

## Huw Davies Transcript

Speaker 4:

What is your full name?

Huw Davies:

My name, my full name? Huw Stanley Davies.

Tammy:

What year were you born?

Huw Davies:

Oh, I don't know about that, 1956.

Tammy:

Where were you born?

Huw Davies:

Where? In a hospital.

Tammy:

What did your parents do for a living?

Huw Davies:

Ooh, well my dad was an SRN, RMN, BTA. So shall I say what that is? He was a registered mental nurse, he was a state registered nurse, and he had a BTA. So I'll let you find out what BTA is.

Tammy:

Please tell us why you decided to work for the Post Office.

Huw Davies:

Sorry?

Tammy:

Please tell us why you decided to work for the Post Office.

Huw Davies:

Why did I decide to work for the Post Office? Well, that's a long story because I was working for another company and I was still at home, and I wanted a six pound a week pay rise. And at the time the Labour government gave a six pound pay rise to everybody. And then I moved to the costing department, and I had another six pounds, and they wouldn't pay me the two six pounds. I got one six pound, but they wouldn't give me 12 pounds.

So my mum saw an advert in the local post office in Harrow, and it said "Counter clerks". And she went in and they wouldn't give her any information, they had to take name and address. And then the next minute I get a letter from the Post Office, inviting me to go for a test.

So I was still having trouble with the other company. So I went for the test and then they sent me for an interview. So I asked my dad and my mum, I said, "What shall I do here? Because I can't really turn them down," because I was going to try and do an accountancy course with other things.

So I was offered the job in the Post Office, but I've always been on the public sector because I want to help people. That's what I want to do. Because my dad was a nurse, so I wanted to help people. That's how I joined the Post Office.

It was by chance in a way, but I would have moved on anyway. But the first job I went for was a guard in the London Transport. And they said I was overqualified. So then I started working for this other company. So, that's how I joined the Post Office.

Tammy:

Tell us about any family members who worked for the Post Office.

Huw Davies:

No, no-one. No-one at all.

Tammy:

Okay. What did your family members think about your decision to work for the Post Office?

Huw Davies:

Ooh, well, I got a pay rise. I not only got me six pounds that they owed me from the other firm, I got a pay rise. But when I first joined the Post Office, which was 40-odd years ago, I had to wait till I was 21 before it got on the main scale. And then I had to wait another five years to get onto the maximum. But I had pay rise. So I think the family were quite happy.

Tammy:

Tell us how you started working for the Post Office.

Huw Davies:

How I started, well I had to go in on six weeks training. And then I went to a crown post office, like the one down in Mount Pleasant. And you stayed there for a bit. And then you went on the roundabouts. They sent you out to all the other post offices.

And after that, you put in your own office. And there was a chap, what was his name now? Alf, Alf Porter, he said to me, "Put in for North Harrow, Huw." So that's what I did. And I did a bit on the roundabout, and then a vacancy came up, and then I was assigned to, to North Harrow Post Office, crown post office.

Tammy:

Right. Describe the training you did.

Huw Davies:

Right, the training was down in Tooting. I had to go to Tooting every day. And it was six weeks. And we had about two weeks where we were in a classroom, and then they put us on the counter for half a day. And then the fourth week we went for a day. And then we went two days.

But after we'd been on the counter, we had to balance the till, because we had real money, real postal orders, real stamps. And we interacted with customers. And we had to do that and then we went back to the classroom and we had to balance the till, so that we made sure we didn't make any mistakes.

And while we were training there was someone standing behind us. Because we didn't know it all, because there was lots of, about 140 transactions the Post Office did, so we didn't know them well. But there was someone watching us, and then we had to go and balance the till. And then each week we did a bit more on the counter.

Tammy:

And what was the first job you did for the Post Office?

Huw Davies:

Well, actually the first job, I worked for Royal Mail in one of the Christmas holidays. I worked in a sorting office, sorting all the mail out. That was the first job I ever had. But it was only in the Christmas holiday. I was a Christmas casual in the Royal Mail. That was the first job I had.

Tammy:

Describe your work in those early days.

Huw Davies:

The work? Well it's quite a lot. Our main thing within the Post Office is to serve customers. And they came in with various things, so there was about 140 different things they could do.

But the main things were pensions, parcels letters, selling Premium Bonds, so people could win on ERNIE. We had telegrams, because when I first joined in the Post Office, British Telecom, as it is now, as you know it, was with the Post Office and with Royal Mail, we were all together. It was the General Post Office. So it was all together, but now it's all split up.

But lots of things we used to do, as I say, there's 140 of them. So it'd take all day to name them all. But they're just a few.

Tammy:

What was that atmosphere like at your work in the early days?

Huw Davies:

Well, 40 years ago we had a bit of a laugh and joke with the customers and with the staff. Because generally in those days, if you did your job properly and you balanced okay, everything was hunky-dory. So yeah, it was good. There was a bit of a banter in the office. And everyone got on well with one another, and with the customers.

Tammy:

What kind of people were you working with?

Huw Davies:

People? Oh right. Well, in the office it was predominantly male, but there was two young ladies there. And when I first started, it was all full-time. So we didn't have any part-timers. So they were my colleagues.

And then we had a manager, who helped run the office. So when you run out of money, or run out of stock, like postal orders or stamps and all that, you'd have to put an order in. And he supplied you. He was like a wholesaler, if you like, giving you the stuff so you can serve the public.

Tammy:

How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Huw Davies:

Well, when I first started it was nearly all white people, mostly male people. So it, wasn't probably till about probably 25, 30 years ago, when part-timers started, we started to get a lot more female, now it's predominantly female. And we had a lot more, Asian colleagues, because I worked in Harrow, so there's lots of Asian colleagues.

And when I left the Post Office, I would say most of our staff actually were, because where I live in Harrow, even across London, lots of our members of staff, including the managers, they were Asian. But it changed from when I first started to a lot more young ladies, females. And it became more diverse as Britain became more diverse.

Tammy:

And what sort of equipment did you use in your work?

Huw Davies:

Right. Well, we had a date stamp, because you add to date stamp things. So it was a little date stamp, and you had to date stamp the thing. What other equipment did we have? We had a machine for counting the notes. Other equipment? We didn't really have anything else.

And we had a barrow, like a wheelbarrow. So when there was a lot of mail we could help the postman out. Especially at Christmas we could help the postman out to his van. But that's the only... We didn't have any other equipment, I don't think.

We had alarms, but I can't tell you about that. In case the robbers came in, we had alarms. So that was a bit of equipment, I suppose, but I'm not allowed to tell you any more about that.

Tammy:

Describe your uniform.

Huw Davies:

Well, when I first started, there wasn't a uniform. On the Royal Mail they had uniforms, but in the counters, they didn't. I could have gone in like this, so long as I didn't have a T-shirt. And then when they introduced the uniform, it was volunteers. But then when it came up to about 60 or 70%, everybody had to wear the uniform.

And then there was a big battle then over ties, because you had to get permission to take your tie off. So, the beginning, when I first started there wasn't uniform, so as long as you were tidy. And in actual fact, I used to work with a lad, he used to have a brown suit on, always tied. He was a spiffing

chappy. And then when a uniform come in, I think his dress went down, because the quality of the uniform wasn't that good.

So when I first started, on the counter side, we didn't have uniforms.

Tammy:

Tell us about the skills you need for your job.

Huw Davies:

Oh, the skills? Ooh, there's lots of those, isn't there? Well, first of all, you had to have the gift of the gab, really, didn't you? You have to be able to communicate with the other members of staff and get on well with them.

And then you have to be good with the customers, because some customers knew what they wanted, and other customers didn't know what they wanted. So you had to find out what they wanted. And as I said, there were so many transactions, people, the customers, you had to have a good rapport with them, because otherwise you wouldn't be able to do your job.

Tammy:

Describe a typical day of work.

Huw Davies:

Right. Well, what you had to do, before the office opened you had to come in with the keys and open up, and make sure there was no bandits there, in case someone was trying to rob the place. And then you'd get your till out, and with your date stamp. And then if you hadn't got any money, you had to put an order into the manager to get your money.

And then once a week, if you didn't have enough stock, stamps and all the rest of it, you had to put an order in for that. And then you'd start on the counter at nine o'clock, we'd open the doors promptly. One of our members of staff would go out to the door and open the door for the public. And there was generally in those days a long queue.

And in those days, we didn't have a single queue. People came, queued up in front of everybody. So if you were quick, you'd get a lot more customers. And if they were slow, you'd see them coming from the back of one queue onto your queue.

And in those days, when you had a passport, a British Visitor's Passport, they used to take about 15 minutes to write out. So you'd say, "All the people in this queue, I'm doing a passport now, so I suggest you join one of the other queues."

And then you served all the customers and what we used to do, when we used to pay pensions, which was Thursdays, and the Child Benefit, mums and dads used to come in for the Child Benefits, we used to have a race to see who could do the most.

And our objective was to get rid of the customers as quickly as possible, because then we could make some time. And then we could go upstairs and have a game of darts. And we used to have a little bit longer than what we were supposed to have for a quarter of an hour break. But when we were on the counter they used to, they used to say crash and bash, and get rid of the customers. But nicely.

Tammy:

What was your favorite thing at work?

Huw Davies:

What was the favorite thing at work? Well, the favorite thing, I suppose, was serving customers. But also, you see, in the last few years I became a union representative. So in that respect, I suppose, it was when someone was getting the tin tack, when someone was getting the sack, that you put a defense up against the management and saved the person the job. So I think that was probably the best thing. But serving customers is the thing, because they are the Post Office. If you didn't have the customers, you wouldn't have a job.

Tammy:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Huw Davies:

Well, the difficult thing, sometimes when you had an awkward customer, and how you dealt with that. And some people, because they've been let down in other post offices, they'd want an argument with you on the price of, say, a letter, or a package to go to abroad or in this country.

And there was a thing called a small packet, where there was regulations it can only be a certain size. So sometimes you'd have to say, "No, you can't have that as a small packet. There's certain regulations for it, and that's too big." And then they have a row, "Well they accepted it at this post office down the road." We said, "Well, we're not accepting it here." So there was lots of things. And what... Say the question again.

Tammy:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Huw Davies:

The difficult things? Yeah well, I suppose it was awkward customers. I don't know what else would there be? I don't know. Awkward members sometimes, wanting to try and get something that you couldn't get from the management. That was sometimes awkward. That was difficult. Other than that, I think it was quite good. The Post Office was quite good.

Tammy:

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

Huw Davies:

Oh yeah. Well the thing is, there was a lot of bullying in the Post Office, even on the counter side. And as a representative, as a union representative, I had to deal with the procedures that we had. And what happened, say someone was being bullied, what you'd try and do initially was resolve it informally. So that's amongst the people that were being bullied.

But sometimes it had to escalate to a procedure. And then what they would do then, they would bring in an outside, it was still within the Post Office, but a division of the Post Office outside to investigate. And then they would go in with everybody, because someone might have had witnesses, and they take reports from everybody. And at that stage, as a union representative, you could go and sit in with them, but you couldn't advise them.

And then the independent person would go away. And then they'd come up with findings. And normally it was half a dozen of one and a half a dozen of another, because it's not always 100%, is it? It's not 100% clear case. But then other issues, when there were bullies about, or people who discriminated, they moved them. Mostly it was managers, they moved, but sometimes it was our people, the counter clerks, they moved.

And if you made a complaint that wasn't a complaint, you were making it out and telling stories or porky pies, telling lies, you could be in trouble for that. So there was some of that. There was some of that, not a lot, but it was some of that. And it was dealt with because within the Post Office there were procedures to deal with it.

Tammy:

Tell a story that stands out from your working life.

Huw Davies:

A story? Oh, right. Well, I hope this is appropriate. But one of the lads that was working with me one day, a lady came in to renew her car tax. And Mr. Clements, I forget his first name now, he refused to issue the car tax, because the lady didn't have all the documents. I think she was missing her insurance. She had to have an MOT and insurance.

And the lady disappeared, and I was sitting on the counter and it wasn't that busy. And a police officer came in. And my mate Angeline goes, "I didn't do it officer, that's the man who did it," pointing to Mr. Clements. And the police officer said, "How right you are, Mr. Clements is it not?"

And what this woman had alleged, that, I can't remember his first name, we'll have to call him Mr. Clements, had kept her insurance documents, where he hadn't, he'd given him back to her. So I think she was a bit of a troublemaker. So she either knew the police officer, or she rung up on a spurious complaint and got the law involved. So that was quite funny. Because one of my colleagues pointed to Mr. Clements, and the officer knew it was Mr. Clements. Because in those days we didn't give our names out, but he was a young lad and this woman had badgered him to give his name out.

Tammy:

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

Huw Davies:

Oh, naughty things? Ooh, can I say that? Where's this going? Where's the film going?

Right. Well, what some people used to do in the old days, because you weren't allowed to smoke on the counter, because the stamps could catch alight, or the money could catch alight, couldn't it? But some people tried to have a sneaky cigarette. So that was naughty, wasn't it?

And what else? People sometimes used to hide other people's date stamps. So when they came back, they couldn't find their date stamp. And what else was naughty? Well, we used to drink tea on the counter when we weren't supposed to. So I suppose that was a little bit naughty, but it saved time, really, because if you had to keep going out the back to have a slurp of tea, the customers wouldn't get served as quick. But there wasn't really anything... Is that naughty? I don't know. That's the naughtiest things I think we did.

Tammy:

Talk us briefly through the different jobs you did while working at the Post Office.

Huw Davies:

Oh my life. Right, well I started on the counters. So there's one down in Mount Pleasant that you can go to. What did I do then? I then moved to Royal Mail, but it was all part of the Post Office. And we dealt with returned letters. So when the letter couldn't be delivered, we had a returned letters branch, so we did a bit of that.

And then I moved into the accounts. So when people were posting mail, we used to charge them for how many they sent. And we used to invoice them manually. Now it's all done. And we used to get the revenue in for the Post Office. And then we used to have to chase companies for missing invoices. Not invoices, the documents, because if there was a document missing they could be trying to get away with not paying the Post Office or Royal Mail as it is now, the money for it.

And then I went back on the counter. I became a manager for about three and a half years, four years. And then I worked in a cash center, where we dealt with all the money, supplying all the post offices with the money. I can't tell you any more than that.

And then what happened after that? Then I went to admin, in St Albans. And I helped recruit sub-postmasters, the ones that run the small post offices. And then that work went to Manchester, and I went back on the counter. And then I became a full-time trade unionist for the union. And that's where I ended after 41 and a half years. So is that brief enough for you?

Tammy:

Tell us about your favorite job.

Huw Davies:

Well, the favorite job, really, is on the counter, years and years ago, because you used to serve customers, and you used to have a bit of banter with the customers. And you were helping lots of old people. And sometimes you were the only person they had a chat with during the week. When I was on the counter, I think that's the favorite thing I did.

Tammy:

Tell us about your relationship with your colleagues.

Huw Davies:

Good.

Tammy:

Tell us about your experience of joining clubs at work.

Huw Davies:

Clubs? Well, there weren't many. When you were in the county, see, the only club we really had was the sports and social club. So I used to pay for that, but didn't really get involved. And the sports and social club used to do theater trips. I went on that quite a lot. But in the bigger offices, they had things like gardening clubs, video clubs, and all that, but I wasn't there. So that's the only ones I was in, the sports and social club.



Tammy:

Tell us about any opportunities to socialize.

Huw Davies:

Well, when we used to balance, on a Wednesday we used to balance. And then after we'd balanced, because we used to balance early because we were good. We used to go and have a game of, what'd you call it, bingo across in the, not RAFA, whatever it's called, the club across the road. So we were able to go down there because we were good and we used to finish early. Because we kept the money, we kept ma'am's money okay, see.

Tammy:

What made you join the union?

Huw Davies:

What made me join the union? Well, actually I had to join the union, because when I joined the Post Office it was a thing called a closed shop. And one of the questions that the assistant postmaster asked me when I had the interview, he said, "Mr. Davies, would you mind joining a union?" And I said, "No, I'm in a union already." But before I gave him the answer, he said, "Be careful how you answer it, I'm in the union and unless you join the union, I can't offer you the job." So I had to join the union, but I would've joined it anyway.

Tammy:

Why is the union important for postal workers?

Huw Davies:

Well, the reason it's important for postal workers is because a lot of the conditions we've got is because of not me, but generations before me. And union's been involved in the Post Office and the GPO when it was a civil service, for 100 years-plus.

And what the union does, it makes sure that the management do their job and that the conditions, not just for us, but for customers, that there's enough people to serve the customers and all that. So it's there for the benefit of people.

And when people are naughty, sometimes, or do things that they shouldn't do. The union's there to help protect them, and help them give a defense of why they did something. Because the only time the union wouldn't be involved is when people stole the money. And that's not good, is it, when people steal the money? Because it's not their money.

But the union's there to help everybody. And if there wasn't a union, and I was involved right at national level in the end with the union, the conditions and that, not just for us, but members of the public using the services, they wouldn't be as good.

Tammy:

What part did the union play in your life?

Huw Davies:

Ooh, the union? Well, it was from day one. The union played in my life. And I was elected after about four or five years. And in those days you did the job, the counter clerk's job part-time, and then you had release time to do the union work. That was called an assistance secretary.

And then from there I became a territorial rep, which is like a regional organizer. And from there I served on the national executive for a while. So it was a big part. And in the last 10 years or 12 years, that was my role in the Post Office. I was there representing people and looking after them.

Tammy:

Tell us about any strikes or this piece you were involved with.

Huw Davies:

Oh, strikes. Oh, there was lots of those. When I first got involved, there was a place called Cable Street, it was a post office in central London. And we went out on strike and guess what? They'd already knocked it down. So that was a bit of a waste of time some people might say, but because we took strike action there, what we wanted to do is keep the post offices open the main post offices, the crown post offices open.

And then we had half a day for the nurses, because the nurses weren't getting paid. And that was many years ago. So we took a half a day's strike action for them. And then we had a strike for London weighting, because it costs more to live in London. So we had to have a strike to get more pay for London weighting, and now it's pretty good, although the house prices in London are high. So we had a strike for that.

But the most strike action I've ever taken. Oh no, I forgot one. I had to take some strike action from a guy called Graham Henson, because they tried to sack him when I was working in a cash center. And we took a day's action. And then we took two days' action. And we were going to take three days' action and then four days' action. And then we were going to go out until they reinstated Mr. Henson, and they reinstated him. So we only took two lots of strike action then.

But we don't always take strike action, it's the last resort. And then we've taken, over the years, days and half days for the crown offices, because what the management have been trying to do is close crown office after crown office after crown office. But we only take the strike action when we have to take it, when their management isn't listening. And I'd rather have the money in my pocket, rather than losing the money. But sometimes you have to lose the money because it's for the greater good.

Tammy:

What was the most memorable moment at the Post Office?

Huw Davies:

The most memorable? Ooh, I don't know. Ooh, that's a very good one. Well, you see it was memorable every day really, because you were serving customers. But I think one of the memorable things was, there was a young lady, well, she was quite old, really, called Gertrude Strands. And they were trying to close Watford Post Office, privatize it. And this young lady stood outside the post office day in, day out. And she got about 4,000 signatures from the local people.

And I think the most memorable day was when we presented her with a bunch of flowers and chocolates and all the rest of it. And we got someone high up in the union to come down to say thank you for her, because she did a lot of work for us.

And I suppose the only other memorable day was when I got a service award, because they used to give you, when you done so many years in the Post Office, they gave you a service award. And I brought some to show you, if you want me to show you, or should we do it afterwards? I'll show you afterwards, yeah.

Tammy:

What was the most challenging moment at the Post Office?

Huw Davies:

I think the challenging bits were when they were trying to close post offices down. And people were out of a job. And then they had to find another job. They were challenging. And as I said, sometimes when you had awkward customers, they could be quite challenging.

And from the union point of view, what was challenging when they were trying to sack someone and the person hadn't done it, or we had to mitigate. So we had to say he didn't really do it and he's sorry, or she's sorry. And instead of getting the sack, we had to try and get him on a lower charge. So they were the things, I think.

Tammy:

Over your working life what were the main changes at work?

Huw Davies:

Well, the main changes in work on the counter was mechanization, because they bought this thing in called Horizon, which instead of doing everything manually, it computerized the system.

Tammy:

In what ways do you think the job has improved?

Huw Davies:

Improved? Oh no, I don't think it's improved. No, I don't think there's been many improvements, because unfortunately over the period of time they've been taking away work from the Post Office. So I don't think there was any improvements really. No, very, very few improvements. Because what the mechanization did was slow things down. because I can sell a stamp quicker than what a machine can, or the inputting into the machine to sell the stamp.

Tammy:

In what way has it gotten worse?

Huw Davies:

In what ways has it gotten worse? Oh, we had a horrible woman called Paula Vennells, who started bringing in cuts and closing Post Offices. And that's how it got worse, because she didn't want crown offices to exist. And even the sub-postmasters, they started closing down the sub-postmasters. So the public was put at inconvenience, and had to travel more to use the post offices. That's how it's got worse.

Tammy:

What would you think if a child wanted to work for the Post Office?

Huw Davies:

Well, I'd encourage him. But the problem is, unlike me, there's not many crown post offices left. So I'm, or was a public servant. So the main post offices, like the one down in Mount Pleasant, we worked for the Post Office. In the sub-offices, they're generally run by families. So they run their own post office, but they're agents for the Post Office. And in the ones that have been privatized, the ones that have been sold off, they work for a new owner. They don't work directly for the Post Office.

So I think, for you, if you wanted to join the Post Office in say 10 years' time, or eight years' time, there might not be opportunities in the crown post office, but there might be opportunities in the other sub-post offices, because we've only got about 114 left now. And there's certain people in the Post Office want to close all of them down. And I don't like those people.

Tammy:

If you were the boss of the Post Office, what change would you have made?

Huw Davies:

I would have increased the number of crown post offices. I'd have kept them open, and I'd have been going to the union to try and make savings and run it a different way. And I'd have been going to the government and saying, "Stop canceling the TV licenses. Stop canceling the MVLs. Let's put some of your work, like the passports and all that, the way of the Post Office." And get other people involved to build up the amount of work that you can do at a post office, so that we can help the little old dear who hasn't got a computer at home to help her fill the forms in.

Tammy:

Looking back over your life, what was working for the Post Office meant to you?

Huw Davies:

What's it meant to me? Ooh, that's a good question, isn't it? Well it is your life, in a way. But what it's all about is about public service, isn't it. And as a trade union representative, it was helping other of my colleagues in whatever way it was. And to improve the service that we gave to the public. And the pain conditions, because we don't come to work for peanuts, do we? we come there for money at the end of the day.

So it's about improving pay and all the working conditions. So that's the holidays and all the rest of it, and the tea breaks, and the lunch breaks, and all the rest of it. But it's about the pay, isn't it? Because that's what you got to work for, because you got to pay all the bills. Like your mum and dad, got to pay all the bills, haven't they, and get you the X-Box and all the things like that.

Tammy:

Thanks.

Speaker 3:

Before we finish, there's a couple of questions I've got.

Huw Davies:

Oh right, okay.

Speaker 3:

If you don't mind answering them, but answer them to Tammy.

Huw Davies:

Okay, right, yeah.

Speaker 3:

You talked about crown office. Just briefly, could you tell me how, just using really rough dates and figures, could you tell me how the crown offices, and when, they were reduced and why, and how they relate to sub-post offices?

Huw Davies:

Right, well, when I joined the Post Office 41 1/2 years ago. Plus I've been gone two years, say 45 years ago, in 1976, you roughly had then, off the top of my head, say about 1,700 main post offices. So their ma'am's, the Queen's post offices, they're called crown post offices. And the people that run those are public servants like me.

And over a period of time, the management decided that they cost too much. Not the quality of the service, because the quality of the service there is better than a sub-post office in my view, apart from the family-run ones who know the score. Because if you pay less money and you have worse holidays, worse sick pay, and all the rest of it, you don't normally get good people.

So over a period of time, the crown post offices went from 1,700 to 1,500 to 1,000. And I can remember talking to a director when they were trying to do it to 750 crown post offices. So this was over a period of 20, 30 years. And he called me a thousand merchant. And I said, "Well, I don't like you, because you're a 750 merchant, and we should keep them all." We should keep them all because the public get a decent service. And they don't get shortchanged and they get charged the proper price for the job. And we do a good job.

And then what happened then, they went below the 750. And we did a deal when Tony Blair got in, so this is before you were even born, in 1997, to keep open 365 post offices. So from 1997 to today, I'll let you work out how many years that is, see how good you are in the maths. We've now gone down to 112.

So we had a moratorium for a while, when the Labour government was in there for a few years, and we kept it at 373, or 375. And the guy who has got to take credit for that, it's not a guy called Andy Fury, who's the national officer. It's a guy called Ian Ward, who was on the executive. And he went in to management, with Andy Fury, and they did a deal for 375 or 373, whatever it was, offices.

So over a period of 45 years, we've gone down now to about 114, 113, 114 main offices. But they're crown offices, and they call it crown offices because before the post office became Post Office Corporation, which included BT and Royal Mail and the Post Office, it was the GPO, it was civil service. So that all these crown post offices, they were civil servants working in them. So they were ma'am's people, the Queen's people. So that's about the length of time we've seen the demise of the crowns.

Speaker 3:

An I right in thinking that some of the crown post offices might be in WHSmiths?

Huw Davies:

Yes, yes, yeah.

Speaker 3:

But then WHSmiths are now taking them over, aren't they? Can you explain how that works?

Huw Davies:

Lots of the, initially when they started privatizing the post offices, they sold them to individuals. And some of those went bust and they closed down. But what happens... Now you're asking the years and that.

They did a deal with WHSmiths to take over 75 of them. And they gave WHSmith 75. Yeah, what year? I don't know. Well, they took over 75 with WHSmiths. And then WHSmiths came back for some more.

The only problem, if you put them in WHSmiths, or another company, the company can close them. And then you end up with no post office. Whereas if it was a crown post office, the Post Office don't normally close post offices, although they did with Trafalgar Square, the biggest office in the country back December 2018. And that was the biggest office. And when I first started, that was there 24/7. It was there 24/7.

And they used to do these British Visitor's Passports. So you could go to Trafalgar Square, if you wanted to go to certain places abroad, and so long as you had all the documentation, you could get a British Visitor's Passport and go on holiday. So if you'd lost your passport or someone didn't have one, they could go to Trafalgar Square from all over the country and get a British Visitor's Passport.

Speaker 3:

Okay. And just finally, you talked about pension day. I remember as a kid, you were always told to avoid pension day. If you want to in the post office, avoid Tuesday.

Huw Davies:

Well, the pension day was a Thursday. And most people in those days didn't have it in bank accounts, they had a pension book. And you, certainly in the outer London area, rather than central London, which were mainly postage. So people doing postage. In where I come from, Harrow and places like that in outer London, they were pension. Thursday was your busiest day, but you had the most amount of staff on on a Thursday. And you used to have to order thousands of pounds to pay the pensions, from your manager.

But also a Tuesday was busy, Monday and Tuesday was busy, because that was the day for young mums to come in to get their Child Benefit. And that got busy. It got busier just as I started, because what a Labour government did, they paid a pound, one pound, for the first child. And before that, you never got it. You never got Child Benefit for... My mum, never got child benefit for Pam, my sister, but Barbara Castle gave a pound to the first. So we got a load more customers in then.

But Thursday, I wouldn't say avoid it, because most pensioners wanted to come in and be first in the queue. But in the afternoon you could come in and walk in and you'd get served fairly quickly. But

there was also the child benefit that they used to pay. And then some people, the poorer people used to pay a number 11. And that used to be on a Monday sometimes.

Other times the pension book would, say, have the Monday date on it, but on the pension book, it had Thursday. Because people try to come in early, someone had put a circle around the Thursday and underlined it, because coming back to what you were saying, when you had rows in the post office, sometimes it was with people saying, "I want my money now because that's the date on the pension book." And you'd say, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no. It's got Thursday here on the front. And look, you've been told before, because someone's circled it." But they were the pension days.

But it wasn't just pensioners. It was young mums coming in to collect them. And then the government decided to get it all paid into bank accounts. So we didn't see some of the old people anymore. So they couldn't have a little chat with us any more, could they? And it was all to save money.