Postman's Knock
An Oral History of London's Postal Workers

- [Man] You'd go to work and the work would be hard, but it was fun. You'd have a laugh, you'd mess around. You probably do things we shouldn't have done, but it was good fun.

- [Woman] The post office wasn't just the place where you would work and deliver mail. You all became friends. It was like one big family.

- At the age of about 14 or 15, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I thought about being a car mechanic and all that. But my father was a postman by then, and it was a very secure job. So, he said to me, "You want to get yourself "in the Post Office, you'll enjoy it," he says, "and you get a decent pension at the end of it."

- My father worked for the GPO, the Post Office. I had an uncle, a cousin and a brother who all worked for the Post Office. And it was kind of, well, that's what you're gonna do. You ain't got any qualifications. I'm not particularly skilled with my hands in DIY or anything like that. So, my dad got me an interview to join the Post Office as a telegram boy.

- I ended up working for the Royal Mail because I was applying for job applications at the time. And I was successful in applying for London Transport, British Rail and the Post Office. And I choose the Post Office because someone very near to me said, "Take the Post Office, they got a nicer uniform."

- I was working in a sweet shop at the time. I was 17. And one day a man came into our estate and said that the Post Office are actually gonna take women on as workers. And he told my dad that it's a good job and I should apply.

- I started working at Royal Mail 'cause I kind of left school and fell into, I think there was just natural migration for the girls that left school to enter into retail. And I was just so bored of working in retail. You know, I'd worked in Austin Reed, and they was like, you know, it was like the over sixties club. And I looked around one day and just thought, "Oh God, I don't want to end up institutionalised here."

- Basically, I went in the Post Office 'cause me father worked there, and he just said it was a decent job. And it was. That was, I went in there for a year or two and that was 60 years ago.

STARTING OUT
- Every single conceivable people from every conceivable background you can think of worked there, and every age from 18 to 65.

- The background of it was military. It was, it was a military background. When you went into the Post Office and you went to that training school at Bellgrove, you had to call them sir, and it was all very officious.

- I mean, all the way back then, you got a lot of old soldiers, funnily enough, because this was, what was that? 20 years after the war, so. And you can normally tell when people have been in the army, 'cause they're very good at taking orders.

- Post Office is a bit over, or it was when I was there. Bit over-managed, you know, a bit, bit, bit, bit like school in some ways, yes. Well, in the Post Office, I don't know whether this is the case now, but if you wanted to go to the toilet, and you're talking grown women and men here, right, if you wanted to go to the toilet, you had to put your hand up to go to the toilet.

- It was pretty much a job of dodging the governors. If you could get away with it, you got away with it. I'm not talking about anything serious. I'm not talking about thieving or anything like that. I'm just talking about sitting down, playing cards and things, and someone'd shout out, "Here's the boss!" And you'd all get up and pretend you're working, you know. Pretend you were sweating.

- [Woman] A lot of the people that worked at Notting Hill lived in Notting Hill. At the time, Royal Mail very much wanted to recruit people that lived in the postcode area. And that was predominantly possibly because we started at 5:30.

- [Man] Well Canning Town's right in the east end of London and the old docklands. Well at the same time of day, they'd be shutting a lot of the docks down. And a lot of the dockers were made redundant, and they came into the Post Office. So, you had this strange mix of ex-soldiers and ex dockers.

- When you started there, they gave you a uniform which never fitted you. It was much too big. Then they gave you, believe it or not, a towel and a chunk of soap. It was about that big. And it was green. And that was meant to last you, well, it did last you forever, because no matter how you tried, you couldn't get a froth up on it. It was like washing your hands with a brick. But they gave this to you, this is part of what you got, and you got these what they called the wet gear. And they were the most uncomfortable sort of tarpaulin sort of stuff that you wore over you if it rained. But no one ever did. You know, 'cause it was too uncomfortable, you'd rather go out and get wet. And that was it.

- They gave you one pair of boots or shoes every six months. And they were not the nicest of shoes I've got to say. They weren't your Armani or anything like that. They were leather, all leather, the sole, the heel, I'm sure they were worth a lot of money at the time, but they were horrible really, because when you used to walk in them, for the first three or four weeks, they used to squeak because they're new leather. And as you walked along the floor, people could hear you coming, like, eek, eek, eek. They would squeak like that. But after, once the weather had got on 'em, and you hit 'em with a hammer a bit, they softened up and they were okay.

- I think it was a bit like being in the army in a way. You know, you had a uniform, you had a badge, you had a cap. This is my cap, which I brought along as a, just to show you what postmen and postwomen used to wear. Hey, so I put on my hat, it might not fit now. There's the hat you used to have to wear.

- 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 my arm, and I'm walking along and the outdoor inspector of Royal Mail caught me. "Where's your cap?" I said, "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 earned £3 a week. So, four hours pay was quite a lump to be stopped. So, I always wore my cap afterwards.

- I went for an interview and a test, quite a simple test. It's, you know, sort of like memory and looking at different addresses and noticing things that were wrong. It was quite a simple test. Passed the test, got offered a job and started about a month later.

- First job I did for Royal Mail, I was uselessly employed. Because you didn't have the proper training to go and do a delivery, they gave you a range of menial jobs to do, which would be things like tipping the mail sacks out with the mail, pushing the work around to people who were more experienced, that could sort the mail and things like that. So, what it said on the signing on sheet was, "You are usefully employed," right. But everybody else termed it as uselessly employed, 'cause you didn't know what you were doing.

- Okay, so it was ever so exciting. It wasn't really. It was working on something called the facing table. It's where all the mailbags were tipped. So, you collect the mail, it all goes in a grey sack, or grey, a beige sack back then because it's all made out of cloth and some of them had fleas in them, they were horrible.

- The facing table, it was a long, long table with postmen and postwomen standing either side. In the middle of there's a conveyor belt. You basically tip the bags onto the table and put the letters onto the conveyor belt. And anything that was over a certain size, you put it in another bag. That's the first job I did.

- Because of Royal Mail's times of jobs, they've got so many different opportunities for people to work early shift, a late shift or a night shift. It came together that I could actually carry on being a travelling motor mechanic and do the shift work at the Post Office. So, I encompassed both jobs. And that way I became a very rich person.

- If you had a small family, it was a great, you know, it was a great balance for work and family life. And a lot of the guys that I worked with had small children and, you know, they was able to get home in time, pick the kids up from school, start the dinner, while their wives went out and done their part-time or full-time job.

- I mean, when I first started to earn a decent living, you had to add a lot of overtime. So that you'd be there from early in the morning to late at night. And it was very you know, tiring. It was very tiring. But that's, you know, if you wanted to pay your mortgage or pay your rent, and have a holiday, you had to work these long hours.

TELEGRAM BOYS

- When I was a telegram boy, they used to call them young postmen at the time, I started in Victoria in SW1, and there were about 30 or 40 fellas between the age of 16 and 18. And we had to learn the routes. So you got a week's training. there were five routes that you had to learn and you got taken out. Three of those routes you did on a bicycle, two of them, you used to walk.

- Very, very nervous because I was the only girl. So, I was the first telegram girl in South Kensington. So, I was with all these young boys,

because we were all 17. So, when you're a telegram, you're 17, when you're a postman, you're 18. So, and it went round the office and it went around other offices that a girl had joined. So, all the people in the other offices were driving up to see who this girl was, and it was me.

- We were allocated a bike. If you were lucky, you got one where the brakes worked. If you weren't lucky, you had to try and sort it out yourself. One of the kids there was allocated, well, it wasn't allocated, it was a question. "Does anybody know anything about bikes?" If someone put their hand up, they would then become the bike boy. So, it was their job to fix the bikes.

- Telegram people were called moppers, but I don't know why. Probably messengers on pushbikes or something like that, I don't know. Before texting and emails, someone would like to send a message to you. So, they would ring up the Post Office and then they would say what they wanted to say. And it would say, "Hi, how are you? "Need to meet at this time or date." And then the people in the office would tap it all up. And it would come out in a long, long, long, long strip of paper all thin, and then they would cut it, and they would stick it on a card.

- Put that in an envelope, fix it in a tube and send this tube what used to be powered by air down, and it used to come into the office where we were, what they called the sending out room.

- [Man] First of all, you have to lay them in, so you don't go back on yourself. If you've got six telegrams, you'd lay them in from the nearest to the furthest.

- And then we would get on a bike, put it in our bag and drive it up to people, and knock on the door and give them the telegram. And if it was someone who had died, there would be a black cross in the corner. So, you would knock on the door and say, "It's sad news, is somebody with you?"

- Delivering a telegram that had sad news, and see somebody get quite upset, I had one lady faint in front of me, holding her little child. And I was only 15 and you imagine, I didn't have a mobile phone. So, I had to rush next door and get a neighbour to come and help me with this lady that had collapsed with the bad news.

- Every Tuesday, without fail, used to go to Harrods, pick up a package and take it to Eton College, which is in Windsor. And you used to get, there was a thing called the green line bus, used to stop at Buckingham Palace Road, you picked it up from Harrods, go to Buckingham Palace Road, get on a green line, and you, they obviously paid your fares before you went, and you went all the way up to Windsor, delivered the package and then come back, obviously, before you came back, you might sit and have a sandwich and a drink in Windsor. Basically, that was your whole day done, lovely trip out to Windsor. What a day's work.

- I did work later on as a telegram boy in Buckingham Palace. I was a postman in there, a young postman. And my favourite was to, 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, round about 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 yeah, I really ran faster than Roger Bannister's four-minute mile to escape from this dog.

- The atmosphere was great. It was joking, banter, always people having a laugh. And it was a joy to go to work.

SORTING

- I started by going to a school down in Kings Cross, where we had to learn sorting, learn how to tie bags, how to lift bags properly. And we done that for two weeks.

- They used to teach you how to empty pillar boxes and how to make deliveries, how to deliver properly without dogs biting your hand off, that sort of thing.

- When you went onto the post, you had to have a, there's a big sorting frame, and you had to put all these cards that were pretend that had pretend addresses, and you have to go through and go, right, well that goes in SW1, SW2, SW, that goes to Scotland, that goes, and you had to do it in quite a quick time.

- First thing you had to do, a bit like a cabbie, we had to learn all the streets in your postcode. In West One, there's 400 streets. So, the first thing you had to do, you had to do that for five, I can't remember if it was three days or five days, and then you did a test at the end of it. And if you got more than three wrong, that was the end of your Post Office career.

- We then started to learn about the different countries in the world, and we had to learn places in those countries. So, we knew if a parcel come in for San Francisco, we knew that went to the USA. If a parcel come in for Montreal, we knew it went to Canada and so forth.

- Skills, memory. You need a good memory, but they did provide people like myself with a thing called the idiot board. That's where it is if we didn't know the postcode of a place, we had to look to the idiot board, find it, and we threw it off. Idiot board, so you can imagine I used it often.

- [Man] In its day, Mount Pleasant was handling 24 million items a week. That's a lot of mail, parcels and letters, Christmas cards from all over the world.

- [Man] You got to remember, yeah, there was no machines to stamp the mail. So, we had to do it by hand. So, you can imagine the size of the workforce. You had to have a huge workforce, 'cause everything had to be manually done.

- [Man] The office, there was about 1,300 people work there, on three shifts. It was open 24 hours a day, six days a week. Yes, it was quite noisy for most of the time. But then there were quiet times when you were waiting for a collection to come in.

- So, I would go out, go to the postbox. I was called a buck. So, 'cause I didn't drive. So, the person that drives was the driver, the person that was next to him was called a buck. So, I would jump out, unlock all the post box, put the bags in the back and then we would drive back. We would tip it on a massive big table and everyone would be there.

- [Man] The collection would come in, massive vans coming in from all over the west central area, come in to, it was all done at high speed. They'd screech in, they'd put it on the bank, the chain would start up, other people would attach it to the chain and the chain made a fantastic, you know, it's quite noisy. And that went all around the building, dropping bags off at particular points.

- [Woman] And then you'd sort it all out into letters and things. And then there'd be a big conveyor belt that come down and then all the parcels would come down this end. And then I would sort parcels with other people, put them into bags and they would be going to Scotland, Ireland, England, America, down that end.

- [Man] 'Cause it comes in in bulk and then you have to divide it down into towns or areas of towns or, and then say if something come into London, but then you'd put in the area of London you're going to. Then that'd go to another department, and then that department will put that into streets.

- But you did your job. You used to say, talk and sort. You couldn't sit next to somebody 'cause you were all lined up in bays of, you couldn't just sit there chatting to someone about football if you weren't doing the work and you'd have supervisors walking around and they used to say some people were a bit more chatty, bit like me. "Talk and sort."

- Depending on the time of year, some of the workload could be very heavy. Christmases, lots of stuff coming from all over the world, they all ended up in Mount Pleasant, all ended up with piles and piles of parcels all coming from Greenland from a man called Santa Claus or.

- One time, one of the guys beside me was opening a box and then he stopped because the box moved. I said, "What's that?" He said, "I don't know." And then the box moved again. So, he stopped trying to undo it. And when he read what was on the declaration, the customs declaration, it had a rare snake in it. And the snake woke up.

- [Man] On each sorting floor, you had banks of machines. You had the coding desks where the operator would read the letter, the address, type in a postcode and it would print phosphor dots on it. And they had another bank of sorting machines that would read those dots and sort the letters.

- [Woman] To stamp the letters through the machine, you had to run them through the machine. So, I was doing that sometimes, running through them to cancel out the stamps. It's all done by machine now, but then you, back in those days, you just ran it through the machine, and that was good. Apart from the times it got jammed, which was all the time. You run it through the machine, you think, no, that's fine, and then it's jammed again. So, you had to call for someone to help you, and always pulling out the letters.

- Well, as I say it was, it was mainly fairly physical work. The bags were about 23 kilos heavy, and you had to pick them up and you had to put them on what they call brutes. And they would be pulled around the office by a small tractor, like a golf cart, but it was a bit more stronger than a golf cart. And you would pull the things around, take them out to the

containers to be loaded or to another platform where they'd be loaded onto lorries.

- What I called my favourite job was working on the platform, offloading the lorries. Because soon as you finish, they had a thing in those days called job and knock, right? You finish doing all your work. Bye, bye, you're gone. And that was allowed. But as long as you finish.

- We would work in a gang, and you'd get in about seven o'clock, and you'd start working and you'd start loading up the things that you had to load up. Then once you got to dinner time, we used to then, some of them, half of them would go home. We would, and then the other half would stay and they would have to load the containers with only half again, because you've let half of your mates go home. And sometimes people used to say, this is too hard. You might say to the governor who was out there working, there's only four of us, we can't load this forty-footer with four of us. And he would remind us, there's not four of you, there's eight of you. I don't know where the other four are, but you do. So, we would have to shut up and say, okay, 'cause the next day, we would go home at dinner time.

- The rail floor was called that because all the sorters used to sort letters to all over the country and they used to tie, they used to do a dispatch, tie the letters up in bundles, in a bag, down the chutes onto a lot of mail vans that were waiting downstairs and they used to take them all to the various railway stations all over the country.

- [Man] Well, the travelling Post Office is where the mail from, say, Mount Pleasant. We used to take it down to Euston, Kings Cross, St Pancras, Paddington, and they'd load it on the train, and during the night, the postman on there would sort the letters and that was called the TPO, Travelling Post Office.

- [Poem]
This is the night mail crossing the border,
bringing the cheque and the postal order,
letters for the rich, letters for the poor,
the shop at the corner or the girl next door.

Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb,
the gradient's against her but she's on time.
Past cotton-grass and moorland boulder,
shovelling white steam over her shoulder.

Snorting noisily as she passes,
silent miles of wind-bent grasses,
birds turn their heads as she approaches,
stare from the bushes at her blank-faced coaches,
sheep dogs cannot turn her course,
they slumber on with paws across.

In the farm she passes, no one wakes,
but a jug in a bedroom gently shakes.

MAIL RAIL

- Mail Rail is the Post Office's own underground railway in London. And it opened in 1927. And the idea was a mail, a letter could be taken from say, Mount Pleasant, central London. And if it say, had to catch a train

at Paddington to go to the north of the country, they could send it down to the railway, down a chute in a mailbag, labelled up. They throw it on a train, gently. The train would then head off, and 20 minutes later, it would arrive at Paddington. They take the mailbag off. It would go up in an elevator to the platform, because we were underground Paddington Station, they'd go out and it would be thrown onto the train, and off it would whiz up the country.

- Oh, well the mail round of course, we were looking after the first ever driverless automatic train system in the world.

- [Man] The trains had to keep moving. On each platform, if you stood on the platform, a train would come in every six minutes, for you to have a take mail, you could read the label, take the mail off if it was for your station, or put mail on if you had mail for another station. And so you'd have maybe 18, maybe 25 trains going around in a big circle because the Post Office railway is a big circle, all going around following one another's tails.

- So, what they you used to do is you used to dare one another and they used to climb into it, right. Usually when they were drunk, and they would travel the railway from Paddington to Whitechapel, which was a very dangerous thing to do. And when people came out the other end, some had to go to the hospital, they were battered, right, from this thing bashing up and down all the ways along.

- If a train stopped on the station, for some reason it wouldn't leave automatically, all the trains behind it wouldn't move. So eventually all the trains across London on the Post Office railway would stop. If it broke down, we had to run out and fix it very quickly. So, we were there all of the time, just waiting for it to break down. So, you had a lot of pressure and what they would say after about 10 or 15 minutes, do we need to move the work, the mail, to the vans? Which means they have to get fleet of vans ready to go to all the offices, all the drivers, they'd have to tell them all the work's gonna be coming on the loading platforms from vans instead of off of the railway. So, it was a big call if they said, can you fix it?

DELIVERY

- [Man] And I used to get in at six o'clock in the morning, and I used to prep my walk - prepare it. So, basically all your letters were in a big pile all mixed up, then you had to sort it.

- [Woman] So I'd come in in the morning, I'd clear all the number 26 boxes, which was for my round. I'd take it to my workstation. And on my workstation was an RM 2000 frame they call those. So, it's pretty much the streets with all the numbers with fillets in. So, you could sort the mail into the street and the door numbers.

- You had to set them in, make sure that you had number one, two, three, four, five. So once you got out, you weren't fiddling through your letters and everything, and then go out on delivery, normally by bus or a van used to take you. I used to do that 'cause there used to be two deliveries, first and second, I used to do that. Get back for breakfast about half nine, and then used to sort the second delivery up and go out on the second delivery, finish about two o'clock, something like that.

- A very manual job working in deliveries. You know, it's not the same as working in a mail centre where you're sat and you're sorting all day or distribution where you're driving, and you know, you're just emptying boxes and pushing Yorks. You're physically carrying stuff, you're, you know, up and down terrains and you know, it is a physically demanding job. And you can see that with the wear and tear of postmen, a lot of postmen suffer with their hips, knees, you know, feet.

- When I first applied for the job, they said, "Can you ride a bicycle?" And I said, "Yes." It was like, "Here's your bicycle. "Off you go." And I was thinking, "Oh, I can't, I don't know how to ride a bicycle." So, I had to go take it to the park and learn how to ride in one afternoon.

- One Christmas I was delivering, I was doing parcel delivery and I came into the sorting office. And on my sorting table, I saw a goose. Not a live goose. I didn't have to walk it to the step, no. So basically, somebody sent goose through the post for the person to have for their Christmas dinner rather than turkey. But I saw the goose's legs and it had a string on it with a big label with a lot of stamps on one side and the address on the other. So, I literally had to go up to this door in Ealing and say, "Here you are." "Oh, thank you, I've been expecting that."

- You got the job, right, on your seniority. Say, for example, you've got 20 delivery walks and the best one is Gray's Inn Road, yeah? Well, the person who was there the longest got the first pick. If he wanted Gray's Inn Road, he would get Gray's Inn Road. So, the longer you were there, the better it got.

- No, but a good walk would be something you could finish in an hour and a half. A bad walk would be something that you couldn't finish in about two and a half hours. I think estates with no lifts, like the posh blocks where you're up and down the stairs, 'cause, and a good walk would be one level, but you'd have a lot more work, but it would all be on one level. So, you'd be walking right the way up one street and round and things. And it was before trolleys. So, you always, you carried it. People can be on their walk, which is where they deliver their letters, you could be on there for 20 years.

- Tom Smith was great, he'd be on Holland Park. If you just had a name, he knew where that person lived. And that's because you had the same postman on the same round for so long. So, the intelligence that you got by being on the same round around your customers, you know who are the people you need to check out, check in on, you know, if there was a parcel or a letter that wasn't written properly, they would just look at the name and go, yeah, I know where they live, even, you know, they live in the basement, it's such and such.

- When you were on a route, on a particular round for a long time, you get to know all of your customers. And again, there's a little story I'm reminded of, of a little old lady that I was delivering to. And it would have been in the late nineties and it was Christmas and the all I've heard is, "Postie, can you come back, please?" And I thought, "Oh no, what have I done? "Have I delivered the wrong parcel or wrong letter "or something like that?" And I've gone back to the door and she's given me a, what we call a Christmas tip. So, people tip us at Christmas and say thank you for all the work that we've done over the year. And the tip was a plate. And I thought, well, it might be, you know, a bit of money, a

card, a bottle of wine or something, but it was a dining plate in a plastic carrier bag. And I looked at it and I was, "Thank you very much." I didn't really know what I was gonna do with this plate, but it just showed even people that hadn't got a lot of money appreciate what the postal workers do.

- I had other customers that liked you to knock the door, to say hello, just to, you know, like to have a bit of social interaction. Other customers would wait for you to come along because you was, you know, it's probably the only person they spoke to that day. So, you know, it's, you're a public service, you're working with the public, but if you're a sociable person like me, it was quite, I looked forward to it. Took me ages though, 'cause you know, I do tend to talk a lot.

COUNTERS

- Briefly, I started as a telegram boy. Then I went as a young postman in Buckingham Palace, took an exam to go on the Post Office counters that was selling stamps, licences, premium bonds, Post Office savings bank, dealing with the public.

- 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 you, if you hadn't got any money, you had to put an order into the manager to get your money.

- When I started, it was all manual work with a pencil and a pen and you know, on paper. So, we had no computers. And I remember the day when we first saw that screen in front of us and we were so amazed that we could touch it and it could work. So, it was a touch screen. It was amazing when we have that. You know, we were so scared to touch a cable because we didn't want to do anything wrong. I'm not touching it. Everybody was like that. I am not touching it. So, we had to call the help and what do we do now?

- 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 get a lot more customers. And if they were slow, you'd see them coming from the back of one queue onto your queue.

- Yes, the pension day was either Mondays or Thursdays and then all it was, giving, giving, giving the money. £87, £54 we knew it 87. So, basically, we had 50, 20 pence. Coin hopper we called it, we had the coins. This is the person for the passport. This person for pension, obviously because of the age. Yeah, giro, because the giro people had cheques in their hands, fanning them over the giro, 'cause it was a hot day inside.

- 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. 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 we, when we were on the counter, we used to, they used to say crash and bash and get rid of the customers. But nicely.

ONE BIG FAMILY

- [Woman] The Post Office wasn't just a place where you would work and deliver mail. You all, they also had a lot of social stuff. You all became friends. It was like one big family.

- You name it, in Mount Pleasant you could do it. From playing darts to growing plants, to making wine, to playing billiards.

- When I first started there, they had a horticultural society, which people had an allotment and they used to bring in, they used to bring in carrots and cabbages and put them on the table and a postmaster would come round to judge them.

- I was in a Post Office camera club, 'cause I'm a keen photographer. I was also did a bit of snooker, played snooker for the Post Office, and a bit of cycle racing for the Post Office, time trials, et cetera.

- Like with the football, they would let you go early. It could be up to about three hours before your duty finishes. We'd go and play football for the office. That was exciting. 'Cause most of the guys were from the east end and they loved their football. They also loved their fighting. So, some of our games did not finish.

- [Man] I think they've sold them all now, but they had big sporting venues. So, if you played cricket, you'd be at a place called Swakeleys, which was owned by the Post Office.

- You had a library where some people used to go and sit and read. You also had a shop there, where it was run by the Sports Association and they sold, I don't know why they sold it, but huge jars of pickled eggs, pickled onions, red cabbage, and various other things. Massive jars this big. And they sold sweets, loads of sweets and cigarettes.

- The union and all the other Post Offices, you would take a little bit of your wage, because we couldn't afford to go on holiday in them days. So when you got your money, you would put, say three pound away a week. And then when they would book a big aeroplane and you'd all go off to America. So I was lucky to take my children to America, but I wouldn't have been able to afford it otherwise.

- When I first went into the office, we had our own bar in the Post Office. Lots of post offices at the time, big post offices, they had their own bar.

- [Woman] Often there're stories of wives rocking up demanding the salary before their husbands drink it all in the Post Office bar.

- Christmas time, we had parties. All the different areas would have a party. And the last party of each year was the West Indian guys would put their money together. And we had a party in the table tennis room, everybody was invited. And it's the one time you got to see the management, the very top in the office let their hair down. And they did let their hair down.

- I was working all men, all men. And one day they said that they wanted to go, they had the thing called the Beano, and a Beano is when all men go on a coach together down to the seaside and all women go on a coach.

But because I was the only woman they said I couldn't come because it was just the men.

- What happened, when you had two deliveries, you used to go and do your first delivery, and then when you got back, you'll be in the canteen together for an hour, maybe hour and a half until you went on your second delivery. So, you had time to have a chat, game of cards, the camaraderie was there. Once you went to one delivery, you didn't all come back. So, once you went out, you were out and then you finished on a road, you didn't possibly see people until the next morning. So that changed the social side of the job vastly.

DIFFICULT TIMES

- Well, the world was different. So, there was, I suppose, discrimination. Discrimination against women, discrimination against people of colour.

- I've always believed in handling any problem myself, not going and running to the management. Times have changed in society in the country, so things are done differently now. But in those days, you dealt with it yourself.

- And I believed on many occasions, I heard those people being racially abused, yeah, I did. On a couple of occasions, I actually intervened when I heard it being said, the words being spoken to people that I thought weren't right. And the managers took no notice, didn't do anything about it. And I didn't like it to be perfectly honest. But I think it was something wrongly was accepted as the norm and I didn't like that, I've got to be honest.

- There was a guy from somewhere up north, okay? And he had not worked with black or Asian guys at all, he had no dealings with them. A governor told him, go and work over there with those two guys. He turned to the governor and said, "I don't work with blacks." And the governor said, "Okay." He sent him to work elsewhere. And he got wrong, now, most of the black guys, white guys, Asian guys in the office knew each other. They'd go drinking together. Some of them actually go parties with each other. So, they weren't too happy about that.

- I mean, I remember a time, no manager was of an ethnic background. And that all began to change in the 1990s. And then, you know, it might not be the most appropriate word, 'cause I don't know what the word might be, but it was kind of an explosion of change in the Post Office. And all of a sudden you had managers, you know, West Indian background, African background. And they went on to prove the point, yeah, yeah. It's about ability, isn't it? It's not about where you come from, you know, or what colour you are. There wasn't a lot of women worked in the Post Office back then because the labour was very manual. As I said, previously, there wasn't any machines, but there was women that worked there. And before the days of equality, the women that worked in the Post Office got paid less than the men.

- There was a perception that a woman couldn't do the job. There was always, and I think that was because women were always in mail centres. If you were looking at delivery, there was a perception by the men that women couldn't do this job, it's too, it's too tough. But as I said, I'm one of these people, you tell me I can't do something, I will prove to you whether it kills me, I will prove I can do it.

- And then when I was a postwoman, I was the only postwoman with a hundred men and me. And in those days, there wasn't a restroom for women, because it was all men. And the only difference was the men carried a heavier weight in the bag. I think I carried 30 pound and the men carried 35. But I think that was the only difference. I had a lot of discrimination because as I say, I was the only woman in there. And you know, in them days, people thought it was all right to be, they thought they were funny and things like that. And there wasn't really any backup. So if someone was insulting or offensive, it was, you didn't really say. And I just think, you know, people thought it was banter and people thought it was funny, but it was hurtful.

- The most difficult thing about my work was because there wasn't too many women there, I kept getting the men asking me naughty questions, but that doesn't happen anymore. Which is good thing because they'll be in a lot of trouble and they might get a black eye.

- We demand the post on the high street, this campaign for postal stoppage-

- So, I had no clue about what a trade union was. So, my uncle said, "Have you joined the trade union the CWU?" And I was like, "What's that?" And he's like, "Trade union," and I was like, "What do they do?" And he's going, "Join them, 'cause if you get into trouble, "you'll need them."

- A lot of the conditions we've got is because of not me, but generations before me and the unions been involved in the Post Office and the GPO when it was a civil service for hundred years plus.

- The Post Office had a very good relationship with the union, instead of always battling against each other, it was possible for the union to talk to the management, tell them what the problems were and agree together what a good solution might be.

- The Post Office is a very good employer and our pension scheme is excellent as well. I was lucky enough to retire when I did. And you can say that's due to the union. If it wasn't for the union, through the years, pushing for these things, we wouldn't have them. And that's true of many jobs.

- When I first went in, it was 44 and a half hours a week. So now it's down to about, I think it's about 30 something. We have for wages, we had to go on strike to get better wages. So that's why, that's what the union done for the workers.

- I'll tell you this, Royal Mail, we're an unskilled job, okay? All right, you need a bit of a memory to deal with letters and be able to sort them fast. It's an unskilled job, but the pay that you get at Royal Mail for an unskilled job, it's very hard. And that is all due to the years of going on strike and fighting for higher pay.

- I remember back in 1971, there was a big strike in the Post Office. It lasted seven weeks. I had at the time was still at home. My dad was on strike, my older brother was on strike, my uncle next door was on strike. There were 13 people from our street, all on strike. And in those days, you're on strike, you're out on strike for seven weeks solid. No money coming in hardly, very little money. So, it bred you into the way of

thinking, well hold on, this is my path, my way. I want to be part of these people trying to protect their rights, trying to work their way into a better life for working people.

CHANGES

- At one time you could join the Post Office as a messenger boy at the age of 14, believe it or not. Right, and you could go all the way through the ranks and become a postmaster. You could become an engineer. You could become a senior manager. You know, theoretically you could become, be on the board of the GPO. Gradually changed and it became more difficult for people to progress through the ranks and to become a higher grade. Because they started bringing people in from universities, recruiting them directly to certain positions that previously had been done by people that were promoted from the lower ranks into those positions.

- The major change is privatisation. We've gone from being a public service, who you put the public at the heart of your concern, you know, the heart, to a privatised service now that's looking just to drive that profit margin up at any cost.

- [Man] Mechanisation. The biggest change in the office. We went from maybe 1700 people, and now they've got 700. Sorting the letters was mechanised. Coding the letters mechanised. So that was the big change.

- [Man] When I started, most things, 99% of the work was done by hand. When I finished, over 70% of the work was done by machinery.

- And of course, the Post Office wanted to get rid of people as quickly as possible because the machines were doing the work and they wouldn't have to pay out the wages.

- The walks are bigger, whereas your walks would be two hours, they're now five hours and there's no break. And you're expected to do all this work. And I absolutely think it's horrendous.

- The change that we're now going through, the change from the fact that we don't get as many letters anymore, but we get lots and lots of parcels. So, we're having to change the way we do things now. Once you're around about 60 and the Post Office, knowing that they're gonna shut down, they are offering early retirement to lots of people, particularly anyone over 60. So, you had been tempted with ¬£50,000, 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 taking over.

- And they keep putting the money up and up and you think can I go, dare I go? And eventually I did. And that's challenging because if you've worked in one place for a long, long time like that, to turn around and say I'm leaving is hard.

- When I first started, I remember my dad saying to me, well that's a job you'll have for life. And to be fair, he was right, because I still had it when I took voluntary retirement at the age of 59. I could have still been there now, if I'd wanted to be. So, it's given me a security. It's given me confidence that my wages would be paid. It give me confidence that if I fell down a flight of stairs and broke my arm, no one was gonna sack me. I would have a chance to recuperate and go back to work. So, there was all those things and it's given me an opportunity to bring up a

family, put food on the table. It was never the best paid job, but never the worst paid.

- You felt important. You was proud to work for this company. And you were part of their brand. You was in the community, you was trusted. It was great. I loved working for Royal Mail. Really did. It made me.

- My identity is wrapped up in the Post Office. It's given me the identity I have, because that's what I've done for so long. I think anybody, if I reflect back on my father, people would have said, Mr. Hart was a soldier. I think people look at me, they would say, Mr. Hart was a postman.

[Song]
Every morning as true as the clock
Somebody hears the postman's knock
Every morning as true as the clock
Somebody hears the postman's knock

What a wonderful man the postman is
As he hastens from door to door
What medley of news his hands contain
For high, low, rich and poor
In many a face the joy can trace
And many a grief he can see
Well open the door to his loud rat-tat
And his swift delivery

Every morning as true as the clock
Somebody hears the postman's knock
Every morning as true as the clock
Somebody hears the postman's knock

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