Everybody worked hard. We're happy working hard. Doing the things, there was the social side. There was quite a lot of other things you could do. We had a snooker room. We had card rooms. This was obviously in your spare time or in your breaks. There was first aid. You could've taken up courses on first aid. There was lots of things to do, but mainly, I think the idea that you could do overtime as well to get extra money. You experience in the particular part where they needed extra help or you like to be trained up on all the different aspects that there were.

If there was a shortage in the department and they put a sheet up saying, "We want extra people for this," and you were trained on that, you put your name down and you got an amount of hours overtime, which meant you got extra money. That was worth doing. There was usually a rush to do all that, but they had a big board with all the people over, everyone in the shift was ... if you did any overtime, your name went on the shift board. They did an amount of ... No one could do more, what they call the Aggre Board, the aggregate of what you'd done. If you've done 10 hours and someone want you to do what you wanted to do and then adding any hours, they would get picked first. If your average was high other than everyone else's, then you would get last from the list to do the overtime. It was a good fair way of sharing out the overtime.

Speaker 1:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

The difficult things about the work. I wouldn't say they were difficult. I think the worst parts, if you had to say they were difficult, was the temperature in the summer. It used to get very hot. When the machinery came in over the years later, the machinery used to create quite a lot of heat. There was lots of fans needed. The air conditioning, I don't think we had air conditioning. We had some form of heating that was up in the rafters with these big blowers. Over years, they assembled a semi air conditioning because it was very hot in the summer. It was worst to work hot in the summer than it was to be cold in the winter. You could put clothes on, extra layers, jumpers and stuff, but in the summer, you just couldn't keep cool enough.

We used to have the post office, the raw mail, they used to have a big trolley that used to come around in the really hot weather. Someone used to push this mobile trolley with cold drinks on it, free, that you would just go and get a glass of orange or lemon or something like that. Just cold drinks. If you wanted to, you could go to the water fountains and fill up a plastic bottle that you had for cold water. It just that it would only be cold for the first few uses and then after that, you're getting warm water

coming out because everyone was using it so quickly, but anyway, that was still better than nothing at all, but I wouldn't say there were any difficulties or didn't find any difficulties in the job. No.

Speaker 1:

Can you tell us about any discrimination you experienced or witnessed?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Discrimination. Well, the only discrimination, if it's discrimination, was in a particular incident that came to my attention, I was a first aider and someone came up to me and said, "Dorothy over there, she's not feeling well, but she's too shy to come and tell you." I went up to this lady. I said, "Dorothy, are you all right?" Being a first aider, I came to the opinion she wasn't well. She needed to go to the hospital. She wasn't well at all. It wasn't just take a sit down, which you could do sometimes. You tell someone, "Go to the canteen, give it 10 minutes, come back down again." She looked to me really unwell. I said to her, "Look, Dorothy, you got to go to the hospital."

Now, I went to her line manager who was in charge of her because you can't just take someone away. I said, "Look, I got to take Dorothy to the hospital." She said, "Oh, no, you're not taking that person to hospital. She plays it up. She plays it up and she's putting it on." I said, "I'm sorry, but I've got to overrule you. I'm taking her to the hospital." I took a lot of air bashing from this woman. Interesting it was a woman manager. This was a woman casualty. I took this lady. We took her to the hospital which was around the corner. She was in hospital for a couple of weeks and they said she was having a stroke at the time, a serious condition that she was having. Now, fortunately, we took her to the hospital. If she haven't gone to the hospital, the situation might got worse.

I think that's the only discrimination I came across, but it was just authority. It was just someone's opinion. With health, you can't be too careful. If someone is not feeling well, it's too risky and say, "Yes, you're all right and carry on working," because you're responsible should something happen. Apart from that, that's the only discrimination I came across, because she thought she knew better than a first aider.

Speaker 1:

Tell us a story that stands out from your working life.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

From my working life, a story that stands out. Oh gosh. I think there's a story every day. Story every day that stands out. In fact, I started to write a book. I've not got far on it, but a particular incident, I can't think ... Well, not that it's-

Speaker 3:

Be careful with your ... because you've got ... I think you're tracking-

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Yeah, yeah. Sorry. Yeah.

Speaker 3:

Just because it's a bit slightly-

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

A particular incident that makes me laugh is when I first started. I've always remembered this. It's not a great deal, but when I was working, they said to me with the group of workers, I was new, and they put me on this little shift, what we would call professionals. They were used to it. Been in the job donkey's years and I was new. "Oh, yeah. Yeah, come and do this. Let me show you how to do it. By the way, go to the roof and just get the air mail in." I said, "How do I do that?" They say, "Yeah, go up the stairs. Yeah, on the roof. It should be coming any minute." I walked up on the roof of the building. I found my way and I'm looking up in the sky.

After about half an hour I thought, well, there's nothing coming. Of course. When I went downstairs, they all started laughing because the air mail doesn't come in onto the roof. It goes to Heathrow properly in the airplanes. They don't drop mail, but it was just a laugh. They had to laugh on a joke with me and saying, "Go and see, go and collect the air mail." Well, that is just a bit of fun but something really outstanding. Things weren't happening all the time like that, but yeah, nothing really special.

Speaker 1:

What were some of the naughty things people did at work?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

The naughty things people did at work. Well, remember what I said about the moving up in the gantry, that the bags of mail would go on and they would come around. That was a duty I was on, what was called the shoot. All these bags would come a long, long, long and then they'd slide down the shoot onto this big metal square base that was kind of slippery. The bags all slid on them and they'd slide down. You'd put the bags onto these rolling piece of equipment to go there. One of the workers that we had there, he used to think it was very funny. With the auto levels, the jumbos, the big square things that you use to put the items in, everybody knew what was in these jumbos, these auto levels. There was a big metal plate, about like this. Let's say, it was about that big, that round, but it was shaped like that. You just dropped it on one of the sides, a big rubber sides going around four sides. It just fitted on that and they have the destination on it.

Let's say, it's a DC1 or let's say, it said, "foreign," these metal plates were thin like this. He used to think lots of fun, throw it up in the air onto this rolling, onto this moving. When there was no bags coming down, this metal plate would come cluttering down like this, make a louder noise. He used to think that was funny. He just used to laugh, but I can't think of many other things. There was lots of fun that we used to have.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about your favorite job.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

My favorite job. Well, after a number of years being there, you'd get promotion to particular duties that are a lot more interesting. After a number of years, I chose to go on the revenue protection. A section where you check the revenue, the businesses are paying when they send their mail. Not just people putting letters in letter boxes. These would be businesses that send bagfuls of mail. The Royal Mail van would go to the businesses who would have a post room in their business and pick up bags and bags of mail from a business. Those business would internet you on the computer, the paperwork, four bags, 50

kilos of items all going to foreign, all going to foreign country. You would get that. You'd sit on the computer, tap in the business. This is before you got the mail.

You would say, "Oh, yeah, they're sending in that amount of stuff." You'd have paperwork ready for when the mail came in, let's say, had five kilos one bag. Five kilos go into Austria, let's say, and it have an Austria label on it. You get your docket, get a bit of paperwork from the internet. You'd have one bag to Austria, five kilos. You'd lift it up and you think, "This feels rather heavy," but anyway, you take it away and take the label off. You look inside. It all says Germany. This is true. This is an actual incident that happened. I took the item up. I tipped the bag out. Everyone of these items had Germany on it. The bag label had Austria.

Now, if we haven't checked that, that bag would've gone to Austria, would've gone to the airport in Austria. They would've opened it. All the mail was German. They would've had to send it back to us, for us to send it to Germany. Now, what happens is, when we send mail inland, if we send something to Glasgow and it's meant to go to island. It's still inland. It's still rather Glasgow. It should've gone to Wales. It's still inland. It's our own mistake with dealing with it twice. It's our fault. If it goes to a foreign country, they charge us to deliver it. All those items that eventually went to Germany, Germany delivered them all in Germany, send us a bill for delivery. If we haven't got that in the first place, that payment in the first place, because that might not even have been checked to start with. We would have to pay the delivery charges of the delivery in Germany.

Also, money is a double whammy. We're not getting the revenue, in the first place. Let's say, for instance, they haven't sent a docket in at all. Those five kilos worth of items that we found that went, first start, it's getting a bit confusing now because the first story leads into the second story. Let's say, we get a bag of mail in with no docket. It's going to a foreign country. If no one checks it, then it goes to the foreign country. We have to pay for their deliveries. We haven't been paid in the first place because they haven't sent a thing, a docket in.

Now, let's say, for instance, they send a docket in and it's got the wrong destination on it, we get back to them. I get back to them and say, "Look, you put a wrong label on here. Oh, I'm so sorry. What happened there?" Actually, this is what happened. A person said, "We thought Austria was in Germany. I thought Austria was in Germany." It's a different country. Their mistake. We had to charge them. There used to be a 25 pound charge for a mistake and you gave them opportunity of a free go if they made a mistake, genuinely. That's usually what happened. You wouldn't charge him the 25 pound charge of what it was, but apart from that, the interest in dealing with international mail because this was all international mail and we use to do that. It was so interesting.

I learned so much geography about where countries were in the world. Really interesting with the different parts and shape of Europe and rest of the world got more than one rest of the world is, it's really distant like Australia. It's distant rest of the world. Whereas Russia, it's not distant, but it's in series one of rest of the world. The eastern part because it's such a big country. You learn all that about the different countries. The price range is enormously different. How much things cost to the different ... right. Like going on the tube or the train, you got a different zones and it's there the further you go. Where it's a bit likely about the post at different parts of the country, but I use to recover thousands.

In fact, I've got an article in there, in the courier. They did an article all about me. It says on there, "Allen spotted that there was this ... he created, found this business that was dealing with a smaller firm, not real mail and he managed to get their work and saved 100,000 pounds for Royal Mail to charge them, which was business they didn't have." There's a whole article in the courier there all about me. It came right near to when I was retiring. In the past, we had made lots of recoveries. In fact, I ended up being the spokesperson for the inland and the international, all on the revenue protection. It was about 22 of us. 21 inland workers and one international. We use to recover, every day, someone

would say, "Go over there. He's just recovered 500 pounds because of this. Tom over there, he's just recovered 1,000 pounds because they made a mistake on their bill. They put five kilos down and it was 50 kilos because the decimal point in the wrong place." We had 50 kilos of work, but the docket only said five, because someone wasn't clued-up with the mathematics of where the decimal point goes.

Anyway, while that was happening, we got together and said, "Why don't we go and check to the main man upstairs and see if we could get an incentive about working harder." Well, we were working harder, making thousands of difference. They said to me, "Go up there. See Mr. Top man." I went up there. I chatted in. I said, "Yeah." He said, "Yeah, that's a good idea, if you can recover." We use to call that recoveries. Money that we wouldn't have got. "If you can recover million pounds this year, each of you get a 50 pound bonus and an extra day off." We said, "We'll ever got that." We crack that easy after the first year. We made that easy.

Well, anyway, when I went up the next year, he said, "Yeah, you can do it again, but we want two million this time now." We couldn't make ... We want two million. We couldn't reach the two million. We were really near it at the end of the year, but he still gave us that extra bonus that he said he would give if we reach the two million, but that is because the incentive is there, you get a drive about doing things, especially if you're all happy and working hard. It benefits yourself. It benefits the business. It benefits everybody, but that was one of the parts of the ... the revenue protection part was the best part of the job I ever did. That's where I was working when I ended up leaving.

Speaker 3:

Just slightly keeping that line on the time today. Let's go to these questions next. Okay.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about your relationships with your colleagues.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

With my colleagues. Well, the relationships were lots of friends, lots of fun. The nearest more relation, closer relationships was when we were doing our first aid section. We all joined up to do first aid. We all became first aiders. We took the course, the St. John Ambulance course. Royal Mail paid for it all. They teach you to be a first aider. You first aid all your mates all around you. One of the main things we use to say to people when we're talking to people that weren't first aiders, "You know, you should be ... Are you not a first aider? No. You know what they say about first aid? You might be a first aider, nine times out of 10. Your first aid would be at your house." It will be at your home, your family. It won't be at work, but we're teaching you to be first aiders at work, but you will benefit from knowing first aid when you're around your family and friends.

There's nothing worse than people saying, "Oh, someone's fallen over. I don't know what to do." If you become a first aider, you know what to do. You can help people. We got to know each other a lot closer than ... We used to go in competition to stay away for the weekend. All paid by the Royal Mail and compete in the nationals, all the offices in the country. We used to submit a team. We used to have a local regional competitions first. Whoever came top, whoever were the best were selected to go to the nationals as we called it. Then you competed against all the other offices in the country. All in Scotland, Wales and everywhere. Northern Island, everywhere. We used to come home with lots of trophies.

Mount Pleasant, I think, used to come home with the most trophies. They were forever winning everything because they were really top class. We have to compete against it then. There's one picture in there in my portfolio there, a picture of me holding up the bandaging competition. I was the national bandaging champion one year. Because that was another part of the first aid competition, treating,

making up people, casualty simulation. We are all trained at casualty simulation, putting make up on, making it look like you've got a broken arm and treating people like that. In the competition, they would be the casualties and you would walk in. We were two minutes spot and you had to gloves on, "Hello, my name is Allen. I'm a first aider. Lay perfectly still. Anybody here." That kind of thing. There's a judge there marking it down, two points, two points, two points, two points.

That was how we became very much more friendlier, being away, being away with them at weekends. There's pictures on there and my photo there with lots of trophies and lots of different people, all first aiders. Yeah, we loved it.

Speaker 3:

A little bit worried about time. Let's go to this one.

Speaker 1:

What made you join the union?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

The only union. Well, that's a good question. You join the union because everyone did. It was never anything that you thought, "I don't know. I'm not joining the union." Unless some people would say ... not everybody had, I wouldn't say, lots of money, but some people said, "You know, that amount that I have to pay, I just don't want to pay. Okay, you don't have to. You didn't have to join the union," but as soon as there was a stoppage or an industrial action, everybody used to, then you'd join the union if you weren't in the union because you didn't want to be different. You wanted to be the same as everyone else. Everybody used to stick together.

I do believe there were some people. Not many that didn't join the union. That always caused bad feeling amongst some of the people. Some of the people made it worse than others. Most people just took no notice of it, where the majority of people would go on strike, which was the idea. Everyone sticks together, because the union were talking for you. They were on your calls and they had to speak to the management and they had to get together with the management and compromise about whatever the discussions were. They always came to a compromise in the end. Maybe it upset some people more than others, but yeah, that was, I suppose, thinking about it. I'd forgotten about that because that's a part of, I suppose, you put to one side the bits that you're not so keen on, but that was very ... I don't remember anyone personally that it affected, but this is an office where I worked in. There was 1,200 people. There was three shifts, an early, late and at nights. When I joined, it was about 1,200 people.

Once the machinery all came in, over the years, I think it ended up resulting in about 800 staff. That's a lot of people for everyone to be 100% happy. There would've been some bad feeling at times, but it didn't affect. I never want you to leave. It never affected me. I love people. The only reason I left was because they were knocking the building down.

Speaker 1:

In what ways do you think the job has improved?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Well, it's improved from the mechanization. I mean, we all were against that when it came in. It's like everything in life, knew things, the way forward, I think, was one of the terms Royal Mail used to use.

You had the jumbos and the things like that. We're doing away with them. We're doing these Yorkeys now, these metal framework things on wheels that had, what would that be called, an envelope inside and a big red canvas that you could throw all the items in, much better idea. No one wanted that at the beginning. They fold it up and you could have them stacking these chairs on top of each other. These jumbos took up so much room. They were heavy. They rolled over your toes because they were square. Whereas the Yorkeys have handles on the back and you were trained. It might sound silly. You were trained how to push these Yorkeys, nice and pull them. You've got to push them where the handles are. All that kind of things. They made a lot of difference.

I think all the things that they ever introduced had to be an improvement. The mechanization, unfortunately, lost staff. You didn't need so many people work in the labor side of it. That's why it went down from about 1,200 to 800 staff because the mechanization of the letters. You tip the bag in the past on a big table and you went like this in the drop bag frame. Once they got the machinery, and there was a massive big machine like this with a great big area like this, like a big mouth going into this big rotating spin dryer drum, you just pick the bags from the platform where they had been thrown in from the lorry and tip the lock into this area like this. It had a little like escalator, a rubber thing with little knob notches on it like this that picked up all of the items and tipped it into the mouth. You had one person there.

One person was dealing with that all on their own and then the rotating spin dryer as we called it would drop the ... it had slots inside it. The big items wouldn't go through. They ended up going out straight out again into a big container like a jumbo. The other thing the staff letters all went to smaller jumbos or containers. This is all without handling it. It was so much. Then the letters went into a machine. You pick the letters out like [inaudible 00:55:23]. It did 30,000 letters an hour. 35,000 sometimes if there were no germs. Mechanization saved a lot of labor involved, but it had to be the way forward.

Speaker 1:

Looking back over your work, like what has working for Royal Mail meant to you?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Well, it meant a lot to me. It's meant a lot to me when I know the difference of the mistakes that can be made. In the sorting, particularly, let's say you don't write improperly or let's say before the mechanizing and the sorting, you come to summit, it's got north, N1. Mr. Jones, blah, blah, blah Street, N1. You put it in the N1 box. If you're doing it too quickly and you're not reading it properly, it might be North One because didn't read the rest of it, but it actually was Northern Island, NI. The same as West One. You sort and you put a letter in West One and it's West Indies, W1. Things like that.

Now, you've got to make sure when you're talking to people. I'm waiting for my letters, Royal Mail, snail mail. That gets me the right hump, because people don't address properly. They don't write even my family. Like I said earlier, you put a G or an E, there are ways. When you're putting in that post code, be specific with the letters, print. Don't do it-

Speaker 3:

Can I talk? Allen, I'm just very aware of time. I think what the question is about is, what does it mean to you emotionally? How do you feel having worked there? What does that mean to you, emotionally?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

All right. That means a lot to me. It means a lot to me. I think what a great job there we're doing. I went back. I went back a few years ago when they applied. I had retired, not working, although I work in a

motor bike shop on a Saturday. I love doing that, but they were advertising Christmas Pressure again. I thought, "Oh, I never got that." I went back and I applied to go back to Croydon, which is local to where I live. They accepted me. I went back for the Christmas Pressure, whereas Croydon is the local office to where my office in Battersea were shut down. The majority of workers were moved to Croydon. I met all a lot of my friends there. All from the past. It was really, really nice to see how they're all getting on. Some of them have got married. Some of them had more children.

Speaker 3:

How does it feel for you to go back?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Yeah, it just gave me a lift. It made me feel as if I was back in the family again. I missed it. I missed it, but I'm such an active person. I'm always doing something. When I left Royal Mail, anyway, I got a job straight away at supermarket. I was there for a couple of years. Then I got another left down, went to another supermarket-

Speaker 3:

Can you say why you left? Just talk just briefly why you end up leaving.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Well, I ended up leaving the first one. I went to Asda. Unfortunately, there-

Speaker 3:

Why you left the Royal Mail?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Why I left the Royal Mail was because I was about to retire. I was six months short of 65. You didn't have to retire at 65, but I was six months to go. Once you were around about 60 and the post office knowing that they are going to shut down. They are offering early retirement to lots of people, particularly anyone over 60. You had been tempted with 50,000 pounds. "Go now and we won't have to reposition you in a place, in a job where there weren't the spaces for workers. The machinery was taken over." You could see the HR department. A lady shook me. When I said to her, "I don't know what to do." She went mad, "You've got to take the money." I thought, take the money and retire early and think. In the end, I took the money and retired, but all-

Speaker 3:

How did that feel when you took the money and retire?

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

Well, I was a bit disappointed with myself because I'd worked at the amount of money I would be given. If I did work for another summit like two and a half years, that would've been the amount of money they would've given me and then I could've retired. Then, say, two and a half years later, because it was no age limit, you could've stayed on, but in retrospects, I felt that after a while of leaving, I thought, "You know, I think I've made a mistake here," because I was still an active person. I've got in touch with a few

people, the pension people. A pension man told me, he said, "Well, it depends how healthy you are for a start." If you think you're healthy enough, you're going to live forever or longer, then don't retire."

Anyway, healthy as I was, I'm thinking, I shouldn't retire, but I ended up retiring. I felt I had so much to offer physically because I want to work. That's why I've got a job straight away. Not at the postal, but the pay was awful. The working conditions were terrible. The managers were awful. I'm thinking to myself, "This is not like Royal Mail. You couldn't talk to a manager." Well, let me give you an example when we went to-

Speaker 3:

Just really quick because we were stopping now, stopping it.

Allen Jeffrey Ryell:

A quick example, when we went to recruit for this job at Asda, the manager there said, "Right, this is a new building. This is what we do." With a video, he said, "Right, when a customer comes up and says, where's the Walmart? You take them to the Walmart. You go there. I don't want to see any pointing, it's over there. You got to go the extra mile. Do this, do that." At the job, this is what we were doing, going the extra mile. Showing the customers everything. What happened? They change the management. The next slot management came. This woman came. A woman came in, unfortunately, this woman came. She was in charge of us. She says, "I don't want to see what you're doing. I'm showing the customer this. No. You point." I said, "But that's not how we were taught. That's how you were taught then. This is how you do it now. That's progress for you."

Because Asda and lik no modern times, it's all rush, quick, hurry up, down, go do that. It's not quality. It's all about quantity. I miss that with the post office because they were all about quality, but with quality, you get speed. It comes, but you've got to get practice, this experience.