

Stamps Story

Delivering His Majesty's Mails.

I.

Have you ever stopped to think of the interesting travels of a letter after it has been dropped into the street pillar box and of the many people who will handle it before it reaches its destination? Perhaps it will travel across great oceans through tropic heat to find the end of its journey amid the snows of countries near the Arctic ocean.

But wherever your letter travels, that wonderful department of every nation, the Post Office is responsible for its safety and in this series of pictures in your page you will see how His Majesty's Mails have been delivered for more than 150 years.

Fifty years before the battle of Waterloo the Letter Woman was a familiar figure in England. Dressed in green with a bright red cape, she carried a bell which summoned householders to the street to receive their letters and also to give to her ones they desired delivered, for the posting box in the street did not come until many years afterwards.

Nowadays letter delivery by women is rare, and the quaint dress of the Letter Woman is seen no more.

Nowadays the mails are carried between cities by fast express or by aeroplane but more than one hundred years ago in England the old Mail Coach did the job and did it wonderfully well. The bustle and excitement of changing horses at the famous inns which stood beside the famous coach roads is well known to all boys and girls who have read "Tom Brown's Schooldays". One of the sights of London in those days was to see the departure of the coaches for provincial towns and cities; inside the swaying vehicle huddled the uncomfortable passengers, while piled high behind the well-rugged coachman and guard were the bags of mail, and another guard in the rear seat.

Rain or shine, through mud and sometimes dust on terrible roads, the Mail Coach lumbering along could always be depended upon for punctuality.

The postman today in Australia wears a rather dull uniform on his rounds, but the gentleman in this picture was attired in clothes of many brilliant colors.

A hundred years ago, the great city of Manchester in Lancashire, England, decided that its postmen should wear a bright uniform, and this was the style decided upon.

The trousers and long frock-like coat were blue. Lined with black, the coat had scarlet collar and cuffs and brass buttons and silver stitching down the front. A white waist coat, also having brass buttons, and broad-brimmed high black hat completed the uniform, which must have made the poor "postie" feel like a bird of Paradise. However, luckily for other postmen of the time, there were no other costumes like it, for in those far-off days, the Post Office in each English city had its own distinct uniform.

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London has been spoken of as the city of strange sights and sounds and when we look at this picture of a London postman of one hundred years ago we can understand that it was true in those days at least.

Though not so brilliant in color as the dress of the Manchester "postie", this man's uniform was bright enough. With blue trousers and waistcoat, long fawn coat with red lapels and cuffs, black top hat with red band and carrying a brown post bag, he certainly added to the color of London's streets. The ringing of the bell which he carried added to the din of traffic so much that the use of the bell was discontinued in 1846.

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For many hundreds of years since man first learned to write letters, they have been delivered in many curious ways and for many different rates of payment. In some cases in the early nineteenth century the postage delivery rate within a town or city was as high as a shilling, but gradually when the Post Office began to grow, the rates came down to twopence.

However, it was due to the work of this man, a picture of whose statue you see, that in 1840 penny postage was made law. Sir Roland Hill was a very clever man who made a close study of the Post Office and how it might be improved, and it was he who suggested the use of stamps and sealed stamped envelopes in a famous paper called "Post Office Reform" which was printed in 1837.

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VI.

We have seen in previous pictures that the bell carried by the postman was necessary to summon householders to the street when they desired to hand their letters to him for delivery, for it was not until 1855 that the first pillar box was erected in London.

Following the example of the French Post Office in erecting boxes in the streets of Paris, the London Post Office adopted the plan and placed the first of them in Fleet Street, beside which you see a lady of Queen Victoria's day in her quaint dress.

First painted green, these "new" boxes at a later date were painted red which color they remain to this day.

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If, on hearing the postman's whistle one fine morning, you were to scamper outside, you would be astonished to see him arrive at your front gate in this fashion. Yet scores of people who inhabit some of the islands off the west coast of Ireland find nothing astonishing in his appearance each day. In these rocky places where footholds are precarious the sure-footed donkey is used for all manner of transport, so it is not so surprising that the Post Office should have the mails delivered "per donkey".

The small-village postman in rural England is a man of many parts, for his job does not end with the delivery of letters and parcels.

In these out-of-the-way places where Post Offices are few and far between, he becomes actually a walking Post Office. He sells stamps, receives mail for posting and sells postal orders. Having on occasions to walk 20 miles daily through the mud and slush of an English countryside in winter, he is dressed for the part, stout boots and long gaiters assisting to resist the damp and cold.

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The pictures which have appeared on this page have dealt mainly with England, but now we will take a peep at postal delivery in different parts of the British Empire.

Five hundred miles north of the mighty Amazon River in South America lies British Guiana and here the Post Office follows the same rules as that in England.

This black gentleman, arrayed in blue uniform and white helmet and complete with brown canvas post bag goes his rounds and performs his duties in a similar manner to the London postman, but whereas the London man pounds asphalt footpaths, the "postie" in this far outpost of the Empire travels on occasions the jungle paths between tropical villages.

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More than four thousand miles north-west of the tropic heat of British Guiana, the Post Office carries on in the depths of the Canadian winter, the task of delivering the mails.

In the frozen North where the country lies for many months under a mantle of snow and ice, the dog-drawn sledge is found necessary to get the mails through. In parts where a horse or motor could not move, a team of seven "huskies", as the Eskimo dog is sometimes called, have been known to draw a fully-loaded sledge over long distances at a speed of 12 to 15 miles an hour!

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On the great veldt or great rolling plains of South Africa beyond the seaboard where large cities such as Capetown and Durban lie, the white population is very scattered. Here, where villages, outposts and lonely homesteads may be hundreds of miles apart native runners are employed by the Post Office for mail delivery.

Faithful servants, they do not trouble themselves with much clothing and carry their packages on the end of a stick. Able to keep up a steady pace for hours on end, these magnificently built natives have proved themselves ideal postmen in difficult country.

When gold was first discovered in Victoria more than eighty years ago, people in all walks of life rushed to the gold fields. Canvas towns sprang up at Ballarat and a feverish search commenced for the yellow metal. Yet all found time to write home and so the Post Office followed quickly on the gold-seekers heels. Here in the picture is a branch of the G.P.O., at the gold diggings and the quaint living quarters of the miners who stand at the doorway, may be seen.

Also in those early days, the Post Office at the diggings acted sometimes as a bank where the hard won riches might be deposited in safety.