

Egbert Hughes

b 1958, Georgetown, Guyana

Came to UK in 1965 to live in Walthamstow, started work for PO in 1978. First job for coop, father and brother worked for Royal Mail and encouraged Egbert to join as a “job for life”. Worked in LOMO (London Overseas Mail Office) in Canning Town for 20 years until office shut - dealt with parcels. Old dockers worked there. Worked with customs to check suspicious packages - found pots full of compressed cannabis. Theft of foreign money by workers not uncommon. Character called Freddie Cox used to sing and dance.

Then moved to processing in Whitechapel - letters. Better pay than parcels. Had wanted to be a boxer - very sporty. Was in the PO football team. Loved the banter and atmosphere - very busy. Did not want to go out on delivery or drive - liked being in with people rather than out and alone. When he started one man said he refused to “work with blacks” - but over time things got better, people learned to get along because they got to know each other. Joined sports and social clubs - tennis, photography - got paid time off to do these activities.

Now working at “The Mount”. People still working there after 50 years. Lots of “old boys”. Management more watchful than in the past. People work much slower now. Advancement used to be through the ranks - now graduates coming straight into management jobs.

Dave Cannell

b 1960, Lewisham

Started for PO in 1986 as Postman Porter in Mount. Delivery plus worked on mechanisation.

Had joined the army in 1977 but had a car accident while on leave - two years of physio after injury. Saw advert that PO needed workers - started in PO as a stopover - needed steady money. Training at Post Office School in Kings Cross to learn "divisions" country split into - needed to learn all counties and towns - after 2 weeks training test was by "live sort" to pass need to correctly sort 300 letters in 15 minutes - i.e., chuck in correct slot. Lots of workers had been in the military. Frequent uniform inspections and badge checks.

It was a good job and a good life. Enjoyed the work and social life - Mount had own restaurants, bar and sports facilities. He became chair of sports club and also holiday club - took 300 postal workers to Florida and other places.

Work became more automated - moved to Paddington and then Bow and then on the travelling post office. Did the knowledge as a cabbie and worked both for a while then took early voluntary retirement from the PO in 2007.

Now a cabbie and blue badge guide.

Bob McGuire

b 1947, Forest Gate

Started in LOMO (London Overseas Mail Office) in 1978 - Canning Town.

Worked in lots of industries including the docks - went to local pubs so mixed with lots of local people and was told PO was a good job “seemed a happy place to work”.

Started as a postman (e general term for anyone - not just those who post letters).

LOMO was a 6-storey building - Worked ground floor - in-bound and out bound.

Training for 2 weeks in Kings Cross - learning postcodes and how to use frames. Air mail and surface mail - surface mail would be sent just down the road to the docks.

Started in the “Bag Room” - literally folding post bags all day - dusty and boring - he was bolshy and demanded to be put on other duties. Lots of dockers worked there so imported the sense of solidarity into the office. People knew each other.

Got involved with the union. 1983 - strike in support of the nurses.

Became rep on local union in 1989 then regional exec in 1996 then full time on union from 1998. Assistant to Gen Sec of CWU.

Billy Hayes

b 1957, Liverpool

1974 started as postman - got sack after a year for taking too much time off.

He used to be gen sec of the union in 2001.

His working life was in Liverpool as a postman - but good overview of the work. 1960s
- a quarter of all workers in the UK either worked for the PO or in work connected to it.

Allen Ryell

b 1947, Grew up in Mayfair

Was a motor mechanic for years until boss sold up so joined PO at Nine Elms when he was 37 years old. Worked as a sorter - never delivered. Wanted warmth and companionship of the office. Start at the bottom - rise by seniority. Then to PHG - Postman Higher Grade - more pay and responsibility.

Ended up in Revenue Protection - checking that correct costs had been paid i.e. contacting companies that had paid for 300 letters (when they were sending 3500 for e.g.). Made the PO lots of money in otherwise lost revenue.

Was very social at Nine Elms - bar etc. left as the office was closing down.

Went back four years ago as a "Christmas casual". Workforce down from 1200 to 800 due to mechanisation.

Mike Sullivan

b 1945, grew up in Lower Marsh, Waterloo

Two-year Apprenticeship started in 1961 for Mail Rail (worked there until 1976).

Maintenance engineer on train and tracks plus in the sorting office. Train was fine, but machine in sorting office not so much so.

Quite separate life from other workers.

Moved to research centre at Dollis Hill where PO developed new tech.

Jimmy Fleming

b 1947, Clerkenwell

His dad worked for PO. He joined in 1969 (and worked until 1989) and worked in Agricultural Hall Islington - parcels, internal and foreign (lovely big old building) - sent mail to the docks.

90% of bosses were old soldiers with ranks like the army.

It was a "Tom and Gerry" job. Trying to duck work and not get caught. Tricks of game.

Closed and work moved to Canning Town (LOMO) - loads of redundant dockers looking for work, great atmosphere as dockers imported banter and camaraderie.

90% heavy manual work.

Overstaffed - worked in gangs of 6-8 people with "two away" - long breaks.

30 hours a week overtime. Vast majority were men.

1989 offered redundancy so left but went back in 1998 and went on to become a driver. Very different - all alone and lonely.

Ended working at Almedia Street.

John Hart

b 1960, Born in Cork

Came to London at 15, went back to Ireland then back to London at 24. Initially worked for White Knight laundry (dad had worked lots of jobs and mum at the Match Box toy car factory).

Got offered jobs for London Underground, Rail and PO. Wife said take the PO as the uniform is the best. 1986 at Rathbone Place PO.

Took job at PO in an "oily rag job" i.e. manual (non-clerical "Suit" job).

Very military - uniform, inspections. Given badge and number and armband and uniform.

Trained in all aspects of the job - unloading vans, everything done by hand.

Trainee for 12 months.

Women paid less than men and handled less work.

Worked in mail centre on sorting, money sorted on 1st floor. night shift and deliveries.

As a driver you only drove - had an assistant to lift and carry - very prestigious job.

Now a driver - have to lift his own stuff, works as CWU rep.

Basic pay much, much better now so no need for overtime - but lost social side of the job and all sports and social facilities.

Keith Brazier

b 1944, Sutton

Dad was a postman and got him an interview at 15 in Victoria. "Young postman" for first three years in City of London. Got job as postman/telegram boy in the Houses of Parliament delivering to politicians etc. Met all MPs.

At 18 went to Stratford Sorting office then to Chelsea - back to Victoria on "Rail floor" then to Nine Elms as inspector at night - travelled to all SW sorting offices to check on workers.

Union man.

tension from going from worker to manager.

Social side - angling, photography.

Liked the social side.

More women joined in later years.

Paul Wood

b 1940, Mitcham

Dad was a postman in Croydon for 46 years. Wanted to be a motor mechanic but didn't work out so became a postie in 1956 - as a telegram boy in Victoria. On bike.

Worked in Buckingham Palace until 17 years old. 400 rooms. Flag story.

Did PO exam and joined Post Office Counters.

6-week training Euston Road, then Regent Street - 30 counters, very busy as used to do everything - TV licenses, DVLA, payments - loads more than just post.

Mix of men and women on the counters (unlike sorting) Lots of practical jokes, enormous rule books.

The GPO family.

Racial mix - no animosity that he can recall.

Reserve meant sent to any office in SW then after two years could pick office - picked Gloucester Road as only 10 staff - more intimate - there in the mid 1960s. Stories.

Then back to Victoria but caught meningitis and very ill.

Put on light duties, the Union would collect him from home and drop him to work and back to allow him to keep working - finished in mid 1990s and took redundancy.

Has collected old bikes, Morris Minor vans and bikes and loads and loads of PO memorabilia - an enthusiast.

His four children work for the PO.

Greg Charles

b 1971, Birmingham

in Military for 6 years, left for a girl, moved up and down to London and joined Royal Mail in 1995.

Took job in Wandsworth Office as needed steady work - minimal training - immediately out on delivery. Took a “walk” based on seniority - the easier ones taken by older hands.

Enjoyed delivering - own boss, met people, out in the elements but also difficult - heavy and hard work. Dog attacks, some estates a bit dodgy, but also friendly.

“People like their posties”.

Last delivery in 2002 as became Union Rep- disputes - very good solidarity at the PO.

Nicky Carter

b 1956, Clapham

Left school in 1973 and became a telegram boy. Father a postman in Clapham and brother and uncle. Uncle had started in 1946, Dad in 1947, brother in 1968.

Father was cook in the canteen and worked for furniture company in the afternoons (common to have two jobs).

Fabulous job as telegram boy - on a bike with lots of boys, flying around the neighbourhood. was Bike boy and fixed bikes.

At 18 became a postman and went to Victoria then back to Clapham in 1975.

Training: Belgrave House in NW London - 48 box frame. 1 week training.

Heavy bags, two deliveries - 1st, the breakfast, then second.

Shift 6am to 1.30pm.

No women. "Post Masters were gods".

Ex-military, aging workforce - hard to get the sack. long terms relationships as people in work long term. Therefore, strong connections and strong union.

Sorting offices reflected neighbourhoods - SW1 increasingly Caribbean.

Office run by Union - managers stayed away generally.

Delivery until 1984 then took union job at his uncles' insistence (he had been union rep).

Stories: Christmas 1974 letter bomb.

Jane Buttigieg

b 1961, Pimlico

The first telegram girl in South Ken in 1979.

120 men in the South Ken Office and her - met husband there and got married in 1982.

Started as a “mopper” - telegram girl- she took no rubbish from the 20 boys she worked with.

After being a mopper became a delivery person.

Training for 2 weeks in Mount Pleasant using old sorting frame, how to tie knots etc.

Started work on deliveries - 2 a day, started at 6am.

Women carried 30lb bags on delivery - men carried 36lbs.

Liked being a post woman, meeting people, hours good, varied.

Walks assigned by seniority - i.e. more time on job can pick the easier walks.

Became a driver - PO paid for her to learn.

She left in 1987 due to having children, but she's back working part time now delivering parcels in Battersea. Very busy due to covid.

Her husband - had left to become a black cab driver but back now too.

Dave Bradbury

b 1953, Paddington

Joined PO in Notting Hill in 1970 after seeing ad in the newspaper. Wanted outdoor life, job for life. Immediately went on strike in 1971 - BIG strike for 6 weeks.

Telegram boy at first on push bike then onto Bantam motorbike.

@18 became a postman in Ealing Green PO. Difficult round in N Ealing. Heavy walks (loads of letters).

Walks changed every 5 years or so to make them even out but union often resisted re-doing walks.

After 18 months took a driver's job as easier physically. Got sick of driving to so Postman Higher Grade and went in sorting in Paddington in 1975. Postcodes not used much until the 1980s, manual.

Assistant Inspector: In charge of divisions, Facing Table - to cancel stamps. He was initially a strict manager but realised he would get more out of people if he was more laid back.

Quite a lot of pilfering, DHSS cheques, passports, FA sent tickets by registered letter.

Project Manager - Mount Pleasant then became a Tutor and retired in 2004.

Huw Davies

b 1956, Edgeware

Started work in the print - finance plus clerical but got mucked around, mum saw ad in newspaper for PO and suggested it.

1976 went to do test at Wembley and got job as Counter Clerk in Harrow.

Was there for 42 years.

Felt he was providing a public service, got to know lots of old people, young mums etc - valued this, particularly in the smaller offices.

Started work as a reserve - sent to offices that need staff but ended with permanent job in PO accounts.

Became active in the CWU after clash with management,

Katie Dunning

b 1979, Notting Hill

Had uncle and aunt in the Notting Hill Office - family recommendations counted for a lot - got job but had to wait 11 months for vacancy in the Notting Hill Delivery Office in 1998.

Had to do a sorting test - "throw off" 50 letters in 2 minutes in 56 box frame.

Went straight into deliveries - Ladbroke Square - favourite walk - beautiful houses and a small round.

Initially paired with a trainer to learn the job.

Start at 5.30am - most people were local due to early start. "Clean down" clear pigeon holes.

Would personalise her work station.

Only 2 women there plus the cooks in the cafe out of 80 people.

Lots of nude calendars and "banter" but as she had family in the office people did not mess with her.

Each office had sports and social club and she'd been going since a child anyway due to family members, so all very familiar.

not many women on delivery, more in processing. Marriage bar meant that historically women would not stay long.

Bad Walk - heavy bags, on estates with broken lifts, not much health and safety. Drug addicts - fear of being robbed.

When she started many people had been there for many, many years.

Liked working outdoors, liked her colleagues, kept fit - but took hours to get round as she was local and knew loads of people so lots of chatting.

Became involved in the CWU- workplace rep (2001) then area safety rep (2005) and released from day-to-day delivery duties but missed the work a bit, but got to know loads more people.

Joined the National Women's Advisory Committee and there was a big drive to recruit more women "Mummy Duties" under CEO Moya Green.

2018 - worked with Dave Ward, Gen Sec of the CWU and did a BA at Ruskin paid for by the union - dissertation on the marriage bar.

Now works in the research department as Policy Adviser.

Bob Collins

b 1948, Islington

Worked for years in the Rag Trade but became unreliable as a job so looked for something steadier.

Joined PO in 1981 aged 33 - Mount Pleasant - had been a prison before.

Massive building, 2 weeks training - worked on Inland Sorting and foreign in the evening. Split into two sections - mail and parcels. Had to learn 35 districts plus loads of sub districts - but like learning the knowledge for cabbies. Learn to look out for letter bombs.

Soft pattern: 6am to 2pm. 2pm to 10pm - nights.

he ended up n nights so he could see his kids.

Lots of overtime - 70-80 hour week

All kinds of people worked there - very cliquy.

Great atmosphere - clubs - shooting range on site, swimming, football etc.

Machine came in and they cut 2500 staff.

Active on the CWU - helped him "become someone who could get up and speak to 2500 people".

Took redundancy in 2009 along with many others.

Norman Candy

b 1949, Croydon

Was a builder for many years but black listed for Union work around asbestos and other stuff so could not get a job. PO one of the only places he could get a job so joined in 1976 in West Central Office.

Amazing to be in a Trade Union that was accepted and a massive part of the running of the business. closed shop.

Postman - mainly New Oxford St, mainly in sorting with 1,300 people.

Indoors, loading lorries, tipping bags, sorting - liked being indoors.

had to travel from Croydon to start work at 6am - so very early starts.

Worked double shifts to earn money as basic pay was very bad.

the work itself was boring, the job was all about the people, the relationships, the social and sporting side.

lots of Jewish people in the office when he started, very left wing and active. the offices reflected the communities they were in.

Became a CWU floor rep and then as Branch Secretary in 1980. Worked for PO until 2002 then for CWU.

Zehra Gurcakan

b 1968, Hackney

Needed a PT job as married to refugee who was not allowed to work - started in 1989 afternoons only at Enfield - few women “the Spice Girls”.

Matrix Sorting - very good work for women with families.

2006 went full time riding a bike on deliveries - very different from earlier work.

5am to 1pm - 8 women out of 300 when started (now still only 20 out of 300).

Outdoors in all weather, on round for 7 years so got to know everyone.

Still has round now but she's a walk risk assessment officer - dogs, tripping, lets people know what they need to watch out for.

Balbir Bharj

b 1960, Nairobi, Kenya

Joined the Post Office because she needed a part-time job and they were advertising part-time opportunities.

Worked on the Counters. Training was intense with 140 different types of transaction having to be learnt. It was also important to learn how to deal with customers.

Her colleagues were very helpful and supportive in her first job as a counter clerk.

Checking IDs was an important part of the job so licenses and pensions etc. were issued to the correct person.

Describes how queues worked in the days when each counter clerk had their own. Some funny stories about the different type of customers and their behaviour.

Balancing the books at the end of the day was the most difficult and important task.

Maths and confidence were the most important skills to have.

Talks about her progression to full time work then management and the different post offices she worked in.

Recounts how she felt as a manager when the other workers went on strike.

Talks about how everything was done on pen and paper when she first started then has a story about when the touch screen computers arrived and everyone was scared of them.

Talks about the history of the GPO and Royal Mail and how the relationship has changed.

Talks about how important the post offices still are to those most vulnerable in society.

Carol Shonibare

b. 1966, The UK (Jamaican parents)

Still employed now after 22 years.

Started as a casual and then got opportunity at Mount Pleasant as part time post woman working 5 hours a day. Worked her way up to become full time. Did lots of training, much of it around operating machines. Very diverse when she first started. They used to have a programme called cultural week for example everyone bringing food from their own culture and clothes so people would get to know each other's backgrounds. She talks about the various equipment she uses for her work and also the uniform she wears today. She talks about the rhythm of work - how Monday is the busiest day of the week, and Christmas. She talks about getting job satisfaction from getting her work done, working with her colleagues and how broken equipment (they call it furniture) affects her work. She says she has never really experienced discrimination.

She describes work on parcels and letter sorting using frames.

She talks about running, with workers from Jamaica, a group to raise money for cancer charities in Jamaica.

She joined the union to protect her from any problems with the managers.

The changes she talks about are job cuts and redundancies and re-sign where you are put in a different job. She speaks about how people have been made redundant and the positions have not been filled so they are short staffed. She says she just gets on with it to enjoy it, but that often they are expected to do the job of two people when people are made redundant but position not filled.

Working for Royal Mail has meant a lot to her. She works very hard and finds the job challenging but says that jobs out there are hard to get so she makes sure she does the right thing to keep her job.

Ray Middlesworth

b 1957 in Birmingham

At 16 was looking for career and friend's father was an engineer in the post office and said he should do it as it was good work and good pay. His family thought it was a good job with good prospects.

Started work in 1974 as an apprentice engineer. 3-year apprenticeship learning theory and practise of all types of engineering starting with electricians. It felt like a huge organisation and easy to feel lost but you worked with a smaller team.

Lovely detailed Description of what Mail Rail was and how it ran including a "typical day" account. Also, of the range of people working there. He worked on Mail Rail to start with and spoke about how nerve racking it is when something goes wrong and you have very little time to fix it. He was also in charge of fixing sorting machines at Mount Pleasant which at one time was the largest sorting office in Europe.

Talked about hearing comments and prejudice.

Talks about Hollywood film with Bruce Willis being shot on location and how they used the income earned to fund and host children parties for 4 years on mail rail and how much he valued this. Worked with engineering fixing sorting machines across London and then worked at Dollis Hill where Royal Mail did their Research and Development.

He speaks about the importance of the Union to pay and conditions. Talks about how the union target in 1975 was a 35-hour working week. hours did go down but then the political atmosphere changed.

He ended up working on Mail Rail once it closed, maintaining the tunnels to stop flooding, "driving his one loco". And he then helped develop it for the museum.

He values having opportunities to practise engineering, to make friends and to get a good living from Royal Mail.