

## Paul Wood Transcript

Speaker 1:

What is your full name?

Paul Alexander Wood:

My name is Paul Alexander Wood.

Speaker 1:

What year were you born?

Paul Alexander Wood:

1940.

Speaker 1:

Where were you born?

Paul Alexander Wood:

I was born in Mitcham which is in Surrey.

Speaker 1:

What did your parents do for a living?

Paul Alexander Wood:

My father was a postman at Croydon and my mother was a housewife-mother.

Speaker 1:

Please tell us why you decided to work for Royal Mail.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, I started when I left school at 15, I wanted to be a mechanic, but I realized after two or three months, it wasn't for me so I thought I would follow my father into the post office.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

My father started as a telegram boy at 14 years old in 1912, and he was at Croydon and he then became a postman driver after returning from the first world war.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

My mum wasn't too pleased because she said over 40 years of dad being in the post office, and she said to me, "You're not changing your job every five minutes", but my dad supported me. He said, "If that's the job you want, I'll support you all the way."

Speaker 1:

Tell us how you started working for Royal Mail.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well. We had, in Mitcham, a bureau called the Youth Employment Bureau and they found you a job and I wrote to... First of all, to Croydon post office, because I wanted to ride motorbikes, the telegram boys at Croydon rode motorbikes, no vacancies. So I went to the Youth Employment Bureau in Mitcham, and they said they wanted telegram boys in Victoria, London, which I'd never been up to... Sorry. We used to get on our bicycles and ride out into the country and not go to London so it was very strange for me to go up to Victoria.

Speaker 1:

Describe the training you did.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Training for a telegram boy was to go out with another boy, a senior boy, who taught you the streets and thoroughfares of the local area and then we had a larger map in the office. Really, we had to teach ourselves, but then when we went to a postman, we went for a six weeks training course then.

Speaker 1:

What was the first job you did for Royal Mail?

Paul Alexander Wood:

First job I did, it was called the [General Posteries 00:02:55] was a telegram boy, which was a means of fast communication before we had texts and mobile phones.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

On what? Sorry.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

To be honest, rather sick, I was very nervous going up to London and meeting a lot of strange people. I felt very nervous, but was soon put at ease when they calmly chip both the other boys.

Speaker 1:

Describe your work in those early days.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Describing it? Really, it was an enjoyment to go to work. They were all very friendly boys. We had many pastimes, similar past times, most enjoyable.

Speaker 3:

Would you talk through the actual work that you would do from when you arrived in the morning to-

Paul Alexander Wood:

Oh yeah. Well, we used to have two duties: one started at eight o'clock in the morning and went through to four o'clock in the afternoon then we had another duty, which was the light duty, 11 o'clock in the morning to eight o'clock at night and we used to get in the morning and the man in charge of us, which was called postmaster supervising messengers. He would book us all there and we had to sign in and then he would give you a pack of telegrams to deliver in different areas. We had different areas in Victoria, we had Belgravia, Pimlico, over the park which was James's St, Piccadilly, [Powmoa 00:04:50] and then we had parliament section, which is the House of Commons and Parliament St. and Whitehall.

Speaker 1:

What was the atmosphere like on your work in the LEDs?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Very happy. I never saw any animosity. We got on very well together. There was about 30 boys at the time and so it was quite a good atmosphere in a very tight office.

Speaker 1:

What kinds of people were you working with?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, the supervising postman, he was in his forties but the rest of us were between 15 and 18 years old. Before we went up to be postman or took an exam to go to another department of Royal Mail.

Speaker 1:

How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, it's very similar. We did deliver telegrams and we delivered express letters and at the time, Royal Mail did a service called, Interflora, so we would deliver flowers, some happy ones to weddings, et cetera. Unfortunately, some sad ones, big wreaths, and we would deliver those all over London. There was a big flourishing Victoria Station and they would ring up for a telegram boy, we'd come and pick up the flowers and we would deliver them to different parts of London.

I'll tell you a little story, if it's okay. I had a large wreath, I picked up at Victoria Station and I had to go to Golders Green Cemetery, and right in the rush hour at nine o'clock in the morning and I rushed down to the tube with this big wreath and I got on the train, I was so fortunate to get on the train with

people pushing and shoving. The door shut and to my horror, I saw that the wreath was half inside the door and half outside, it bent all the frame so when I got to Golders Green Station, I sat there for a long time straightening out the wires so the flowers weren't all bent up.

Speaker 1:

What sort of equipment did you use in your work?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, the only equipment we had was an [inaudible 00:07:22] pedal cycle, and we had a pouch on your uniform, on a belt... There's a belt, I'll show you later, and that held the telegrams, but within Victoria, we weren't allowed even to use pedal cycles in all the areas because it was so dangerous in the amount of traffic. So we used to have to go by public transport or walk.

Speaker 1:

Describe your uniform.

Paul Alexander Wood:

The uniform in those days was a navy blue uniform, a jacket and trousers and a waist coat, that's a little jacket goes underneath your main jacket, and it had red piping around your cuffs, around your collar and a cap, very important to wear your cap. One day, a very hot day like today, very similar day today, I took my cap off, I'm 15 years old, not used to wearing a military style cap. I took my cap off and put it under me arm and I'm walking along and the outdoor inspector of Royal Mail, caught me, "Where's your cap?" I say, "Under me arm. "It's supposed to be on your head"

And I got fined four hours pay which was quite a bit really when you only own three pound a week, so four hours pay was quite a [inaudible 00:08:46]. So I always wore my cap afterwards.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about the skills you needed for your job.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, patience with the public, politeness, learning local knowledge really because wherever you went, if a member of the public, we didn't have sat navs, member of the public would see somebody in uniform and think you knew every street, so you had to learn them to put them in the right direction.

Speaker 1:

Describe a typical day at work.

Paul Alexander Wood:

A typical day, as I say, we picked up a wallet of telegrams and you did it with them and that took you most of the half morning. We come back and got up the canteen for a cup of tea and then we go back to the sending out room, it was called, and you might get any job from delivering flowers, as I said InterFlora, and another job was express all the way. A member of the public could ring up for a telegram boy and asked them to go and collect something from, say, a shop and deliver it to them and they might

be a long way away from Victoria. Sometimes we were [inaudible 00:10:15] down into Surrey. So it was quite exciting really when you went out from an area that you didn't know.

Speaker 1:

What were your favorite things about your work?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Meeting people, meeting colleagues at work. We had quite a few laughs, it wasn't at all serious and then when you went out people were quite patient with a telegram boy. Quite sad some of the telegrams you had, it was quite a few wars still going on and any casualties were informed to the next of kin by telegram. So it was quite sad sometimes when you knock at the door and you see a mother comes to the door and you could see the shock on her face before she even opened the telegram.

Speaker 1:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Paul Alexander Wood:

I think that was the most difficult. Delivering a telegram that had sad news and see somebody get quite upset. I had one lady faint in front of me, the whole little child and I was only 15 and making... Didn't have a mobile phone so I had to rush next door and get a neighbor to come and help me with this lady that had collapsed with the bad news. That was the saddest thing I think I had with the job.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

Not one. I never saw any discrimination. No, it never entered our minds.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

Just hang on a minute, just trying to think. Quite a few... I'll tell you, sorry. I did work later on as a telegram boy in Buckingham Palace. I was a postman and my favorite, we used to deliver to the Queen's apartment, to the Duke of Edinburgh's apartments and Prince Charles and Princess Anne. Now, Princess Anne was a friendly little girl. Then she was about, I think roundabout five or six, and she used to show me her new dollies and I was sitting there talking to her and suddenly out came one of the Queen's corgis and they're quite vicious, chased me down the corridor and I really ran faster than Roger Bannister's four minute mile to get to escape from this dog.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

Naughty things? Well some of the things I can't mention on the video. Naughty things... When a new boy attended, we used to put their head, very naughtily, down the toilet and flush it. That was a christening to become a telegram boy.

Speaker 1:

Talk us briefly through the different jobs you did while working for Royal Mail.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, briefly I started as a [Tokyo 00:13:59] Telegram boy then I went as a young postman in Buckingham Palace, took an exam to go on [inaudible 00:14:08] that was selling stamps, licenses, premium bonds, posts office savings bank, dealing with the public that was for about eight or nine years and I progressed from there up into what we call writing juices, and I was in inquiring about loss mail and returning mail that couldn't be delivered.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about your favorite job.

Paul Alexander Wood:

My favorite job, I think was at the end of my service. I was put on inquiry office for tracing parcels unless it's going abroad and that was really interesting because I have contact with many countries abroad and members of the public used to write to me and I still write to him as a penfriend from different countries and I think that was the most enjoyable.

Speaker 1:

How did you progress in the Royal Mail?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, it's the way I did. I progressed by taking exams and moving from... We didn't wear a uniform on the counter, more civilian clothes and then went up on to writing duties, which covered everything from salaries, lost mail, all inquiries and dealing with the public.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about your relationships with your colleagues.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Very friendly, right up until a few years ago and even today, I've still got friends that I met 65, 70 years ago.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about your experiences of joining clubs at work.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, I didn't do any post office club at all. We used to have a spoke center over in North London, which I used to go over just to call my chip. I never took part in anything there.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about any other opportunities to socialize.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, I think it was just less to the boys. We used to make friends and we meet up and go out for cycle rides out into the country or meet up later in pubs to play darts, et cetera.

Speaker 1:

What made you join the union?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Why did I join the union? First of all, for insurance benefits, in case you got knocked off your bike or anything like that, not really for salary increases or anything like that. They were a good insurance. They would fight your case for you, that was one of the first reasons I joined the union.

Speaker 1:

Why is the union important for postal workers?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, I think the more you are together, as combined together, you're more likely to be heard by your employer.

Speaker 1:

What part did the union play in your life?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, unfortunately, I was very ill halfway through my career. I caught meningitis and I was off sick for over a year, in hospital for weeks, and the union got me back to work. We'd rode a mile, doing what they call a simple job. I was on light duties. Now I don't think without union, I would have had a job for the next 20 odd years.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about any strikes or disputes you were involved with.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, unfortunately, the largest strike we had, and the only strike I was involved with was 1971. We went on strike for, I think it was six to seven weeks for better pay, better conditions. That's the only one I can remember.

Speaker 1:

What was the most memorable moment at the post office?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Most memorable?

Speaker 1:

Moment at the post office.

Paul Alexander Wood:

At the post office. Well, I think meeting the Duke of Edinburgh when I worked at Buckingham Palace, he was quite a comical man.

Speaker 3:

[inaudible 00:18:54] saying to ask you about a flag story at Buckingham Palace.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Oh yes. Yeah. Yes. I've got a story there. There's a large flag that flies from the top of Buckingham Palace when the queen [inaudible 00:19:10] residence called the Queen's ensign and it was the job of guardsmen, an army guardsman, that was in the next office to the post office to hold this up when the queen was in residence. One night, November night, it was very, very windy and this guardsman, who we nicknamed Flaggy, because that was his job putting the flag up. He said, "Could you two boys come and help me hold the flag up tonight, the queen is at a theater tonight but she'll be back about eight o'clock. Can you come and help me?" So we went out on the roof over the Buckingham Palace, and there was no guard rails around in those days, just a small baluster straight about one meter high-

Speaker 1:

What was your most challenging... Sorry.

Paul Alexander Wood:

Anyway this flag, has to go up flowing. It has to be and she caught the wind... Not like sometimes you see a flag its rolled up and then the person pulls the rope and it unfolds. It has to go up flowing. Well, the flag is about 24 feet by 18 feet, it's a large, large piece of material. And Flaggy explained to us that my friend and I, had to hold the corner of the flag and when the queen came through the gateway of Buckingham Palace and out of the arch, that is when the flag has to go up the flag pole. And he said, [inaudible 00:20:52] shout out, "Let go." Well, the queen came in and she came down in the mouth, this was a tiny light on top of her car showing it was the royal car and then she came through the gateway, Flaggy shouts out, "Let go."

Well I heard him above the road, winds and traffic, but my friend didn't. The next minute I see him up. He's being holed up the flag pole, still hanging on the flag over the balustrade blowing in the breeze and I think that's the only time when the royal ensign came down when the queen was in residence but I don't think that should be known because I might end up in the Tower of London.

Speaker 1:

What was your most challenging moment at the post office?

Paul Alexander Wood:



Most challenging moment for me was to balance, that we had to balance our stock on the counter, stamps, cash, et cetera, at the end of each day, and to me that was the most challenging, I found.

Speaker 1:

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

Paul Alexander Wood:

Main changes at work was the shorter hours. Discipline didn't seem so strong as it was when I first joined and the management used to sit with the actual staff, not in a little small office off to the side. I would think that was about the main things.

Speaker 1:

In what ways do you think the job has improved?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, it's entirely different. I can't really compare it. Be unfair for me to say. I've got four children that are in the post of his or in Royal Mail and what they tell me, it's quite different things, different to what I remember 20 years ago, even. But I think it would be unfair... It's a different world completely. So things have changed, probably for the better in one way, but being an old dinosaur like myself, we don't think so.

Speaker 1:

In what ways has it got worse?

Paul Alexander Wood:

I don't think it's got worse. It's just changed completely, it's a different job.

Speaker 1:

What would you think if your child wanted to work for Royal Mail?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well, as I say I've got four working for them now. They seem, particularly, in one way happy. They do have their little moans, but I think everybody does about their job. Yeah, I would say it was a good opportunity to meet people and to have a career.

Speaker 1:

If you were the boss of Royal Mail, what changes would you make?

Paul Alexander Wood:

If I was the boss. Well, I think I would bring back more... I think people miss the many deliveries that we used to do and you get one delivery a day. I think I would bring back at least two deliveries, perhaps three, and also bring back a smarter uniform than what the postman or postwomen wearing today.

Speaker 1:

Looking back over your working life, what has working for the Royal Mail meant to you?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Well it was my whole life. 40 years is a long time out of your life and I would say mostly it was a happy time and I'm also very thankful to Royal Mail for living as long as I had. So I think if I'd been of [inaudible 00:25:05], I could have easily got worse but I think Royal Mail gave me a future.

Speaker 1:

Thank you very much for answering our questions. Is there anything you would like to talk about that we have not covered in our questions?

Paul Alexander Wood:

No, I don't think so. Is there anything?

Speaker 3:

Yeah, there's another note obviously post office counters is very different to some of the other jobs in the post office, like sorting office and stuff. Could you just talk about how different, and the different atmosphere, maybe-

Paul Alexander Wood:

Yeah.

Speaker 3:

Different people that would work on counters?

Paul Alexander Wood:

Yeah. Well, the counter office, they were staffed by all posts office staff. They weren't private in those days like they are now. We had little sub-offices, which was owned by a tobacconist or baker or something like that but the main big post office, we dealt with all types of transactions that the general public wanted. We used to have a post office savings bank, which is quite good that people would [inaudible 00:26:25]. You only got two and a half percent interest. Well, there's not many banks that give two and a half percent interest today.

We sold them different types of stamps, not only postage stamps, but national issuance stamps for male and female. We dealt with many, many parcels going all over the world, being in Regent St. We used to have a lot of department stores and firms around there that would send parcels all over the world. Now, there was Wilkinson's Sword and they make swords in those days, and they would send them to officers in the armies all around the world. It was very interesting the counter, I'd say the only thing that I used to just start with balancing in each day and make sure, because you couldn't go home until the two columns absolutely corresponded.

Speaker 4:

Okay.

Speaker 3:

And to just finally... We know you are a bit of a collector. What kinds of stuff did you collect?

Speaker 1:

Yeah. I liked collecting the old, I'll still call it GPO, not Royal Mail. I collect most items that we used in those days and I've got a little mail van, [inaudible 00:27:52] a mail vain. The post office bought, over 20 years, 52,000 of these vans and they used them for mail deliveries, mail collections and also there was green ones which went yellow later as post office telephone because the telephone service was run by the post office.

So I've got one of those, I've got two motorcycles, they're BSA, that was the firm, a British firm bantams, which the boys rode further out when they were out in the suburbs of London or big cities and they would ride them quite some distance with these BSA bantams. It was always boys charge to try and get on the bikes and all the other coaching items I've got, I brought a few along to show you. That's a telegram [boyce 00:28:53], belton pouch that we wore and I've got date stamps and many photographs, hundreds of photographs and actually I go around to schools, talking to people like yourself, but without the camera, instructing them really what the post office was like in the early 50s.