



# OUR POST OFFICE

by  
*Mary F. Moore*





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*by*

MARY F. MOORE, B.A.



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*The village post office at Dorchester, Oxfordshire  
(postal address: Dorchester-on-Thames, OXFORD)*

# OUR POST OFFICE

## *Chapter 1*

### **Post Office Savings Bank**

As their car ran down the hill into the Cotswold village, the three Hammonds looked about with interest.

"It's very pretty," said Susan.

"The church clock has a blue face," pointed out John.

And, "I hope there's a post office," said Paul.

"A post office," echoed his older brother. "What do you want that for? You've no money to spend there."

"But Daddy promised that I should sign my Post Office Savings Bank book the very day I was seven," Paul reminded him. "And that's tomorrow."

Then he asked, "Please, Daddy, will you give me my book tonight, and then I'll be ready?"

Mr. Hammond shook his head. "Sorry," he answered, "but Savings books have to be kept locked up. You shall have it first thing tomorrow."

Paul sighed. "I should sleep much better with it under my pillow," he stated. But soon he had forgotten his disappointment, and was exploring the tall old house, where they were to stay for their holiday.

The sitting-room was opposite a shop, which had the owner's name over the door, and beside that the name of the place, Idfield, and two other words, which Paul began to spell out.

"P-o-s-t, that's Post—O-f-f-i-c-e, is that Office?" he asked Susan.

"Yes," she answered. So Paul went to bed happily, knowing that his great wish would be fulfilled.

Next morning when he woke, he sprang up feeling that he must have slept away half his birthday. But John said sleepily, "Be quiet, kid. It's not seven o'clock yet."

"Oh dear," sighed his small brother. "I just can't keep quiet!"

Very soon he heard the landlady stirring, and then he slipped quietly into his clothes, and crept downstairs.

"I'm going across to the Post Office," he explained softly.

"'Tain't open yet, love," Mrs. Barrow told him. "And mind you don't lose yourself."

Paul didn't see how he could do that. When he got over the road, he noticed that the shop door was open, and that a man was sorting newspapers inside.

"Are you the Post Office?" he asked.

"Not quite," answered the man. "I'm only Edward Rayne, the sub-postmaster. And that notice in the window says, 'Hours of Business, 9-5.30,' so we're not open yet. But I don't suppose you can read."

"Of course I can," said Paul indignantly. "I'll come back at nine o'clock, and bring my Post Office Savings book to sign."

"Then you must be seven," said the postmaster. "Are you just opening an account?"

"Oh, no. Daddy started accounts for each of us with five shillings almost as soon as we were born," Paul answered.



“ So John’s had his for ten years, and Susan hers for nine years. But mine’s only seven years old today.”

“ Oh, happy birthday,” said Mr. Rayne. “ Now you’ll be able to deposit and withdraw money—that is, put it in and take it out— for yourself.”

“ How much at a time ? ” asked Paul.

“ You can put in as much as you like, but not more than £5,000 altogether,” said Mr. Rayne. “ Only I don’t suppose the amount will worry you at present.”

“ No,” agreed Paul.

“ And you can withdraw up to £10 on demand—that is, at once. But if twice in seven days you withdraw more than £3 at a time, your book must be sent to London to the headquarters office, for checking.”

“ How do they know about it there ? ” Paul asked curiously.

“ Everyone with a Post Office Savings Bank account has a reference card at the headquarters office in London,



and all the particulars of your account will be there.”

Then Mr. Rayne asked, “Can you remember the Office and number printed on your Savings Bank book?”

“Yes, Daddy made me learn it in case my book gets lost at any time,” said Paul. And he rattled off, “Redburn 9491.”

“Good for you,” said the man. “And do you know that you get interest on all the money you put into the bank?”

“What does that mean?” Paul asked.

“That for every hundred pounds you have in the bank, the Post Office gives you £2 10s. a year on the 31st December.”

“Oh, I haven’t anything like as much as that,” Paul said, shaking his head.

“All right. Then I’ll say that you receive a ½d. for every month you have a complete pound in the bank. Does that sound better?”

“Much,” nodded Paul. “I say, you do know a lot about it.”

“So will you if you read what it says at the back of your Savings Bank book,” the postmaster assured him. “And don’t forget that if you want to deposit or withdraw money you can do so at nearly 21,000 post offices in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.”

“Thank you,” said Paul politely. “I don’t suppose I shall need them all, but it’s nice to know.”

He had been sitting cross-legged on the counter while he talked, but now he unwound himself. “Here are John and Susan,” he said. “It must be breakfast time.”

It was, and when his brother and sister came in, John exclaimed “Little donkey! If Mrs. Barrow hadn’t seen you go out, we should have thought you were lost.”

“I was on important business,” said Paul.

“Yes.” Mr. Rayne agreed, “and he’s coming back later with his Savings Bank book.”



*A seven-year-old boy signing his Post Office Savings Bank book*

On an ordinary day Paul might have been scolded for going off alone, but a birthday is different, and so he escaped. At breakfast, when he had looked at his presents, he began to talk about the Post Office again.

“What made people start saving money that way?” he asked his father.

“Well,” he answered, “about a hundred years ago it was decided that poor people ought to have some proper place to keep their savings, rather than hoarding them in their houses, and perhaps having them stolen. The Post Office seemed the safest place, and so it took over the job. It drew up plans that made it especially easy for children and workmen to save money, and soon people all over the country took to the idea of saving both large and small amounts. That led to the Post Office being called the Banker of Mr. and Mrs. Everyman and their family.”



“That’s awfully interesting, Dad.” said John suddenly. “Are there any other ways one can save money through the Post Office?”

“Yes, of course,” his father answered. “You’ve got some National Savings certificates haven’t you? And to get those you put 6d. and 2s. 6d. stamps in a book, and then bought a certificate when you had saved £1. You can also buy Government Stocks and Bonds through the Post Office. In this way you can lend money to the Government who will pay you interest while they are using the money.”

“I’ve finished my breakfast,” announced Paul. “And the blue-faced clock says it’s almost nine. So let’s go back to the post office.”

## *Chapter 2*

### **About Post Offices**

“Come along,” said John, “let’s follow Paul like the animals going into the Ark—two by two.” So they trailed across the grassy strip to the post office, with Paul in front, carrying his Post Office Savings book, Mr. and Mrs. Hammond after him, and John and Susan at the back.

Mr. Rayne saw them coming, and opened the door with a smile. “Come in, most important customer,” he said to Paul, and the small boy led the way.

Mr. Rayne offered him a new pen, and soon he was signing his name on the first page of his book, where his father had first written it when Paul was a baby. Mr. Hammond held the book steady, and Paul’s tongue worked as hard as his fingers.

After that, their parents went back to the house, but the three young people stayed to wander round the post office and the shop.

“There, Paul,” said Mr. Rayne, “you can call on the Post Office Savings Department to help you at any time. And that means a staff of 14,000 people, you know.”

“Oh, and where are they all?” asked Paul.

“Most of them in London; others work at Harrogate in Yorkshire, Morecambe and Lytham St. Annes in Lancashire, and in the City of Durham. The Savings Department helps the country very much with all its work.”

“I bet it does,” said John suddenly. “Paul told us what you said, and I don’t suppose he made much of it up.”

While the signing was going on, the older boy had been looking round the post office. Only half of the room was used for such work, and the other part was a little shop, with bottles of sweets on the counter, sitting beside note paper, pens and pencils, groceries and fruit—in fact, everything that a well-stocked village shop should have.

“You must be kept busy all day long with both a post office and a shop,” John said to Mr. Rayne.

“Oh, my wife generally looks after the shop,” he answered. “But I do all the post office work myself. You see, this is what we call a scale-payment sub-office, where the sub-postmaster is responsible for everything.”

“What is ‘everything’?” asked the boy.

“Well, firstly the telephone and telegraph keep me busy. It would take a long time to tell you about them, because their work is so extensive. Then I issue and cash postal orders and money orders for large and small amounts.”

“That’s a sort of banking, isn’t it, in which they use money orders instead of cheques?” asked John. “Dad was speaking of it last night.”



*Young Customers in a village post office*

“Yes,” replied Mr. Rayne. “Then you’d be surprised to hear how many licences the village needs—wireless licences, television licences, dog licences and forms for driving licences. I seem always to be dealing with some sort of licence.”

“But I should have thought that selling stamps kept you busiest of all,” put in Susan, skipping up after a tour of the shop.

“Sometimes it does,” answered the sub-postmaster. “Everyone needs postage stamps now and then. And there are National Insurance and National Savings stamps, too—you’d hardly believe how many different kinds of them I have to keep.”

“What about pensions?” asked the girl. “Don’t people come to the post office to collect those?”

“Quite right, they do—old age and retirement pensions, widows’ pensions, allowances for soldiers’ wives and so on. Then there are also family allowances, which help parents to meet the expense of providing for either large or small families.”

He went on, “So you see that in a village a sub-postmaster can be kept busy, even if there is not much of any one thing to be done at a time.”

“It must be different in a large office, though,” said John wisely. “One person couldn’t possibly deal with so many things.”

“No,” said Mr. Rayne, “in a large post office everyone is a full-time post office worker, and the work is done by a number of people.”

“Do they find lots of people queue to buy stamps and get only one at a time?” asked Susan.

“Yes they do, and it’s a great help when people buy books of stamps. These books vary not only in price but also either contain stamps all of the same value or an assortment to meet different needs.”

“I’ve seen stamp machines outside post offices and at the sides of letter boxes” announced John. “They must be useful.”

“They are indeed.”

He added, “Besides that, at the parcel counters of some post offices you will find machines which print and issue gummed labels to be used on parcels in place of stamps. These show also the amount that has been paid, and the place and date of posting.”

“That sounds very useful,” John said approvingly. “The Post Office seems to be doing a great deal with machines now.”



“It is,” said a voice from behind them, “and in future it’s going to do a great deal more.”

The three swung round to see a postman watching them with a friendly grin. “I’ve been listening to everything,” he told them. “Now suppose you ask your mum and dad to let you all come to my cottage this evening, and I’ll tell you quite a lot more. You’ll be interested in my Post Office photographs, and I can certainly explain how exciting a letter’s journey is.”

“Oh, thanks !” cried John and Susan, while Paul squeaked, “I hope they’ll let us come !”



*A counter clerk selling stamps*



*Catching the post: the box about to be cleared*

## Chapter 3

### Value for Money

As they began dinner, John stated, "We've found another friend besides the postmaster."

"Who's that?" asked Mrs. Hammond.

"He's the postman, and his name's Mr. Ridings," shouted Paul, with his mouth full of potato. "He wants us to go and see him after tea. Can we?"

"That depends," answered his mother. "We'll ask Mrs. Barrow about him."

When the landlady came in to clear the table, she had to answer questions from them all. "Oh, yes," she assured them, "Jem Ridings is a nice chap, and very interested in his work. You kids will have a grand time talking to him."

So that settled things, and as soon as tea was over they galloped down the village to the little thatched cottage which they had already found.

Jem Ridings was waiting for them, with a huge sack of photographs on a table. "These fit in with what I'm going to say," he explained.

John picked up the photograph of a post office in the Lake District and said, "That's a good picture, but it looks miles away from anywhere. I can't imagine letters arriving there every day."

"Oh, but they do," Jem said. "The postman coming out of the gateway will probably have either a motor or a bicycle to get him round. And there will be one delivery of letters and parcels each day, with perhaps another later."

"But how about collecting the letters?" asked John.

"In country places that's usually done at the same time," Jem replied. Then he went on, "The Post Office is proud of



*A postman delivering a parcel*

the fact that most letters are delivered in towns and villages between 7 o'clock and 9.15 each morning, and in all more out of the way places by mid-day. Except in the country, parcels are usually delivered a little later than letters."

He added, "It takes thousands of postal vans to collect letters from many more thousands of letter boxes. In London I often think they look like a stream of large red ants when I see them running to and from the main post offices."

"At home we can post letters up to eight o'clock at night in Redburn," said Susan. "But here Mrs. Barrow says the last collection is at a quarter to six. Why's that?"

"Because Redburn is a town," Jem explained. "Most towns have a collection between 8 and 8.30 p.m. from some of the street boxes as well as a late collection from the Head Office."

Then John asked, “ Why are we told so often, ‘ Post early in the day ’ ? ”

“ Because it makes the Post Office’s work so much lighter when a rush of letters doesn’t come at the last minute. So business firms with a great many letters often choose to catch an early collection, and so help the Post Office.”

“ I think we have to pay a lot for a letter,” stated John.

“ I don’t, my lad,” answered Jem promptly. “ Have you thought what you get for it ? ”

“ Not really,” he answered.

“ Then listen ! First you buy the stamp, perhaps from a machine, but probably from a counter clerk. There’s the first service. Afterwards you write your letter and post it. Since it hasn’t legs to run alone to the post office, it must be collected



*At the facing table (see page 20)*

by a postman, who either walks, cycles, or drives a van. Then, does he push the letter on the first train going in the direction of its address?"

"No, of course not," laughed John. "Letters and parcels have to be date-stamped and sorted."

"Yes, but before the sorting there's what we call 'segregating' (or separating). In the box where your own letter has been posted there will be both letters and small parcels, which we usually refer to as packets, and these have to be separated from each other. All the letters and packets collected by the postman are tipped on to a large table. Here the packets are picked out to be dealt with separately as they will not go through a stamp-cancelling machine. Then the short letters and long letters are picked up separately. We call this facing".

"What a funny word," said Paul, who had been listening hard.

"It means arranging the letters so that all stamps are in the right position for going through the cancelling machine."

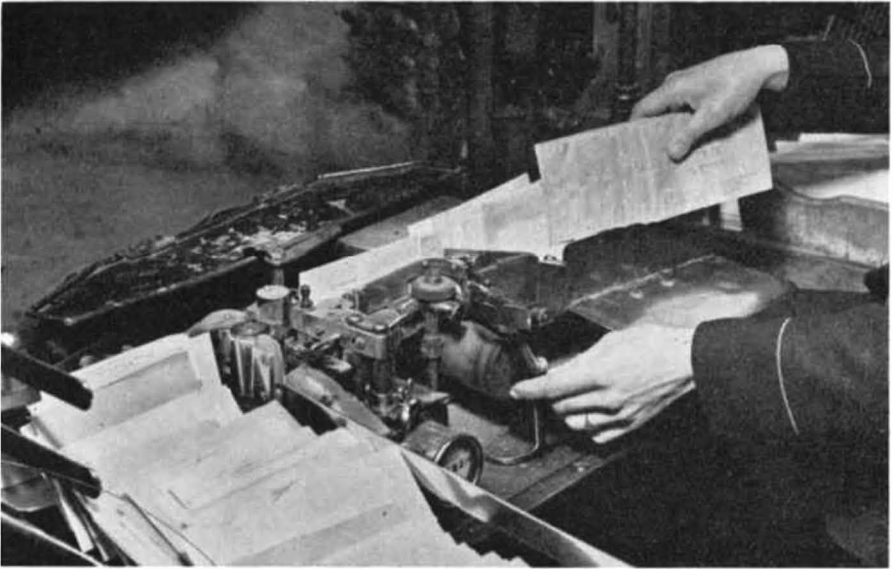
"That's for postmarking them, isn't it?" asked Susan.

"It is, my dear. And let me tell you it's not a bit funny when people put a stamp in each corner of the envelope. That means the cancelling has to be done by hand—as parcels are—instead of by machine. Here's a picture that helps to explain a stamp-cancelling machine."

"Why are stamps cancelled?" asked Susan.

"So that people can't use them again, silly," said John promptly.

"That's right. Then comes the sorting that starts your letter in the right direction," went on Jem. "Every letter goes into one of forty-eight pigeon-holes, or divisions, and each pigeon-hole represents one county or group of counties, or else some city or town."



*The stamp-cancelling machine*

“ Why should there be forty-eight ? ” John asked curiously.

“ Because no sorter can stretch his arm like a piece of elastic, and forty-eight divisions are as many as he can deal with. Satisfied ? ”

“ Quite, thank you, ” answered the boy.

“ After that comes another sorting, so that separate bundles can be made up for as many towns and counties as possible. The bundles are then put into bags and some of them go straight to the post office in the town in which they are to be delivered ; others have to pass through yet another sorting office before they reach their final destination. They travel by mail van, by train or even by air. And the train may perhaps be a Travelling Post Office. ”

John almost bounced off his chair. “ Why, I’ve heard of that ! ” he cried. “ You have some pictures of one, so please tell us more. ”



*Sorting letters (see page 21)*



Jem said, “ I mean to in due course. But we must deliver our letter and earn the money paid for the stamp first. At the end of their journey, letters come again to a sorting office, and slip into more pigeon-holes. These may either represent different parts of the town or village round about or else take in just one postman’s round. (But very often they have to be sorted again and divided among several postmen.)

“ The postman then puts his letters in the right order for delivering them. And if you don’t think every letter or card has earned its stamp by the time it’s delivered, then I’ll eat my postman’s badge ! ” ended Jem.

They laughed, and John said, “ Now for the Travelling Post Office, please.”

“ Not yet. First I’ll explain how you can help to send



*Sealing a mail bag before despatch (see page 21)*

letters and parcels on safe journeys. Each year the Post Office deals with 11,000,000,000 letters and parcels, so it says 'Thank you very much' when they are properly addressed.

"Do you remember I told you that after stamps had been cancelled the letters were sorted into 48 pigeon-holes? Most of these will have the names of the counties on them—so make sure to include the county in the address (except for the largest cities, like London and Glasgow). Then when the letters are sorted again the sorter will want to know to which Post Town they are going."

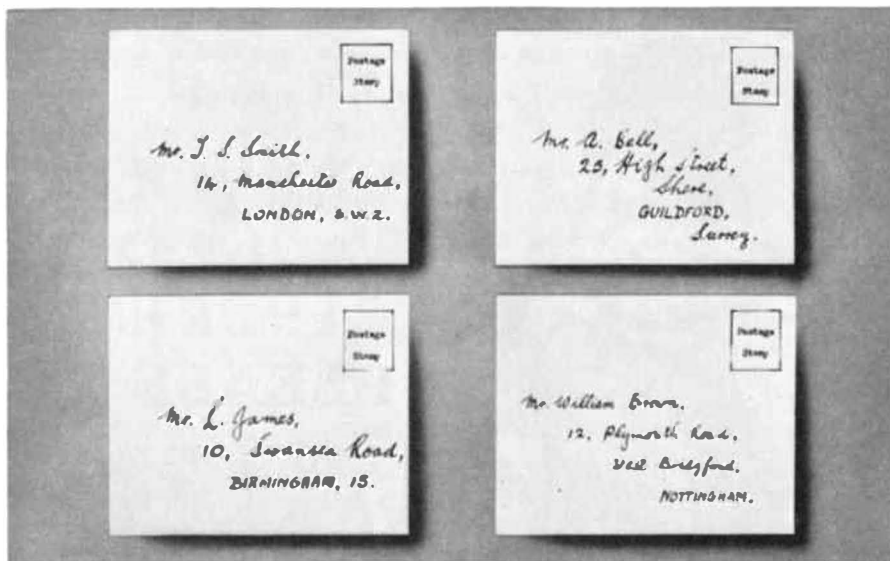
"What is a Post Town?" interrupted Susan.

"The town that deals with all letters for a particular district," replied Jem. "For instance, letters for Idfield and other villages round here go from all over the country to OXFORD, where they are sorted and continue their journey by van. As the Post Town is so important we ask you to write it in block letters like this—OXFORD.

"You'll put the name of the village in of course—and don't forget the house number and the road. Even though I know practically everyone in Idfield they make it much quicker to put the letters in the right order. And if I'm on holiday the chap who does my job is lost without them.

"Now, here are a couple of envelopes that would make things clear to all the sorters who will have to handle them. One is addressed to this village in the way I've been telling you, but the other is addressed to Glasgow. As that is a big town it is divided into postal districts, and so it's just as important to put the correct district, such as 'C.2,' on those letters as it is to put 'Idfield' on letters coming here.

"Then you should stick the stamp in the top right-hand corner—for the sake of the cancelling machine. If possible, do please put numbers of houses, and not names, and don't use the words 'local,' 'by' or 'near' in an address."



*How to address letters correctly. Note particularly the POST TOWN*



*Heartbreak Corner, Mount Pleasant (see page 26)*



“Is that all?” asked Susan.

“Oh, no. The Post Office has leaflets which tell people other things about correct addressing of both letters and parcels. You know, about one parcel in every few hundred has to be repacked because it has not been properly tied up, or else because somebody else’s parcel has damaged it.

“In London, there’s a special section in Mount Pleasant Sorting Office called ‘Heartbreak Corner.’ And that’s the home of parcels which have come to grief, and so have become heartbreaks for the people who will never get them.”

“What a sad name!” exclaimed Susan. “Well, if you’ll tell me, I’ll try and remember how to pack parcels properly.”

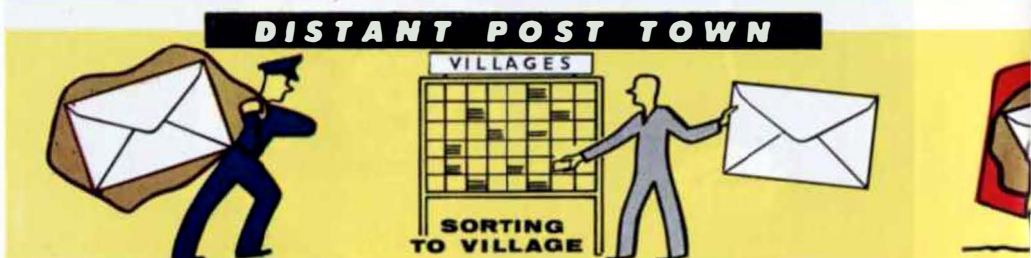
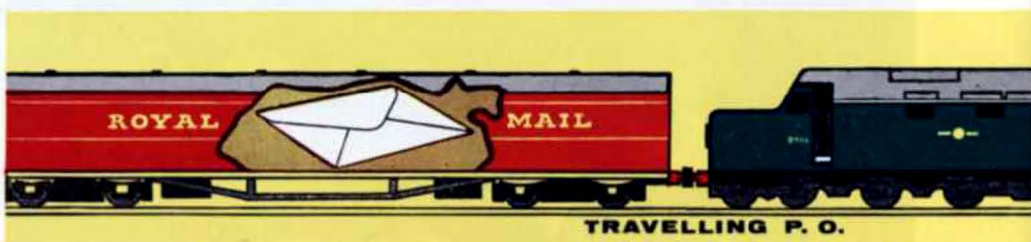
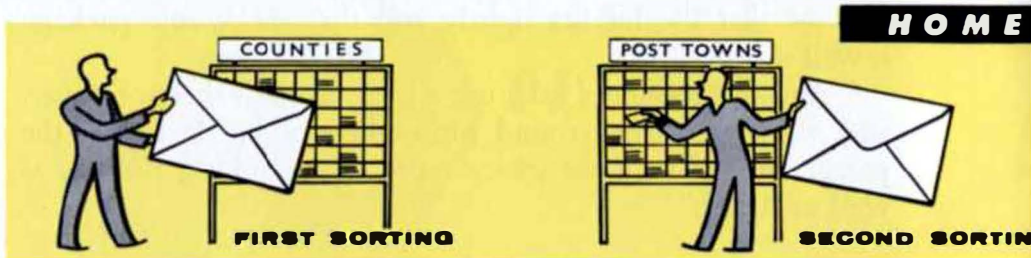
“ Good girl,” he approved. “ Always use strong brown paper and good string and tie your knots tightly. Don’t leave empty spaces inside the parcel, but stuff crumpled paper, cotton wool, or some other packing into the gaps. Of course, anything fragile should be packed in a strong box made of metal, wood or fibreboard, and surrounded with at least 2 inches of soft packing like wood wool. If there are two items they should be wrapped separately inside the box ; and see that the lid fits tightly and that the whole package is well sealed.

“ And for goodness’ sake use a large enough sheet of paper, and wrap the string round more than once. It makes the parcel safer if you use sticky tape, or something similar, as well as string.”



*The parcel counter*

# THE JOURNEY



# OF A LETTER

## TOWN

### FACING & STAMP CANCELLING



## TOWN

### RAILWAY



### WAYSIDE NET APPARATUS



### VILLAGE P. O.



### DELIVERY





*Ledger cards at the Post Office Savings Bank (see page 32)*

“What about the addressing? Is that the same as for letters?” Susan asked.

“Yes, but you should write ‘From’ and then your own name and address on the left-hand side of the parcel, at right-angles to the other address,” Jem told her. “And inside the parcel always put a slip showing both names and addresses. That helps the Post Office no end if things go wrong. Oh, and don’t forget, ‘Post early in the day’.”

He laughed and said, “Well, you’ve been very good to listen to all that. So now I’ll show you some photographs, and tell you about the Travelling Post Office.”





*The guard signals the 'all clear' to the mail train.*

## Chapter 4

### Travelling Post Office

“These are some of the things you’ve been hearing about today,” said Jem. He showed them first a photograph of a small boy signing his Post Office Savings Book, and Paul chirped, “That’s awfully like me this morning!”

“No, he’s better looking,” teased John. “What’s this a picture of, Jem?”

“It’s a card tray, holding Savings Bank reference cards at Head Office,” Jem answered.

“Then I shall have a card like that,” said Paul proudly. “Mr. Rayne told me so.”

“Don’t crow—we all shall,” John ordered.

John and Susan were picking up other photographs, but Jem said, “You’d better leave those until you’ve heard about the Travelling Post Office.”

“That sounds just like something magic,” stated Paul. “Is it magic?”

“I almost believe it is,” twinkled Jem. “It can pick up and put out bags of letters while rushing along at a magic speed.”

“Then please go on,” begged Paul.

So Jem began, “The first Travelling Post Office was used in 1838, and was a horse box, fitted up as a carriage for sorting mail during the train’s journey. It ran on the Grand Junction Railway, between Birmingham and Manchester and Liverpool, and it was a great success. So soon the Travelling Post Office (or T.P.O.) became part of the postal organisation.

“Even the first specially built carriage had an apparatus that could receive and despatch mail while the train was running at full speed. There’s your magic, Paul, and soon I’ll show you



*The Euston-Aberdeen Travelling Post Office at Euston.*

a picture of what happens.”

“Oh, good,” answered the small boy.

“The first T.P.O. from London (Euston) ran to a place a little further north than Bletchley, to where Watling Street, the old coach road, crosses the railway. Very soon, however, it was going on to Preston, in Lancashire. And now the T.P.O.s in Great Britain cover nearly three million miles a year. So you can guess how important they are.”

“Can you tell us about any particular one?” asked John.

“Yes, there’s the Down Special, which runs every night between Euston and Aberdeen, and carries no passengers—only mail. It does the journey of 540 miles in less than 12 hours, and sometimes is hurtling along at almost incredible speed.

“The sorting carriages are about the length of an ordinary passenger coach. Along the whole of one side are frames for sorting, while on the other side of the carriages hooks are placed to hang the empty mail bags on. Wait a minute, and I’ll find you a photograph.”

Jem fished it out, saying, “There, that explains better than I can.”

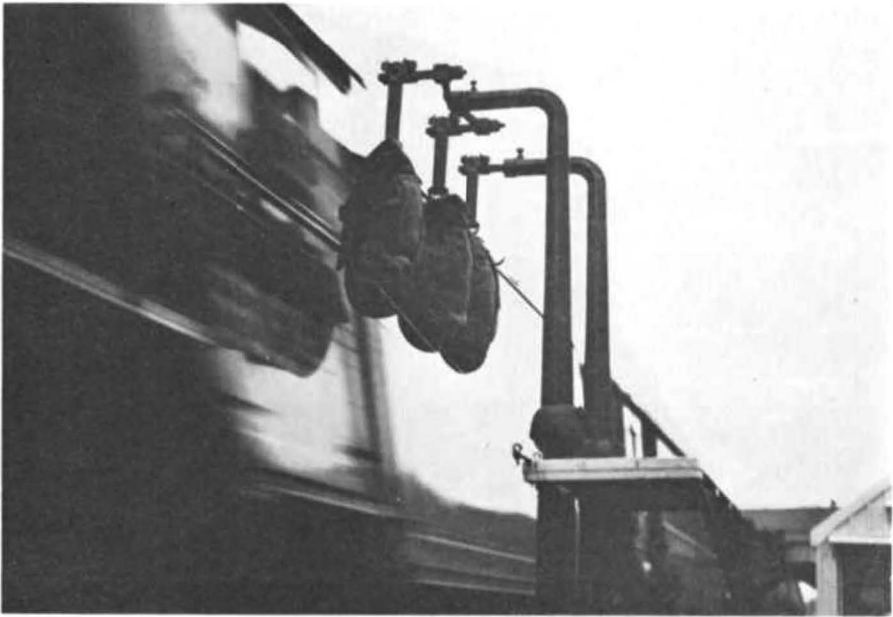
He continued, “During the first part of its journey, the T.P.O. collects mails to be sorted, and when this has been done it distributes them. But it doesn’t always stop at stations for this.”

“How does it get the mail bags on and off, then?” asked Susan, looking puzzled. “Is it with what you call ‘apparatus’?”

“Yes,” said Jem. “Here, let me show you another picture.”  
He found the photograph of a train going at full speed



*Inside a sorting carriage of a travelling post office.*

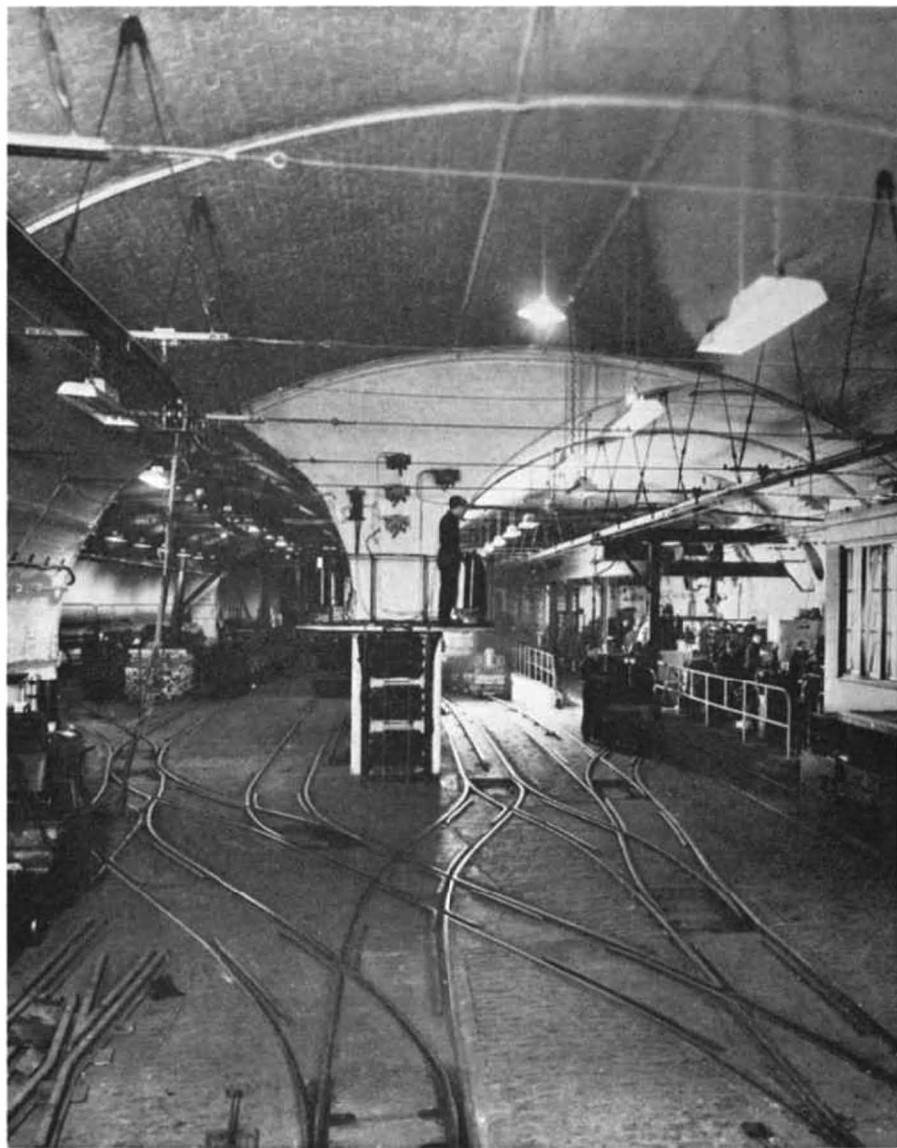


*Mail pouches at a wayside standard about to be picked up at speed  
by a travelling post office*

past a standard at the side of a railway track, and about to pick up a mail bag which hung in a strong leather pouch from one arm of the standard. Below the standard was a net fastened to a frame, and that, Jem explained, was to receive the mail bags that the mail train would fling out.

“But how do the pouches get into the carriage?” asked Susan, still mystified.

“A net is hanging outside the mail carriage, and waiting for them,” explained Jem. “You can just see it here, and it is moved into position by a long lever inside the carriage. This net is in a frame, too, and the speed at which the train passes the standard and takes up the pouch makes the net partly close and fling the pouch on to the floor of the carriage. In two seconds it is back in position, and ready to gather up



*Post Office Railway: engineering depot and workshop*

pouches from other roadside standards.”

“ I knew it was magic ! ” cried Paul.

And Susan asked, “ Does the same sort of thing happen when mail is put out from the train ? ”

“ Much the same. Then the pouches are hung on to the ends of iron bars, called delivery arms, which are extended from the side of the carriage as the train approaches the apparatus point and the pouches are then dropped into the wayside net. The delivery arms spring back into the side of the carriage immediately the pouches are dropped. You’ll be surprised to know that the train can drop mail and pick it up in less than a quarter of a second.”

“ Well, it’s certainly wonderful,” said John.

Paul had been examining the photographs again, and suddenly he said, “ What a funny little engine ! ”

Jem leaned over him to look. “ That belongs to the Post Office Railway,” he explained. “ But it’s rather too late to talk about it now.”

“ When can we then ? ” persisted Paul. “ Tomorrow ? ”

“ Yes, I can manage that,” replied Jem, laughing at his eagerness. “ Same time and same place if your mum and dad will let you come.”

## *Chapter 5*

### **Post Office Railway**

Bursting into their sitting-room, Paul shouted, “ Jem says that if ‘ Mum and Dad ’ agree he’ll talk to us about the Post Office Railway tomorrow. Please, please say they do ! ”

They did, and so next evening the three were in Jem’s

cottage once more, and looking at photographs. Paul picked up one, and said, "Here's a tiny train coming out of a tiny tunnel. It looks like a toy."

"But it has a lot more work to do," answered Jem. "Do you know that every day the Post Office Railway trains rumble under the streets of London with 45,000 mail bags? And it's the only railway of its kind in the world."

"What's the idea of the railway?" asked John. "Does it speed up the delivery of letters and parcels?"

"I should say so," Jem answered. "And it takes a lot of traffic from the busy streets of London, which, as you can imagine, is a good thing on a foggy day."

"How many stations are there?" John asked.

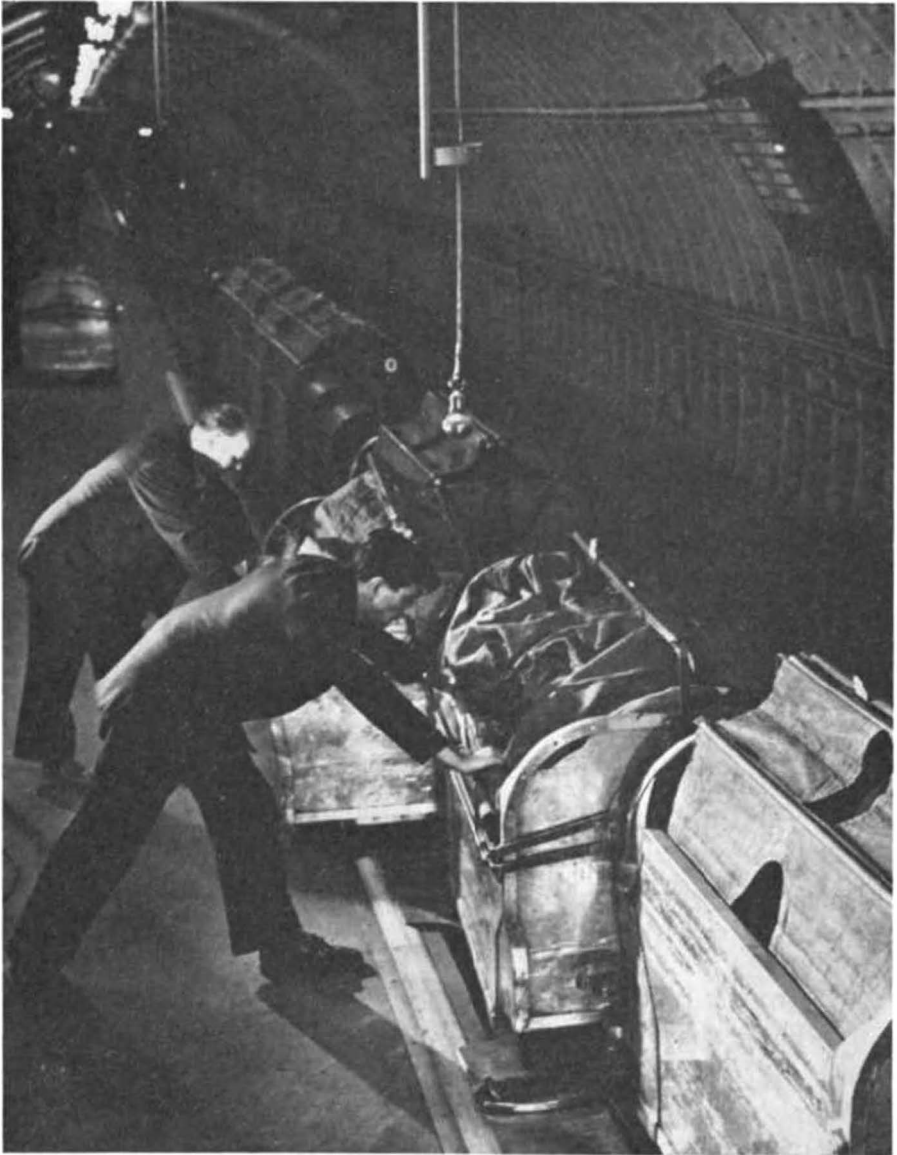
"Eight. The largest one is Mount Pleasant, which has 500 trains passing through it daily."

"And passengers in them?" Susan demanded.



*Post Office Railway: a train (rear view) travelling under the streets of London*





*Post Office Railway: loading carriages with containers of mail bags (see page 41)*



*Post Office Railway: control cabin*

“No, there isn’t even a driver on the trains. They are controlled electrically from stations with platforms looking rather like those of passenger Tube Railway stations. Until they draw near to the stations, the trains run through a tunnel which has a double track. Then the tunnel divides into two, each with a single track. But at the stations there are two separate tracks, one for stopping trains, and one for non-stop trains.”

“Are the platforms long?” John wanted to know.

“They vary. Mount Pleasant has the longest, 313 feet, and the shortest is 90 feet. There are reversing loops for trains, and some stations have sidings, too.”

Jem went on, “Between the stations, the trains’ speed is nearly 35 miles an hour, but as the track slopes they are slowed down when they approach a station, and given a good

start when they leave it.”

“How big are their loads?” asked John.

“Oh, yes, I mustn’t forget that. Each train has one or two cars, and there are four mail-bag containers on every car.”

“Do both letters and parcels go that way?” asked Susan.

“Yes, each container has either fifteen bags of letter mail or six bags of parcel mail.”

“If I was a parcel, I’d burst my paper and string, and ride on the engine,” declared Paul.

“I guess you would,” answered Jem. “And you’d rush down the spiral chute on to the platform, or else ride down on the lift—you see, both chutes and lifts take the bags from sorting offices down to platforms. Then you’d have a ride in what we call a container, and be loaded on to the train.”

As he picked up some photographs, Jem laughed and said, “But you can’t pack into a mail bag, so you’d better look at these, and pretend you’re there.” And he showed them Train No. 28 coming through a tunnel into a station, Train No. 29 patiently waiting for its two cars to be loaded, and the workshops where the rolling stock is maintained.

Then Susan saw another picture, labelled, “Control Cabin Switch Board,” and asked what that meant.

“Oh,” answered Jem, “as the trains have no drivers they’re controlled from switch cabins on some stations. But on other stations the controls are entirely automatic.”

“Does the mail come from all over the country?” John asked.

“Yes, from Britain and overseas as well,” Jem told him. “In London, Paddington and Liverpool Street main line stations receive the mail and then send it by the chutes and conveyors to the Post Office Railway platforms there.”

“But what about the other big stations in London?” asked the boy. “You were telling us about Euston and the



*Using a self service machine at a large railway station (see page 45)*



*A counter clerk operating a parcel label issuing machine (see page 45)*

T.P.O.—doesn't it have the Post Office Railway there, too ?”

“No, unfortunately not. If it had, this little railway could connect up with trains going north, and speed mail still more. But quite possibly some day it will run further in London.

“There,” he ended, “that's the story of a railway that started carrying mail in 1927, and is like no other railway in the world.”

“It's a jolly interesting story, thank you,” said Susan.

“What are you going to talk about next ?” asked Paul.

“Please, and if you don't mind,” John corrected him. “I'd like to know something about the beginning of the Post Office, Jem, please,” he said.

“You mean its history ? Yes, that's interesting, too. But now I ought to tell you about the machines that help post office work, and will help still more in the future. That's what we call 'mechanisation'.”

“Please go ahead,” begged the three, and settled down to listen.

## Chapter 6

### Making Machines Work

“We did hear a bit about machines from Mr. Rayne,” said John. “He told us of one that issues gummed labels to use on parcels instead of stamps.”

“But why should machines be used ? I'd much rather see the postman come up the path than have a machine roll along and fling letters at me !” Susan declared.

Jem laughed. “You'll probably still see the postman for



*A counter clerk serving a customer (see page 45)*

a long time," he said, "for so far no machine has been invented that can 'fling letters' at you."

"I'm glad of that," answered Susan. "I like to meet nice friendly postmen."

Jem continued, "There are lots of things a machine will never be able to do. But the postal service costs a great deal of money, as it's at work twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week—which means all the time. It takes a very large staff for that, and therefore nearly three-quarters of post office money goes in wages."

"How do you know all this?" demanded John.

"The Postmaster General has told us. So he says that to reduce costs and help everyone to do their best work we must use machines. These are some of those which are being introduced now.

“ I expect your mum sometimes goes to a self-service shop, where the customer takes what she wants and then pays for it. Well, it will soon be easy for anyone to get books of stamps, stamped envelopes and letter-cards, as well as single stamps, through self-service machines.

“ On the other side of the counter, the clerk is helped by the parcel label issuing machine that Mr. Rayne has already told you about and experiments have been made with other types of machines too. But there are, of course, some things that can be done only by clerks, and so we shan't see them all swept away suddenly.”

Jem added, “ And nowadays postmen do have mechanical help, through motors that take them long distances, and electric trucks—like milkmen's—which help walking postmen with parcel deliveries.

“ There are other machines that will help with the moving of mail in sorting offices, and between sorting offices and station platforms.” Then Jem asked, “ Do you remember what has to be done to get mail ready for sorting ? ”

“ Yes,” John answered. “ Letters are separated from packets—I think you called that ‘ segregating ’—and then short letters are separated from long ones. After that, you said, the letters were put with the stamps all in the same corner but I forget what you called it.”

“ Facing,” Jem reminded him. “ Yes, and then they go into the machine that cancels the stamps and adds a postmark. We now have machines that can do all those things, and I think I must tell you about ALF.”

“ Who's he ? ” John asked curiously.

“ It is an Automatic Letter Facer, and works as hard as any postman. First it receives the letters from the separating machine, and puts them into stacks with the stamps already cancelled and facing the same way.”

“What a wonderful machine,” cried Susan. “I’d like to see it, only it would be much too busy to bother with me! Are there other machines, too?”

“Yes, and some sound as clever as ALF. One sorts letters into pigeon-holes, instead of the postman doing this by hand. The postman sits at the end of the machine with a keyboard in front of him, and the machine shows him letters one at a time. After he has read the address, the man presses two keys, which tell the machine into which of 144 pigeon-holes the letter should go. When the machine has sent that letter on its way to the correct pigeon-hole it takes up the next letter, and shows that to the postman.”

“And does it save a lot of time?” asked John.

“Indeed, yes: work can be done twice as quickly, for the postman can sort letters into 144 pigeon-holes, where before,



*Letter sorting machine*





*Parcel sorting machinery*

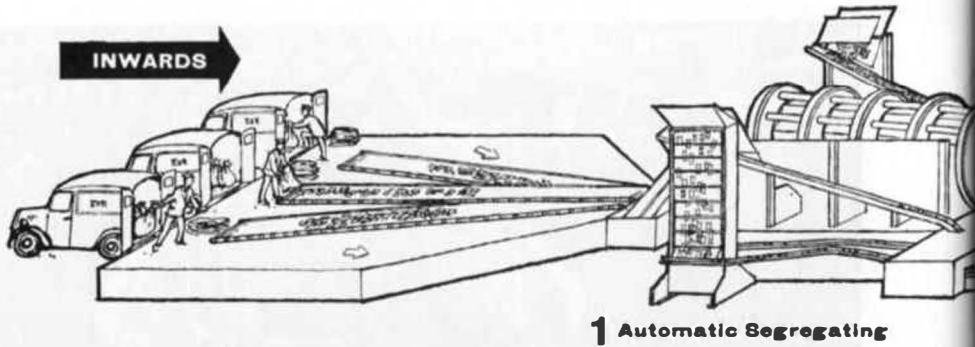
as I told you, he could only reach 48 when sorting by hand. But he can also work at his own speed, stopping to make out the badly-written addresses, and hurrying up over the others.”

“Are there machines that will sort parcels, too?” asked Paul, who thought it was time he came in somewhere.

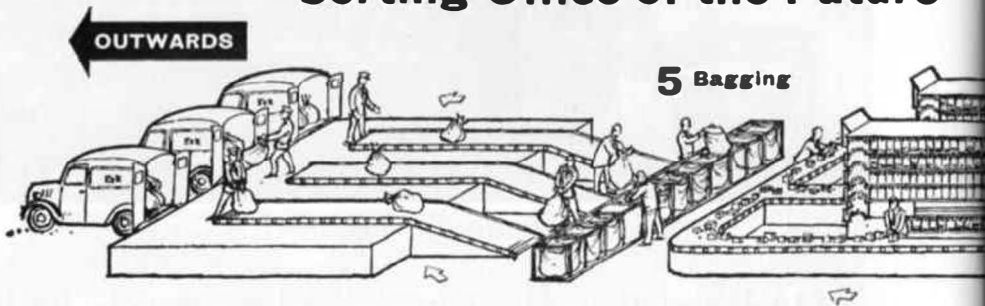
“There are, although parcels are not so easy to sort, because they are so many sizes, shapes and weights. One machine has been invented which begins sorting when a button is pressed. In time, I expect that will be working in some of the larger sorting offices.”

“I hope one comes to Redburn,” stated Paul. “Then I’ll ask the post office people to let me press the button sometimes.”

“All those are present inventions,” said Jem. “In the future many other things will come along, especially to help with sorting. They will come all the quicker if the public—



## Sorting Office of the Future



that is you, your mum and dad, and your friends, help the Post Office, too.”

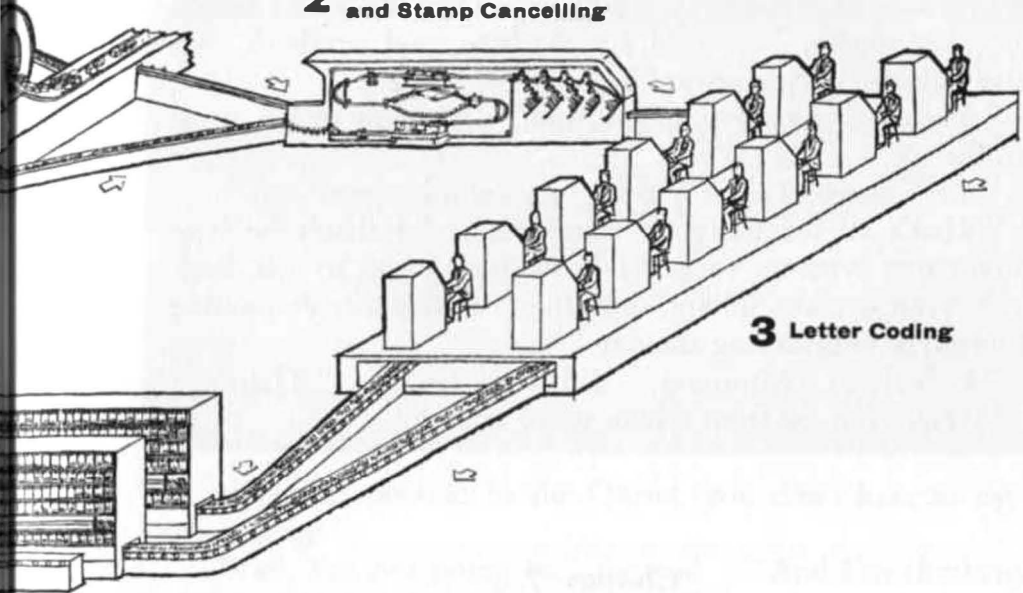
“But how can we?” asked Susan, looking puzzled.

“Think of this,” said Jem. “Each letter is sorted three times at least before it gets to the postman who pushes it through your letter box. Wouldn’t it save time and money if sorting could be made easier by everybody using a sort of abbreviated address which could be read by a machine and dealt with more quickly.”

“Of course,” agreed Susan.

“That could be done if people would use special codes of a few letters and numbers (which the Post Office would

## 2 Automatic Letter Facing and Stamp Cancelling



## 3 Letter Coding

## 4 Automatic Letter Sorting

give them) on their notepaper and envelopes. It might not be easy for them at first, but they would soon drop into things, and if they would try this idea when the time comes the Post Office could be helped enormously. So, you see, it depends on you, for you are the public of tomorrow.”

“Well, I’ll think about it,” promised Paul, “and I hope there’ll be lots more machines by when I’m grown up, for I like machines. What’s this?” he asked, holding up a drawing he had found.

“That gives us an idea of what the sorting office of tomorrow may be like,” Jem explained. “Let’s look at it together.” He showed them a diagram which explained how in the

future when mail bags were brought in it might be possible to do the segregating, letter facing and stamp cancelling with several machines and very few men. Then the letters would be given codes, be sorted by machine, and go back into mail bags for their outward journey.

"*There's magic, if you like, kid,*" said John to his small brother.

"Yes," agreed Paul, "and we may see it happen."

"That's all for tonight," stated Jem. "I shan't be here tomorrow evening, so don't break your necks to get back from your cycling, hiking, motoring, or whatever you amuse yourselves with during the day."

"I shall go swimming," said Paul firmly. "There's a baby river not far from where we're staying."

## Chapter 7

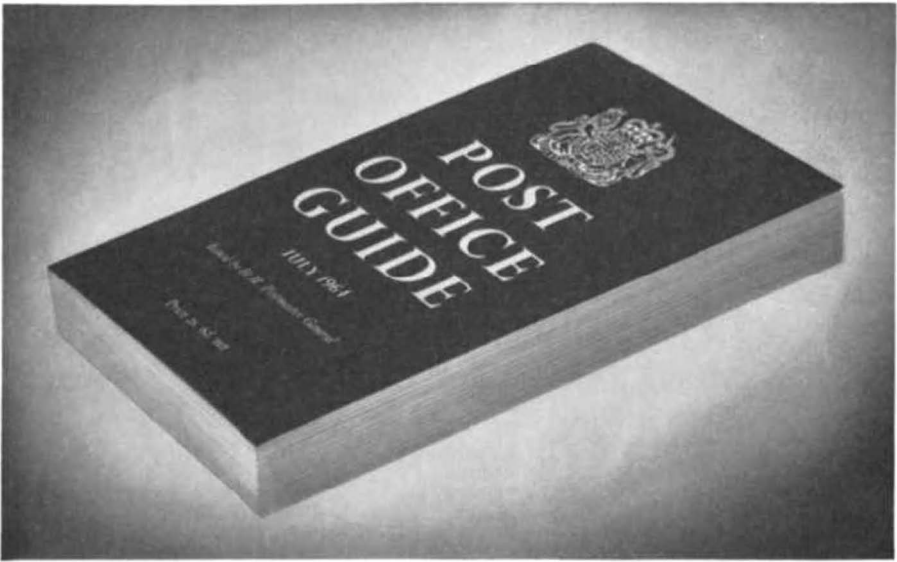
### More About the Post Office

A few mornings later the three strolled over the road to buy chocolate and sweets in the Post Office shop. But John soon moved to the other side, and picked up a fat red book.

"'Post Office Guide'," he read. "I guess that will tell me a lot of things I want to know."

"More than you'll ever remember," answered Mr. Rayne, coming from behind the grille. "If you want to be amused, look at what it says in the Miscellaneous part of the Inland Post section."

So John did, and was soon telling Susan, "If you send



an address or petition to the Queen, you don't have to pay any postage."

"Well, I'm not going to," she said. "And I'm thinking of chocolate, not post office, just now."

So John shared what he was discovering with Mr. Rayne. "It says here that postmasters are not bound to give change when they are being paid, and anyone who receives money can not question it being the right amount after they have taken it away from the counter."

"That's quite true," agreed the postmaster. "And a bit further along it tells you that the sender can be made to pay a charge on a packet if it has been posted unpaid, or underpaid, or if it can't be delivered, or is not accepted."

"I'll be careful what I send then," laughed John. "Though I could get anything back if I changed my mind."

"Oh, no, you couldn't," Mr. Rayne said promptly. "Nothing can be taken back once it has been posted, or handed in, even if you can prove that you are the person who sent it."

“ You may not have it back even to add something, or to put more stamps on.” He went on, “ On my side, I’m not allowed to give information about letters or postal packets, except to the person they’re addressed to. And I mustn’t inform people of anything I know is private.”

“ This is a very interesting book, and I should like to read it through,” stated John. “ But that would take weeks, and we’re only here for a little while.”

“ Get a copy of the Post Office Guide at the Redburn Post Office when you go home,” Mr. Rayne suggested. “ And it will tell you more of the things you’ve been asking me and Jem Ridings about. But what is it you specially want to know ? ”

“ I’d like to learn some Post Office history, and that’s not given in the Guide.”

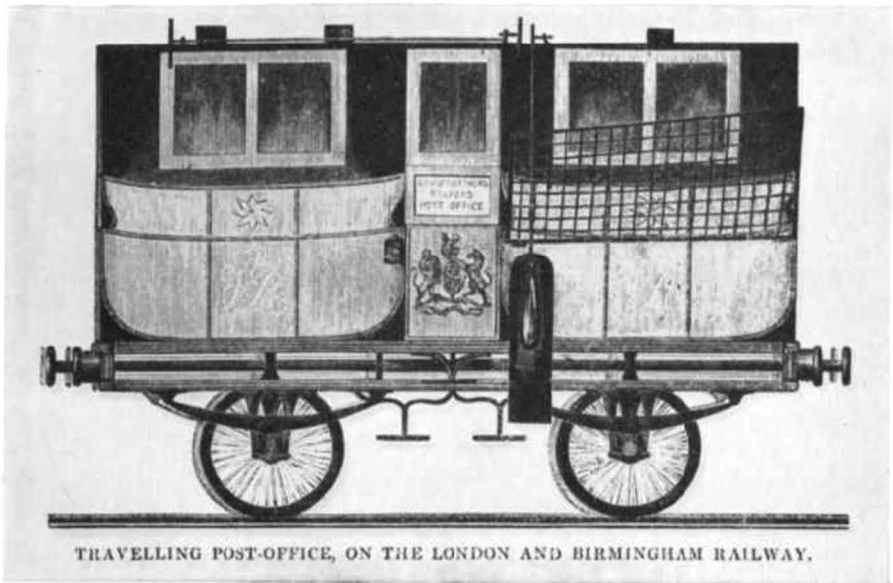
“ No, there isn’t room for everything,” replied Mr. Rayne. “ There *are* books about the history, though. . . . The Post Office has a long and exciting story, which links up with the Middle Ages, when the King’s Couriers, or King’s Messengers, had to be ready to set out at all times of day or night.

“ They rode along bridle paths with their messages, and were in danger of being waylaid and robbed, because they often had money and valuables with them, too.”

Then he shook his head, and said, “ But if I start talking of Post Office history I shall never end. One Postmaster General said that the Post Office was like a great tree, with its roots in the past. This tree started to grow very simply over four hundred years ago, in King Henry VIII’s reign, and it has gone on growing ever since.

“ So now we have one of the finest Post Offices in the world, and one that has been a pioneer in so many ways. Do you know what a pioneer is ? ” he asked suddenly.

“ Isn’t it a person who does something that has never been



*Early sorting carriage, 1838 (see page 32)*

done before?" John asked hopefully.

"That's a pretty good answer. Well, the Post Office in England was the first to start a penny postage, and to have the same rate of postage all over the country. It had the first Travelling Post Office, too."

"Oh, Jem told us about that," said John. "Any other firsts?"

"Yes, the first adhesive postage stamp. Do you know what that was?"

Almost at once, John answered, "Wasn't it the Penny Black?"

"Indeed it was, the very famous Penny Black, issued in Queen Victoria's reign, in 1840, which has become one of the most sought after stamps in the world."

"Dad's got one," stated John, "and he says he'll give it



*The "Penny Black"*

to me some day."

"You're lucky," answered Mr. Rayne. "I don't need to tell you to take care of it."

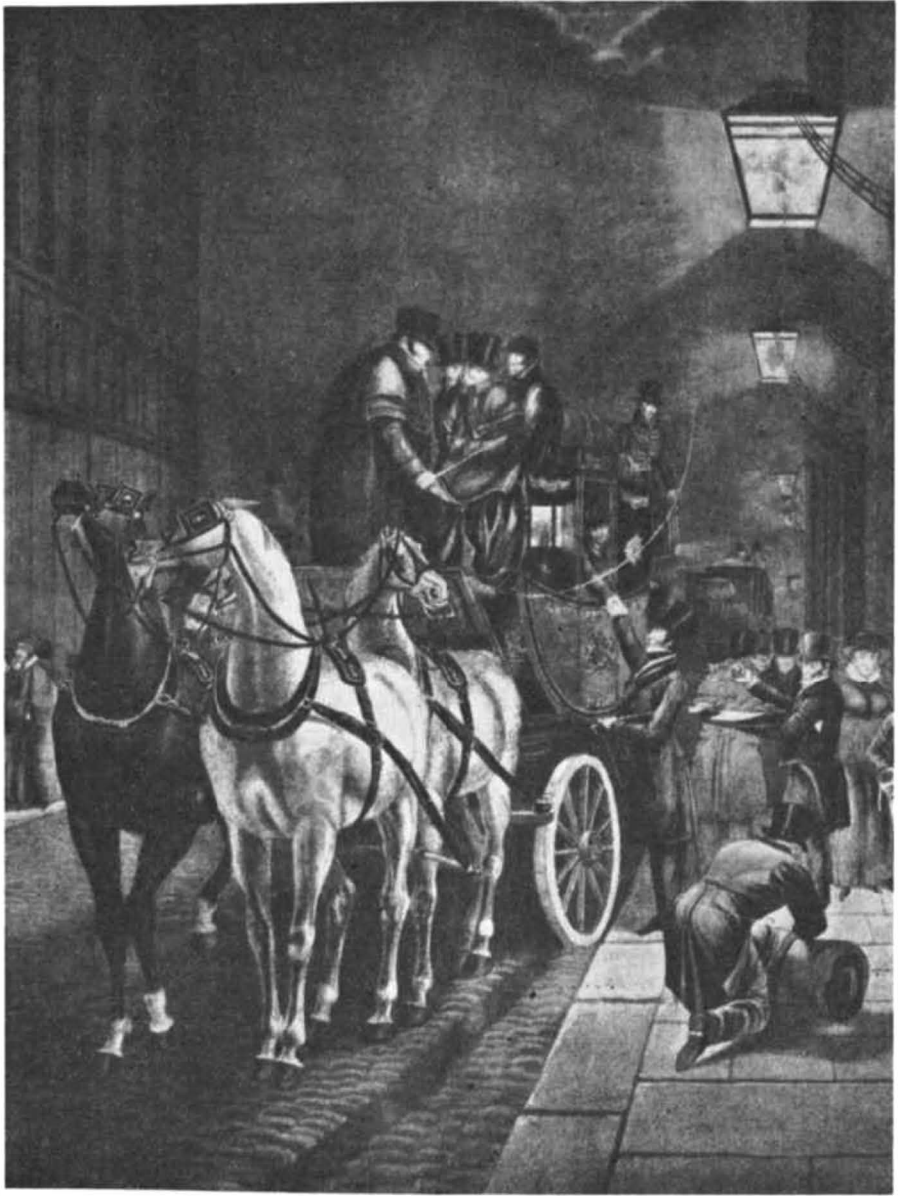
"You bet I will," promised John. He flipped over a few more pages of the Post Office Guide, and said, "All the foreign places named here make me feel I'm starting a voyage round the world."

"We'd better keep to England at the moment," Mr. Rayne said smiling. "What next?"

John was looking at the list of contents now, and he suddenly exclaimed, "Telecommunications—why we haven't said a word about those! I suppose that means telephones and telegrams, doesn't it?"

"It does, and other things, too." Mr. Rayne answered. "But that's not really my story. And if I stopped to tell





*Mail coach leaving the General Post Office in Lombard Street, London, early in 19th century*

you about them this little office would go to sleep.”

As John looked very disappointed, Mr. Rayne added, “ But I’ll try to find someone who can answer your questions. How long are you staying in Idfield ? ”

“ Another week,” answered the boy.

“ That’ll do. You know, you’ve learnt a good deal in the last few days. You may believe now that the Post Office is one of the biggest businesses in the world. It has always looked after the country’s trade and communications, and for three hundred years has tried to improve them. The Second World War made its task difficult, but since then it has gone ahead quickly, and is still doing so.”

“ You and Jem Ridings are both very keen on the Post Office,” said John thoughtfully. “ Are all Post Office workers like that ? ”

“ I suppose most of them are,” answered Mr. Rayne. “ You see, the keen ones have a sense of tradition—that is, they want to carry on and improve the work that others have started. We are proud to belong to a team.”

He paused, and then said, “ I’m sure that the Post Office has more to do with just ordinary folk, like you and me, than any other branch of the Civil Service. . . . And its great aim is to serve the public as well, and with as little expense, as possible.”

“ I’ll remember that,” answered John. “ And, please, you won’t forget that I want to hear about telephones and telegraphs, will you ? ”

“ I certainly won’t,” Mr. Rayne promised. “ And now, shoot off and enjoy yourself, but come back later in the week.”

*There is another book by Mary Moore about John, Susan and Paul, called “Our Telephone and Telegraph Services.”*





For details of other publications about the Post Office for use in schools, please enquire in writing from your Head Postmaster or Telephone Manager.