

# DELIVERED TO THE FRONT

## Up and running

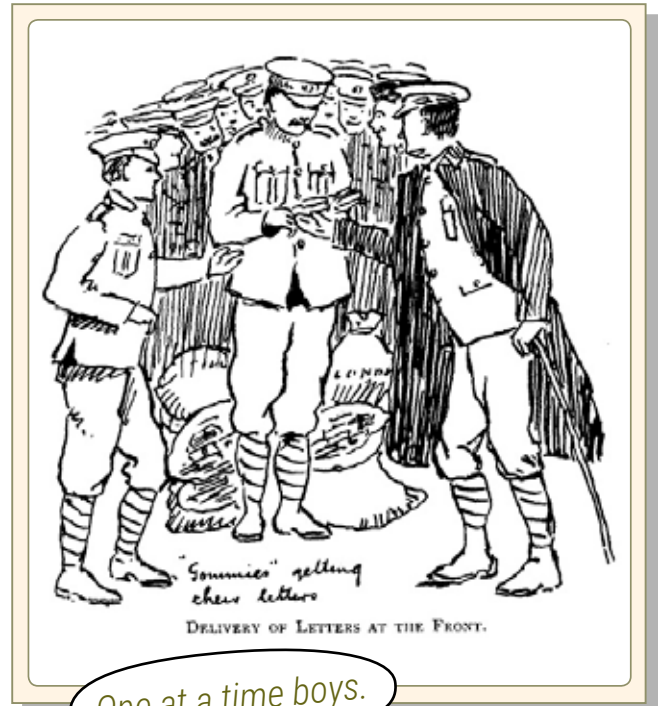
In August 1914, at the start of the First World War, the General Post Office worked in complete secrecy. It was instructed to prevent any letters from reaching troops and vice versa.

By December, an efficient mail system was up and running and soldiers could expect to receive mail from home in two days of being sent.

### ► Soldiers receiving letters at the Front

*'I got three letters posted in Ireland on the 26th (of December) and in England on the 28th this afternoon, so letters are reaching us as quickly as if there were no war. It's really rather wonderful'.*

Gerald Burgoyne, Officer,  
British Expeditionary Force, 1914



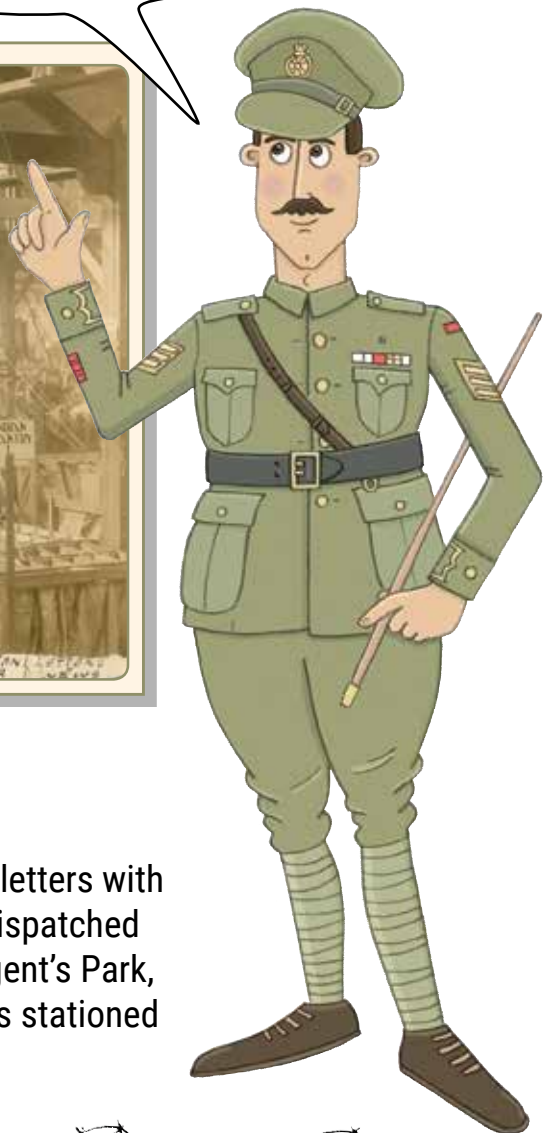
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### ▲ The Home Depot employed 2,500 staff, mostly female

## The Home Depot

People writing to soldiers on the Front only had to address letters with names and the correct fighting unit. Mail was sorted and dispatched by the Home Depot, a huge wooden building erected in Regent's Park, London. At the height of the war, letters for over 8,000 units stationed in France and Belgium were sorted there.



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## The boat train

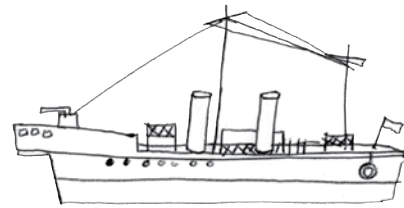
Mail destined for the Front left the Home Depot for London railway stations in lorries, destined for the 'boat train' to Folkstone or Southampton. At the docks, mailbags were loaded on to 'mail packet ships' bound for Boulogne, Calais or Le Havre where the main Base Post Office was located.

### ► The boat train



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*'The appearance of a long black craft ... makes one realise that the mail is under the protecting arm of the Navy in the form of a torpedo boat acting as an escort'*  
Major General C.A. Wheeler describes a journey aboard a packet ship, 1915



## Delivering to the Front

Transporting mail had to be done at night with minimal lighting. For reasons of security, the men loading trains were not informed of troops' whereabouts until last moment. Within a few hours the mail was sorted and delivered to the Front together with food and arms. From there, the mail was taken by horse, truck, lorry or cart to the trenches. Other services were offered too for example, cashing postal and money orders, foreign exchange, war loans, Savings Certificates and even dog licences!

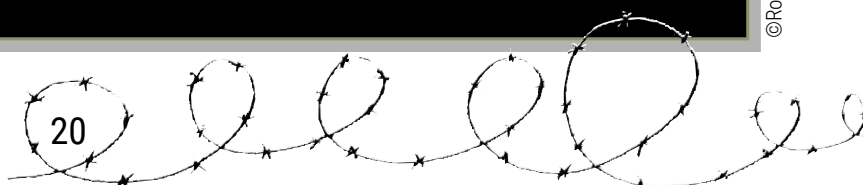


▲ **Field Post Office**  
Soldiers posted and collected mail from Field Post Offices. This could be in a tent or sometimes was no more than a table

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## ► Sorting the mail at the roadside

*'The mails are stacked and sorted by the roadside; the long line of carts comes up... to receive its quota of the mails from home; and each orderly then clatters off with his letters and parcels, which he carries with his comrades right up to the firing line'.*

Frederick Williamson,  
Director of the Army Postal  
Service, July 1915



**Power  
POINT**

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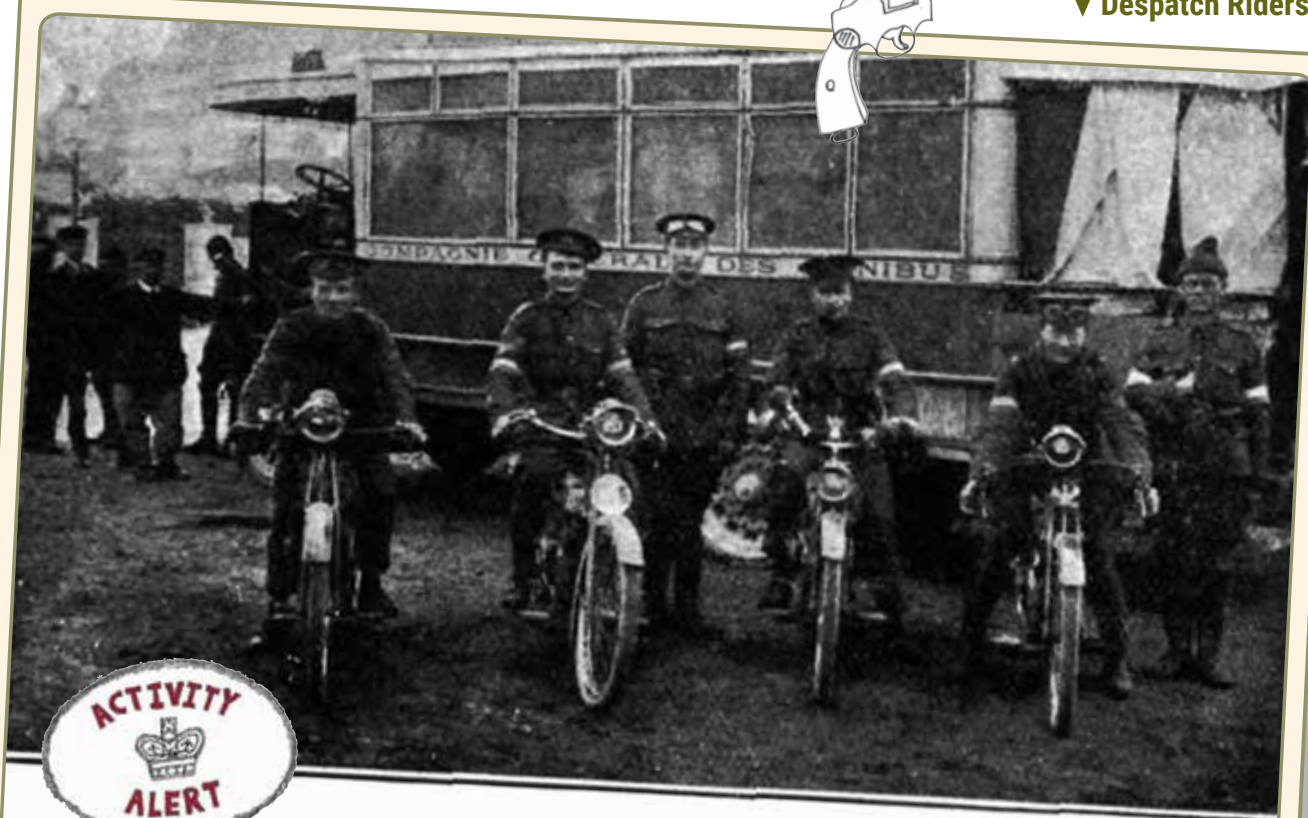
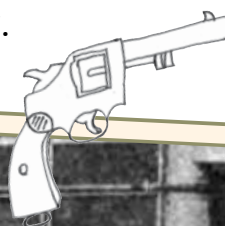
## Dangerous deliveries

Despatch riders on motorbikes and armed with pistols delivered secret and important messages to the trenches. The men had to be quick map-readers - if roads passed through bombed out areas, alternative routes had to be quickly chosen. They also had to possess a wide knowledge of the army organisation since delivering dispatches to an army convoy on the move was not easy.

*'He returns from his journeys at any time of the day or night, covered with dust or mud and his trusty revolver hanging out of his pouch ready to hand'*

A.A. Jayne, St Martin's Le Grand,  
1915

## ▼ Despatch Riders



SOME DESPATCH RIDERS.

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**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS2 activity is linked to General Post Office Despatch Riders who were responsible for delivering important and secret messages to the Front.

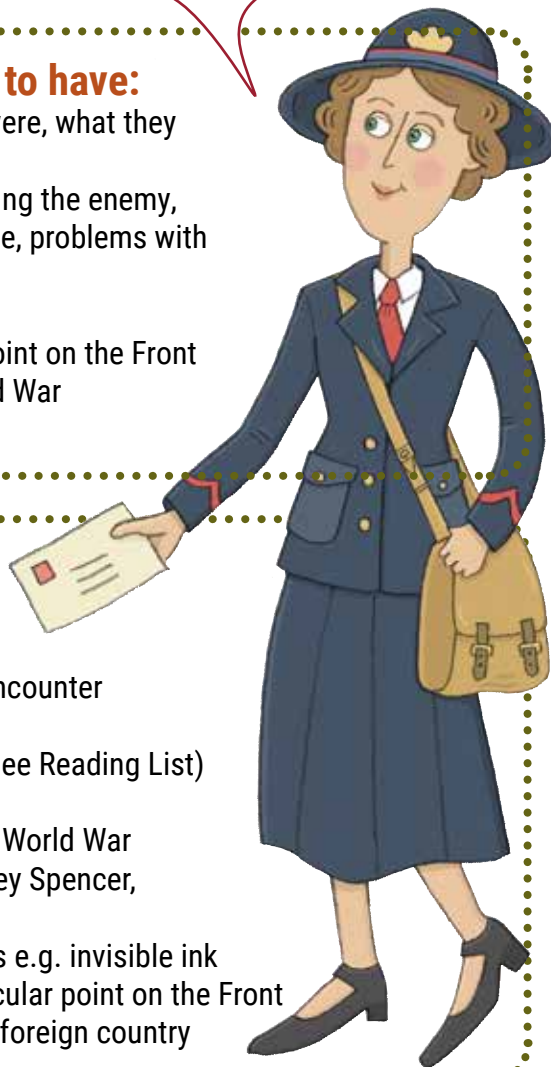
*Pupils make a secret miniature map that fits into a matchbox.*

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Used archival material to research Despatch Riders (who they were, what they did, what they wore for the journey, how they travelled)
- ◆ Discussed what problems they might encounter en route (avoiding the enemy, getting lost, impassable conditions e.g snow, ice and bomb damage, problems with language)
- ◆ Using the internet, found out what and where 'the Front' was
- ◆ Explored maps to plan a route from the school to a particular point on the Front
- ◆ Talked about other ways of sending messages in the First World War comparing with how urgent messages are sent today.

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **History:** Researching The Postal Museum collections to find out about individual Despatch Riders
- ◆ **English:** Ask pupils to imagine they are Despatch Riders who encounter adventures en route to the Front
- ◆ **English:** Reading adventure stories set in the First World War (see Reading List)
- ◆ **English:** Reading poetry written by men on the Front
- ◆ **Art & Design:** Looking at paintings and drawings made by First World War artists e.g. John Singer Sargent, Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevison, Stanley Spencer, Percy Wyndham Lewis or Muirhead Bone
- ◆ **D&T, Science:** Exploring other ways of making secret messages e.g. invisible ink
- ◆ **Geography:** Using maps to explore alternative routes to a particular point on the Front
- ◆ **MFL:** Introduce vocabulary appropriate to directions/signs in a foreign country

**To do:**

- ◆ Plan a short route for the map-making activity
- ◆ Assemble equipment: an empty matchbox or similar for each pupil; strips of blank paper; art materials e.g. felt-tips, pencils, coloured inks; glue sticks. Cameras would be useful but not essential

**Success criteria****By the end of the project:**

- ◆ All pupils will be familiar with how mail was moved to the Front
- ◆ All pupils will be aware of the difficulties delivering mail to the Front
- ◆ Some will explore further to discover more about moving mail to the Front

**Key terms**

Home Depot  
Despatch Rider  
The Front  
Pistol



## ACTIVITY

4

## MISSION POSSIBLE

Despatch Riders delivered important and secret messages to the Front. They travelled on motorbikes at high speed. It was dangerous work so they carried a pistol!



The men were excellent map-readers. If the enemy, bomb damage or weather conditions blocked the way, they had to change the route quickly.

**Your task is to make a map for your journey. Only you will be able to decipher it in case it falls into enemy hands.**

**Step 1**

Cut your strip of paper just wide enough to fit in a matchbox and about six times longer.

**Step 2**

Divide the paper into six equal sections. Each section should be slightly shorter than the length of the box so it will fit inside when folded.

**Step 3**

Using the lines as a guide, fold the strip into a concertina.

**Step 4**

Walk along your route and note, record and collect items that will remind you which way you went e.g. a leaf from a large tree you passed, the colour of a front door. Try thinking of ways to describe things without words e.g. a barking dog, a creaking gate, or smells from a café.

**Step 5**

On your map, stick items down, draw signs and symbols or make coloured marks/shapes in the order that you noted them on your route. REMEMBER NO WORDS!

**Step 6**

Fold up your map into the matchbox. Good luck for the journey!

**MESSAGES HAD TO GET THROUGH AT ALL COSTS!**



# LETTERS HOME

## Writing home

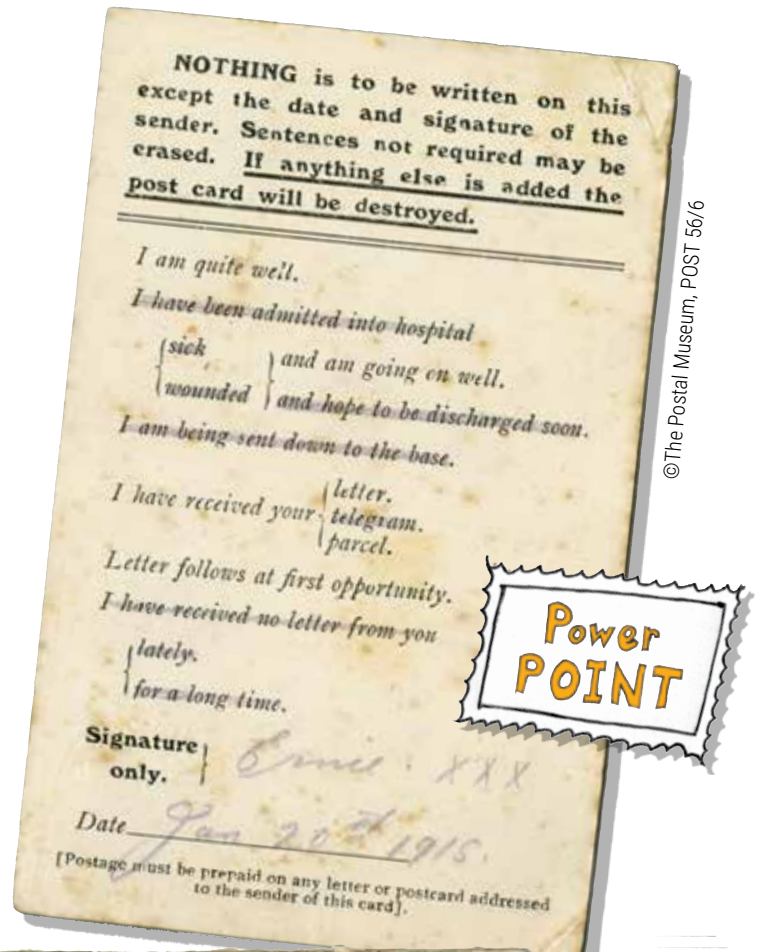
At the beginning of the 20th century, letters were the main way soldiers could stay in touch with their loved ones.

*'If a letter from home meant a lot to a soldier when it had travelled a few miles, it must have meant even more when home was 12,000 miles away.'*

Major Wilson,  
Head of Army Mails in Australia

### ► A Field Service Card

It was said that the Army Postal Service sent over two billion letters during the First World War. Soldiers were encouraged to use Field Service Cards with simple pre-printed messages that could be crossed out as appropriate and returned for free. If anything else was added, the card was destroyed.



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### ▲ An Honour Envelope

## Ordinary letters

Ordinary letters could be sent in special Honour Envelopes. Soldiers signed the envelope to show they hadn't written any sensitive information. These letters took longer and might still be examined by the censor.

## Censorship

The censorship of letters and telegrams took place on a large scale during the war on the Home Front, in the field and at sea. The General Post Office worked with the Admiralty, the War Office and Military Intelligence to monitor and control all correspondence leaving and entering Britain to gather information on different people, organisations and military and espionage operations.

► A letter to the Postmaster General authorising censorship

▼ A letter passed by censor



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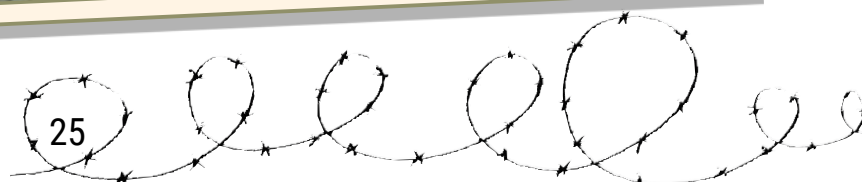
▼ The job of censoring letters was mostly undertaken by women on the Home Front



©Reproduced with permission. Graham Mark, British censorship of civil mails during World War I, 1914-1919 (2000)



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## Parcels

Parcels from home containing items such as socks and food were a big comfort to soldiers. It was estimated that the Army Postal Service sent 114 million parcels during the First World War.

◀ This cartoon illustrates a soldier who had been granted leave and wrote to his wife for the railway fare home - but got socks instead



Power  
POINT

## Newspapers

Newspapers were popular too. Delivery was so efficient that the London morning newspapers were delivered on the day of publication and reached the trenches the following day.

## Morale boosters

Sir Evelyn Murray, Secretary to the Post Office reflected that,

*'the value of regular and rapid postal service to the morale of the forces was soon recognised.'*

One soldier stationed in France, wrote a letter published in a London newspaper saying he was lonely and appealing for someone to write to him. He received 3,000 letters, 98 large parcels and bags of small ones!



## Curious addresses

Some soldiers illustrated envelopes to express personal feelings. These were sent to the Tolhurst family and show a change in attitude to the war.

◀ This letter dated September 1914 uses flags to express unity. The middle letter dates from December 1914 and has a more threatening image. The bottom letter was sent to Vera Tolhurst on 11 November 1918



**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS2/3 activity encourages pupils to be aware of stamp design. From 2014 to 2018 Royal Mail will issue 30 stamps to commemorate the First World War. There will be 5 sets of 6 stamps. Themes to be covered include:

- ◆ How artists, painters and writers interpreted the events
- ◆ The role of non-combatants and civilians
- ◆ The role of the Services
- ◆ The role of women
- ◆ The contribution of the Commonwealth.

*Pupils design a stamp to commemorate the contribution the General Post Office made to the First World War.*

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Looked at examples of postage stamps in circulation during the First World War and compared them with stamps today
- ◆ Talked about where letters were sent during the First World War; how letters raised morale, how soldiers were able to send Field Service Cards free of charge
- ◆ Discussed different types of commemorative stamps e.g. royal events (the Queen's Diamond Jubilee), national events (Olympic Games), anniversaries of the birth/death of significant individuals (William Shakespeare)
- ◆ Talked about the elements that make up stamp design (size, the head of the reigning king/queen, value)
- ◆ Found out about the Penny Black (what it was, when it was introduced, how raising the cost of postage in 1918 spelt the end of the 'penny post')

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **History:** Researching The Postal Museum collections to find stamps from other countries in circulation during the First World War e.g. Germany, France and Belgium
- ◆ **Art & Design:** Finding out about famous artists who have been chosen to design stamps e.g. David Hockney, David Gentleman
- ◆ **Art & Design:** Making a 'curious address' letter by designing an envelope using illustrations only
- ◆ **Art & Design:** Using potato prints to make 'franking' stamps

**To do:**

- ◆ **Assemble equipment:** one printout of the stamp template per pupil, art materials

**Success criteria****By the end of the project**

- ◆ All pupils will be aware of the elements that make up stamp design
- ◆ All pupils will be familiar with how Royal Mail produce stamps to commemorate important events, anniversaries and people
- ◆ Some pupils will want to investigate stamp design further

**Key terms**

The Penny Black  
Penny post  
Commemoration



From 2014 to 2018, Royal Mail will issue 30 stamps to commemorate the First World War. Six will be produced each year.

All sorts of people  
have designed stamps  
including famous artists  
and children

**Your task is to design a stamp to commemorate the important role of the General Post Office in the First World War**

### Things to think about:

- ◆ **Subject:** What will be the subject of your design? A person or group of people e.g. Despatch Riders? Or something to do with the General Post Office e.g. a Morse code message? Or an event e.g. the sinking of the RMS Lusitania. Or something else?
- ◆ Use books and the internet to collect images of the event, person/people or objects
- ◆ **Design:** Your stamp must show the head of the Queen and the value of the stamp
- ◆ **Size:** Your design must be clear when its reduced down to the same size as a postage stamp
- ◆ **Shape:** British stamps come in several shapes and sizes. Some stamps from other countries are octagonal and even triangular



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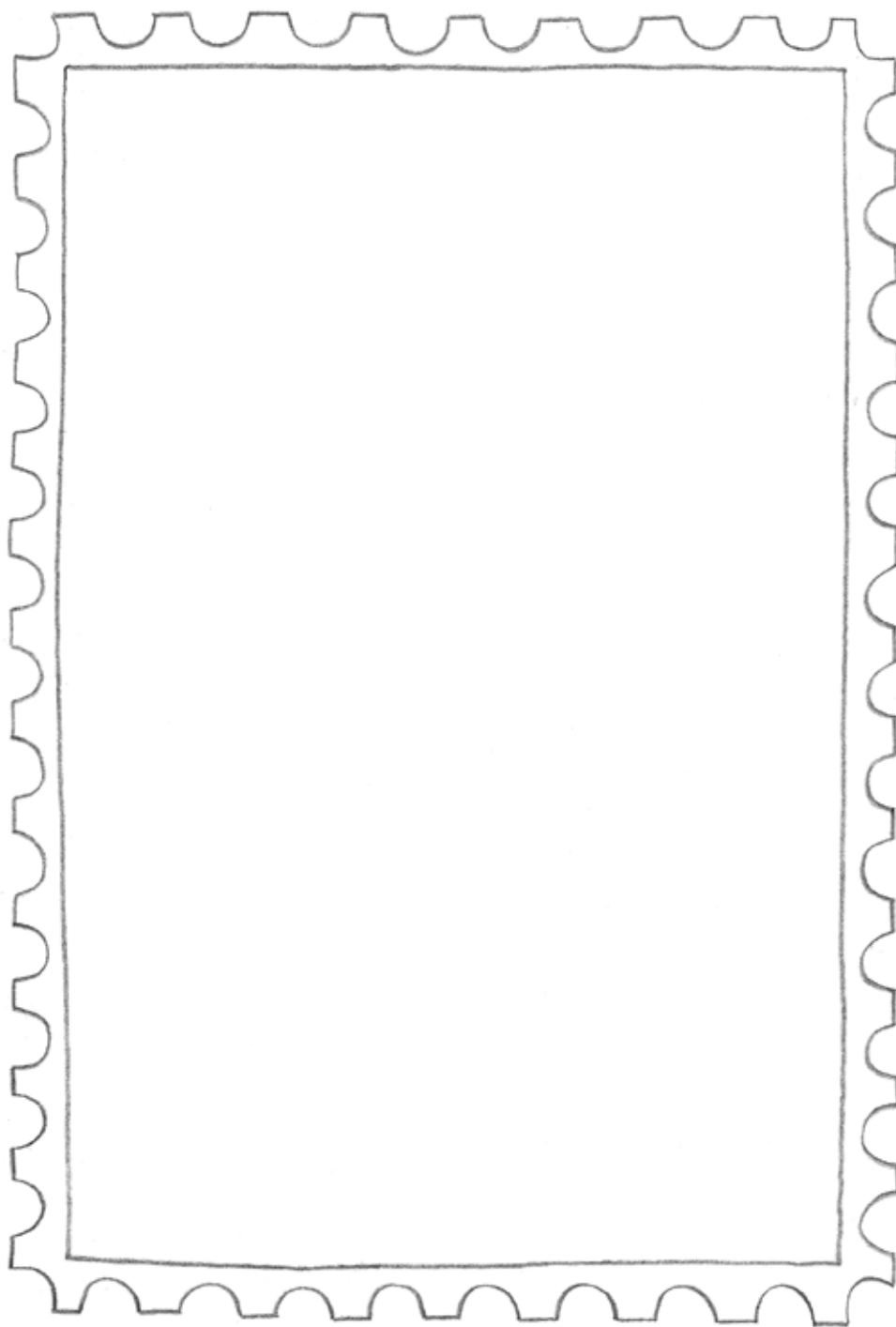
### To make

- ◆ Choose your materials. You can use anything you like for example, collage, paint, inks, photography, felt-tips or a computer
- ◆ Scan your design into a computer. Reduce it down to postage stamp size

### Evaluation

- ◆ Look at new and old postage stamps. Which ones stand out and which ones don't?
- ◆ Does your design stand out when it is reduced down in size?
- ◆ What could you do to improve the design?





*Each stamp design has to stand out so that postal sorters and Post Office counter staff can tell the value of the stamp at a glance*



*The Queen has to approve all new stamp designs*

# INTERNATIONAL DELIVERIES

## A global service

The First World War was a truly global conflict. The work of the General Post Office extended as far as Egypt, East Africa, Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) India, France, Holland, Italy, Salonika (modern Thessaloniki), South Africa, West Indies, Central America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA.

*'After reaching the ports of destination the mails were entrusted to a strange variety of transport, ranging from travelling post offices on the Italian and Baghdad railways to a sleigh journey of four hundred miles round the shores of the White Sea'*

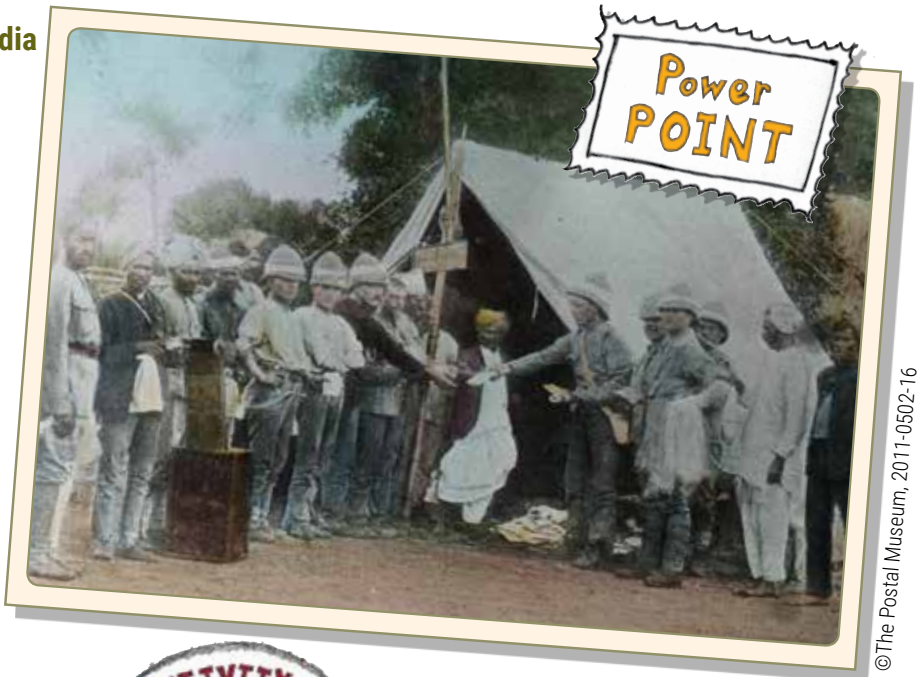
Sir Evelyn Murray,  
Secretary to the Post Office

### ► A tent acts as a military camp in India

### ▼ Illustration of Indian Base Post Office in France



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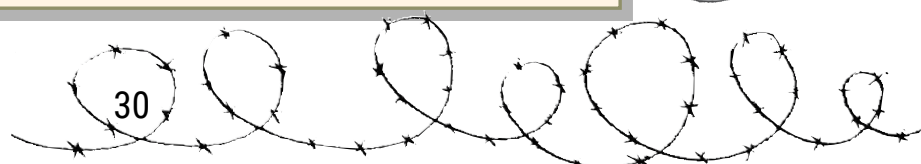
### ◀ The British Post Office, Madras



©The Postal Museum, 2012-0030-19

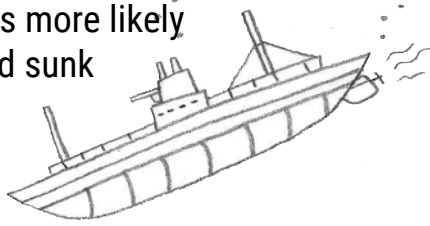


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## Delivering mail by ship

The main means of transporting mail to far-flung countries was by ship. But seagoing mail was more likely to be attacked and sunk by enemy ships, submarines and mines.



▼ An artist's impression of the sinking of the RMS Lusitania

## Weighted bags

Many letters and parcels were lost at sea. When the RMS Lusitania was torpedoed in 1915 over 1000 people were killed and 147,000 letters were lost. The lost mail included secret letters from the Governor of Bermuda to the Colonial Office in London that had been stored in a weighted bag to ensure it would sink and not be captured in the event of the ship sinking.



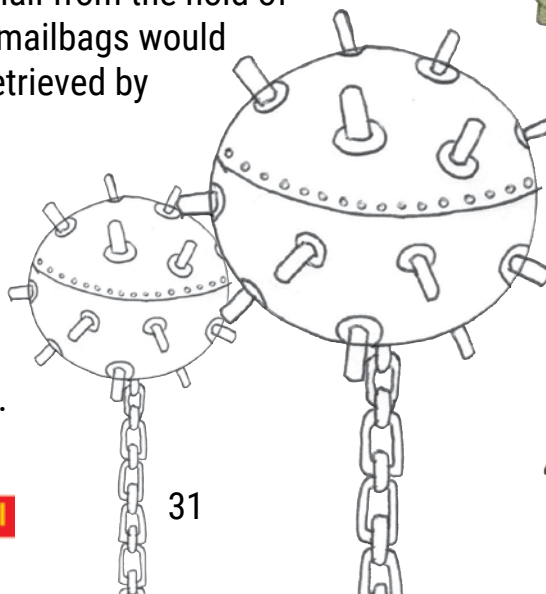
148 Americans lost their lives. America entered the war after that.

## Buoyant mailbags

Putting important mail into buoyant mailbags was considered. This idea was abandoned because firstly, the crew would not have enough time to retrieve mail from the hold of a sinking ship. Secondly, buoyant mailbags would mean they could be spotted and retrieved by enemy ships or submarines.

## Retrieved from the sea

Some lost mail was washed up or recovered by local fishermen who were paid for the time, work and the danger involved in salvaging it.



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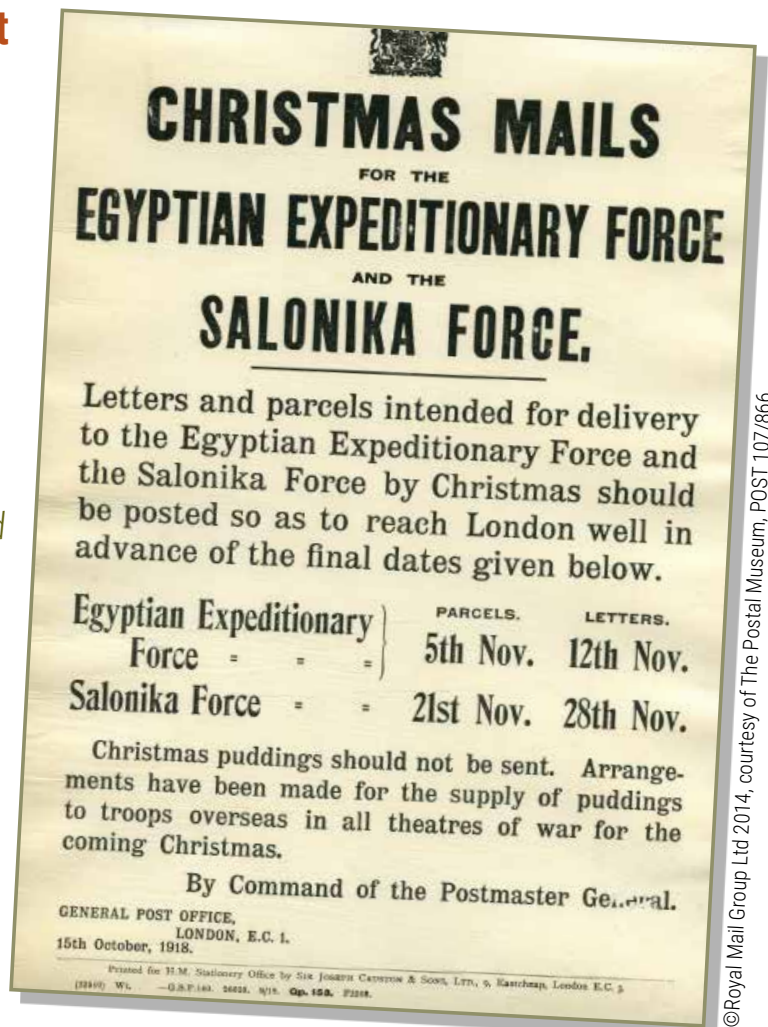
## International work at Home Depot

Home Depot in Regent's Park took on an increasingly international dimension during the war as the scope of its work expanded. This was reported by Colonel Wheeler at a celebration in 1919 to commemorate the work of the Army Postal Service.

*'An officer and 20 other ranks of the Canadian Postal Corps have reported to the Home depot... What shall be done with them? They were sent along to Mount Pleasant and from that time the Canadian Postal Corps dovetailed its workings into those of the Home Depot.'*

## Lasting friendship

Lieutenant Hollis Smith of the United States Army organised mail for American troops in London and on the Western Front. After the war he reported: 'He and other American Officers had formed friendships with the British Army that they would never forget, and it was their ardent wish that the flags of the two countries would always fly together.'



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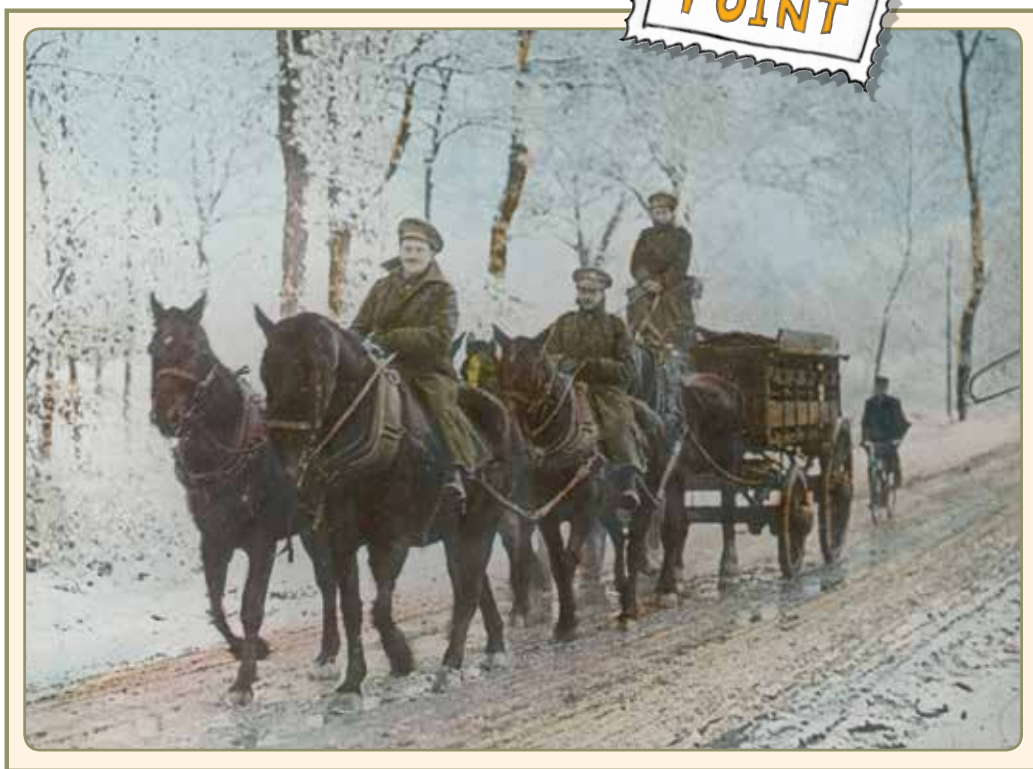


▲ A notice about sending Christmas mail including Christmas puddings

## The Christmas Post

Like today, Christmas was the peak time for delivering mail. During Christmas 1917, over six million items were posted that is, nearly one million items per week.

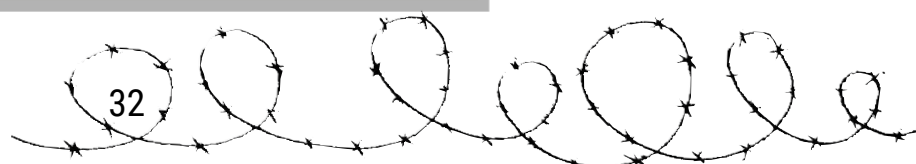
◀ Delivering the Christmas mail in 1918



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**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS1/2/3 activity uses Science (Uses of everyday materials) and Design & Technology to find out how important messages sent by sea were protected in leaded bags so that they would sink without trace if the ship was torpedoed and sunk.

*Pupils experiment with different materials to test the idea of weighted mailbags.*

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Used maps and the internet to investigate the story of the sinking of the RMS Lusitania (how it was carrying important messages, where it was sunk and the outcome)
- ◆ Discussed ways of stopping messages falling into enemy hands if a ship is sunk
- ◆ Talked about other ways of sending urgent messages by code, signals, light or sound (see pages 2-3)

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **History:** Investigating the valuables also carried and lost on the RMS Lusitania (what are 'valuables' and why were they also being carried? What would pupils choose to save in time of war?)
- ◆ **English:** reading First World War stories (see Reading List); writing an adventure story based on this activity
- ◆ **Art & Design:** Looking at pictures of the sinking of the RMS Lusitania
- ◆ **Geography:** Using maps to explore ways to deliver urgent messages overland
- ◆ **Extension activity for KS3:** Carry out research about the RMS Lusitania (how the tragedy of this event was used to promote financing the war through War Bonds and Savings Certificates)

**To do:**

- ◆ Source world maps for each group
- ◆ Provide a map of Europe for each group
- ◆ Provide a selection of items that float e.g. hard boiled eggs, tennis balls, bananas
- ◆ Provide a selection of materials that sink e.g. gravel, modeling clay
- ◆ Provide string, tape
- ◆ Provide bowls/buckets of water

**Success criteria****By the end of the project**

- ◆ All pupils will know that important mail was sent by ship
- ◆ All pupils will be aware that it had to be protected from enemy action
- ◆ Some pupils will want to find out more about the RMS Lusitania

**Key terms**

The RMS Lusitania  
Mailbag  
Torpedo  
Valuables  
Governor



In 1915, the RMS Lusitania was torpedoed in the Irish Sea. Hundreds of thousands of letters were lost including secret messages from the Governor of Bermuda to important people in London. The messages had been stored in heavy, waterproof bags to make sure they sank to the bottom of the sea and did not fall into enemy hands.

*You must send an important message by ship. Watch out! Enemy submarines and mines threaten a safe passage.*



**Your job is to invent a way to sink your message if the ship is torpedoed.**

### Step 1

- ◆ Find some clean recycled containers, not too large to drop into water e.g. bags, bottles, jars with lids, plastic containers.
- ◆ Which ones would be heavy enough to go to the bottom of the ocean?
- ◆ Which materials would hold together in water?

### Step 2

- ◆ Write a message to put into your container.

### Step 3

- ◆ Fill a bag with the material you think is best for weighting the container down.
- ◆ Put your message inside the container.

### Step 4

- ◆ Test your bag in a bowl of water. Does it sink? Is your container completely waterproof?
- ◆ Could you improve the design?



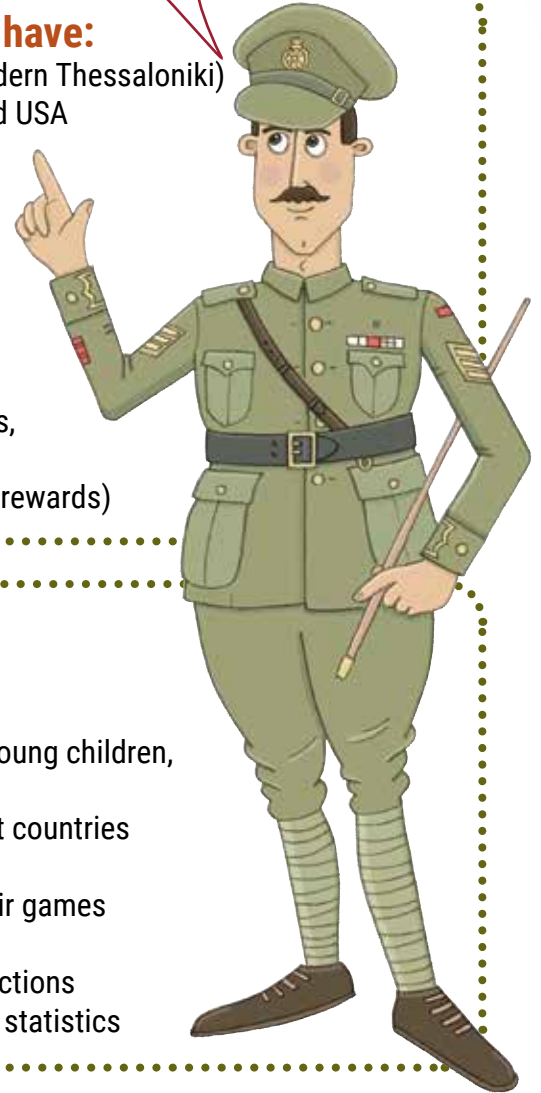
**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS2/3 activity is designed to make pupils aware that the work of the General Post Office extended world-wide during the First World War.

*Pupils design a board game*

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Studied world maps and identified Egypt, East Africa, Salonika (modern Thessaloniki) Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA
- ◆ Thought about how mail was delivered to those countries (by sea, overland by train, lorry, cart, sleigh)
- ◆ Considered how different types of mail were delivered (cards, letters and parcels)
- ◆ Investigated how all mail was sent from the Home Depot in London after being sorted and censored
- ◆ Compared how messages and mail are delivered today
- ◆ Investigated possible dangers en route (submarines, mines, U boats, bomb damage, enemy fire)
- ◆ Talked about the rules of simple board games (aims, penalties and rewards)

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **ICT:** Developing the game through computer programs eg Scratch
- ◆ **Geography, D&T:** Looking at postage stamps of other countries
- ◆ **PHSE/Citizenship:** Making sure pupils consider the needs of very young children, or those with poor eyesight and reading difficulties
- ◆ **Music:** Investigating the sounds and musical influences of different countries
- ◆ **Maths:** Investigating distances (miles, sea miles and kilometres)
- ◆ **Design and Technology:** Discussing how pupils can customise their games (e.g. letters or stamps for counters, illustration and other art work)
- ◆ KS3 activities could include investigating The Postal Museum collections collections to find out more about delivering mail globally, particularly statistics

**To do:**

- ◆ Source world maps for each group
- ◆ Provide one printout of the board game template for each group
- ◆ Assemble equipment: scissors, pencils, dice, counters
- ◆ Source different types of board games e.g. Snakes and Ladders

**Key terms**

Global  
Penalties  
Rewards  
Kilometres  
Miles

**Success criteria****By the end of the project**

- ◆ All pupils will be familiar with the extent of the Postal Service during the First World War
- ◆ All pupils will be aware that all mail was sorted and censored at Home Depot before being sent abroad
- ◆ Some pupils will want to explore archives further to discover more about moving the mail



When the First World War broke out, the General Post Office was the biggest postal service in the world. Throughout the war, it continued to deliver mail to all parts of the world.

*British soldiers everywhere depended on getting letters and parcels from home to keep their spirits up.*

## Your task is to design a board game

### Things to think about:

- ◆ The aim of the game - getting mail to all corners of the earth including very cold countries and very hot countries
- ◆ Different types of transport e.g. ships, trains, lorries, horse and cart, camel, sleighs, parachutes, motor bike
- ◆ Penalties if you land on 'snakes' and rewards if you land on 'ladders'

### To make

- ◆ Cut out a journey board.
- ◆ Decide your destination from the list below.
- ◆ Write it in the stamp at the top of your journey board.
- ◆ Using the internet find the flag of your destination country. Draw it in the outline 'stamp counters', colour it in and cut it out.
- ◆ Colour your journey board and add other details such as landscape, dangers and friendly spots. You can cut out or copy the additional images provided to liven up your board too.
- ◆ Cutout the **BOOM** and **NEWS ALERT** cards and write events on the other side. You can use ideas from below or even better think up your own fun ideas e.g. 'Polar bear eats Christmas puddings'.



### Post sent to these countries in the First World War

Egypt  
East Africa  
Mesopotamia (modern Iraq)  
India  
France  
Holland

Italy  
Salonika (modern Thessaloniki)  
South Africa  
West Indies  
Central America  
Australia  
New Zealand  
Canada  
USA

**BOOM: things that will hold the post up**

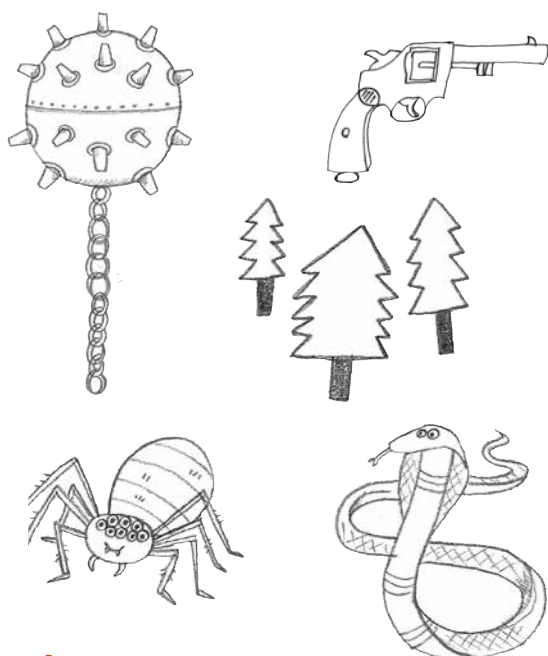
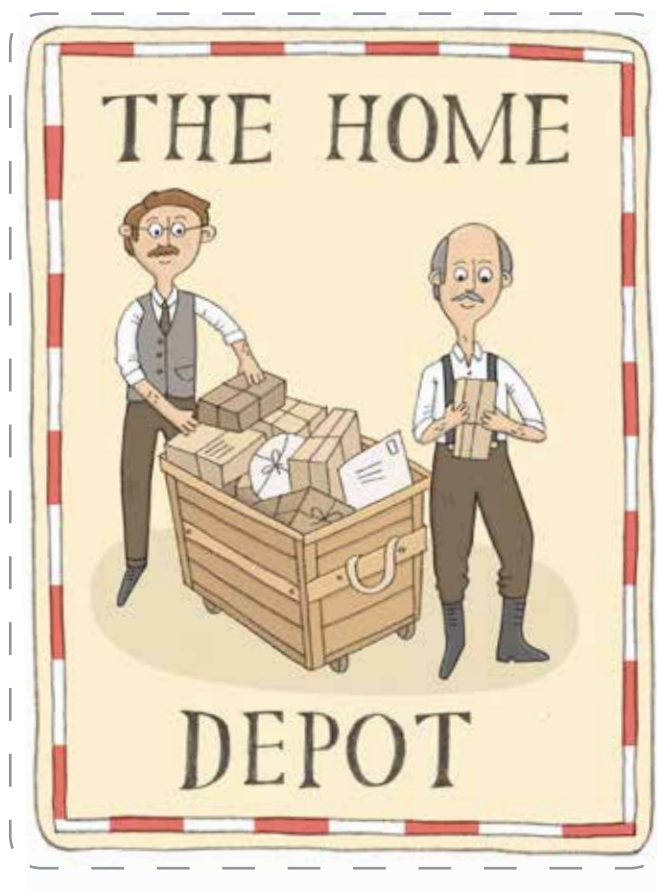
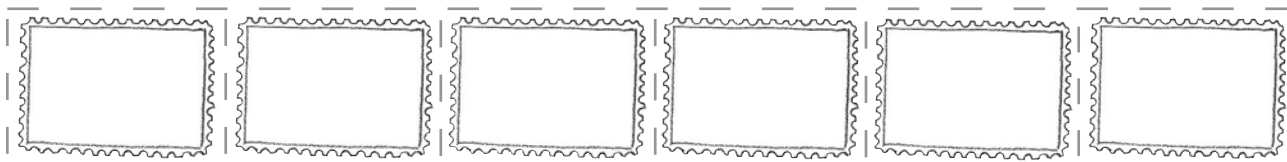
Mines  
 Submarines  
 Torpedoes  
 Wild animals  
 Angry local people  
 Enemy tanks  
 Bomb damage  
 Zeppelins  
 Fire  
 Floods  
 Gas attacks  
 Spies  
 Terrible weather

**NEWS ALERT: things that will help post be delivered on time**

Friendly local people  
 Morse code warns of danger  
 Post Office Rifles claim enemy territory  
 Telegram warns of danger  
 Bomb damage cleared  
 Spies captured  
 Good weather

**Home Depot card store**

Cut out and colour these extra images to decorate your journey board.

**Flag counters**

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Forward 2 squares

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Back to the start

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Forward 3 squares

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Back 1 square

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Forward 1 square

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Miss a go

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Have another go

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Miss a go

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Forward 1 square

