

## The Postal Service in the First World War

**KS1, KS2 and KS3  
resources**

**Teacher's notes and  
activity sheets for pupils  
can be photocopied.**



Censored envelope © The Postal Museum, PH12-05



Photo of Home Depot ©Royal Mail Group Ltd, courtesy of The Postal Museum, POST 56/6

**This learning resource was sponsored by Royal Mail Group**



Royal Mail will issue a landmark series of Special Stamps each year from 2014 to 2018 to commemorate the First World War. The set will feature 30 stamps, with six stamps produced each year. It will provide a wide-ranging and inclusive commemoration, featuring the contribution of the armed services, the role of the Commonwealth Countries, non-combatants and women.

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**Content developed by Newbery & England.  
Designed by Helen McDonagh.  
Illustrations by Sophie Foster.**

# Last Post:

## The Postal Service in the First World War

In *Last Post*, war time characters guide your pupils through different topics to tell the story of the contribution the General Post Office (GPO) made to the First World War.

There are four topics:

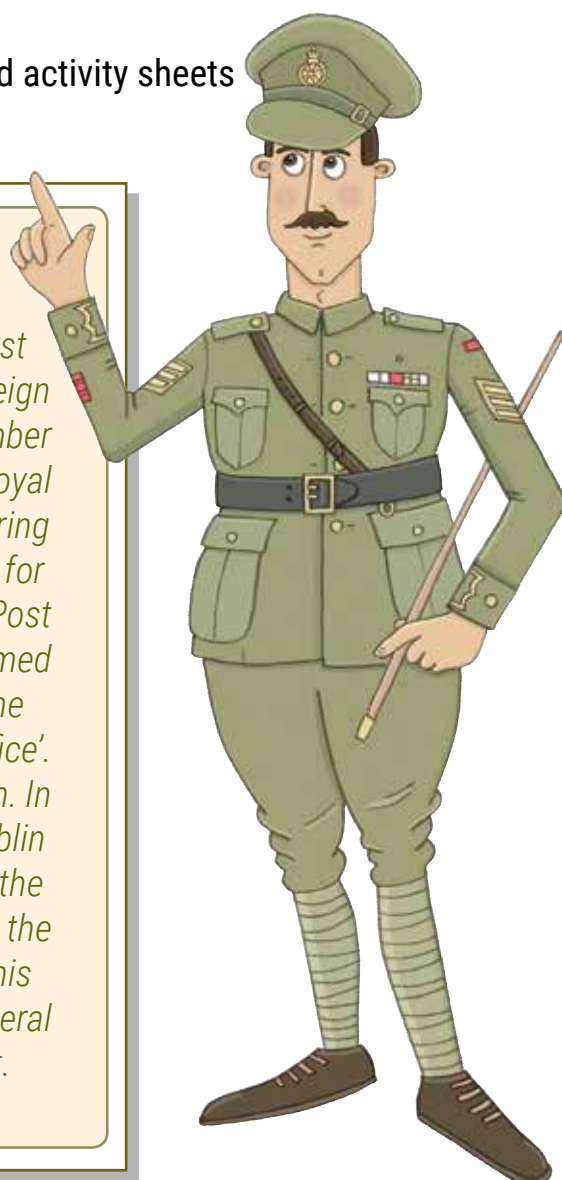
- ◆ COMMUNICATIONS
- ◆ THE HOME FRONT
- ◆ MOVING THE MAIL
- ◆ THE POST OFFICE RIFLES

The resource has been developed using original archival material such as letters, magazines, adverts, cartoons, poems and photographs held in the Royal Mail Archive cared for by The Postal Museum.

Each topic includes teacher's notes, lesson plans and activity sheets for you to photocopy and use as you wish.

### **Royal Mail Group Ltd**

*Royal Mail has a long and proud history. The first 'Master of the Posts' was appointed during the reign of Henry VIII in Tudor times. Since it began a number of different names have been used. The name 'Royal Mail' refers back to the Stuart king, Charles I. During his reign he opened his own private mail service for public use. Although today Royal Mail Group and Post Office Ltd are separate companies, they once formed a single organisation. For much of its history the standard organisational name used was 'Post Office'. Post Office buildings existed in almost every town. In the principal cities of London, Edinburgh and Dublin there was a main Post Office building known as the General Post Office (GPO). For many this became the official name of the organisation. Throughout this learning resource the terms 'Post Office' and 'General Post Office' are used in their historical context.*



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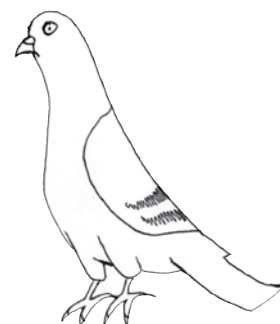
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### THE POST OFFICE RIFLES

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## TIMELINE READING LIST



# SENDING MESSAGES

## General Post Office Engineers

Communicating with troops on the front line is vitally important in any war. During the First World War, General Post Office engineers were specially trained to set up, maintain and operate telephones on the front line. This allowed quicker, more regular contact between troops and army headquarters than in previous wars.

## Watch out!

Telegrams alerted the navy to the presence of the enemy. In the famous Battle of Heligoland one message said,

*'Bear round sharp to starboard and you'll catch them'.*

In the battle that followed, the British navy sank four German ships.



◀ Two soldiers, one standing on the other's shoulders, are attempting to use a telephone on the front

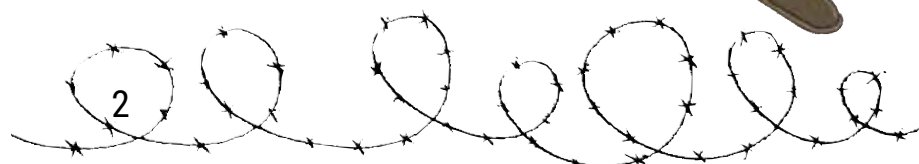
Steady chaps!



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## It's official!

Every Saturday, a telegram giving up-to-date news of the war was sent from London to every telegraph office in Britain. It was printed out and displayed in Post Office windows for everyone to read on Sunday morning.

► **Mr Pike Pease, Assistant Post Master General, inspects the boys and congratulates them on their smart appearance**



©Royal Mail Group Ltd 2014, courtesy of The Postal Museum, illustration from St Martin's Le Grand, 1917, POST 92

## Boy messengers



Boys, as young as 14, delivered telegrams to soldiers' families. They often delivered the tragic news of a son, brother, father or husband, killed in action. These telegrams earned boy messengers the nickname of 'angels of death'.

## Pigeon post

Carrier pigeons were used to carry messages to and from the front line where telephone lines did not exist. The army used about 22,000 pigeons during the war and only two percent of birds failed to return.

▼ **Belgian agents care for pigeons in Flanders**





**Overview of the lesson:**

This lesson makes pupils aware of how some messages were sent by Morse code during the First World War.

*Pupils use Morse code to send a message like soldiers did in the First World War.*

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

- ◆ Made Morse code transmitters (see page 6)
- ◆ Understood that Morse code transmitters use simple electrical circuits
- ◆ Identified and named basic parts e.g. wires, bulbs, switches and buzzers
- ◆ Found out that before the electronic age people invented different methods of sending a message e.g. flashing mirrors, smoke signals etc
- ◆ Discovered that modern telecommunications can send messages very quickly over vast distances
- ◆ Explored archival images of General Post Office engineers setting up systems to transmit messages

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **English, ICT:** Making up secret codes
- ◆ **English:** Developing drama and role play by reading stories based on the idea of sending secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **History:** Researching The Postal Museum online collections to find out more about secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **Science, D&T:** Exploring other ways of sending signals e.g. light houses
- ◆ **Music:** Investigating messages in music e.g. Inspector Morse theme, drums patterns and durations
- ◆ **Maths:** Looking at mathematical patterns in codes; investigating distances to see how far messages could be transmitted

**To do:**

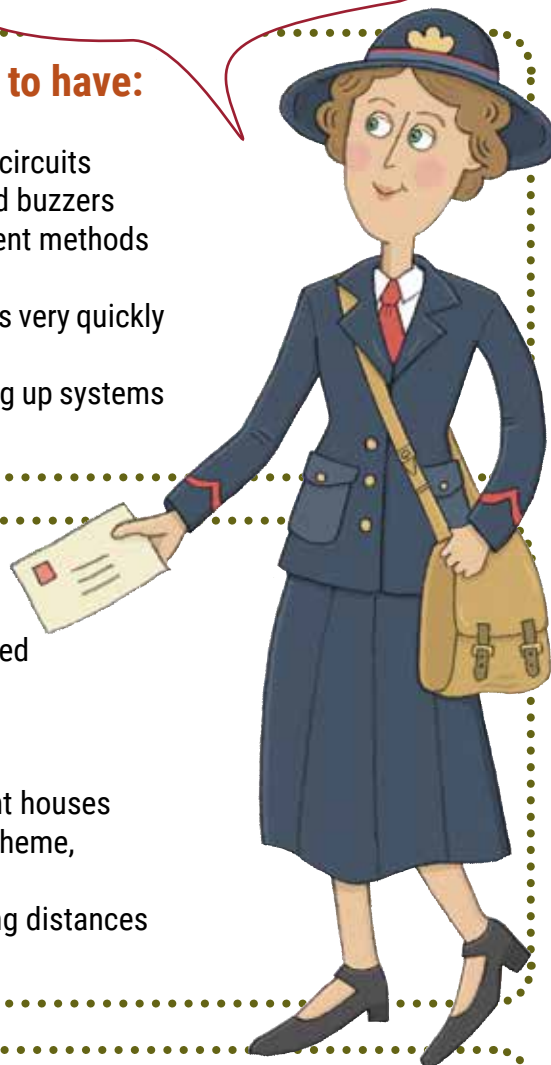
- ◆ Assemble Morse code transmitters
- ◆ Make a second room available for transmitting messages

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

- ◆ All will have increased knowledge of how some messages were transmitted in the First World War
- ◆ All will be familiar with the Morse code
- ◆ Most will have developed their understanding of electricity further
- ◆ Some will want to find out how other messages were transmitted

**Key terms**

Morse code  
Transmitter





1

## Morse code

Morse code was used to deliver important messages during the First World War. It uses electrical signals to send messages based on short and long sounds or flashes of light that represent all the letters of the alphabet.

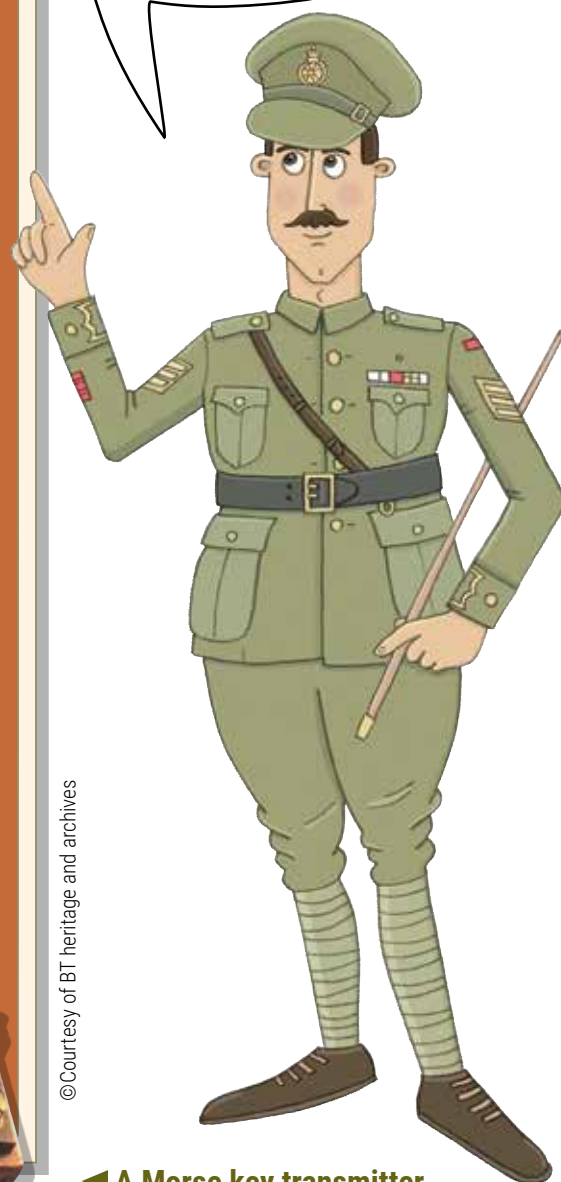
**WORK THIS OUT!**

**Did you know?**

**Did you know?**  
Samuel Morse, an American,  
invented the Morse code  
in 1838.



©Courtesy of BT heritage and archives

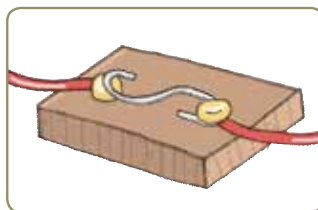


### ◀ A Morse key transmitter

**Make this Morse code transmitter and send secret messages from one room to another!**

**Step 1**

Make 2 switches (see diagram) but bend the paper clips up in the air above the drawing pins.



**Step 2**

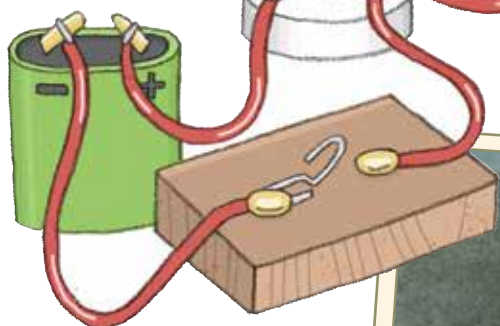
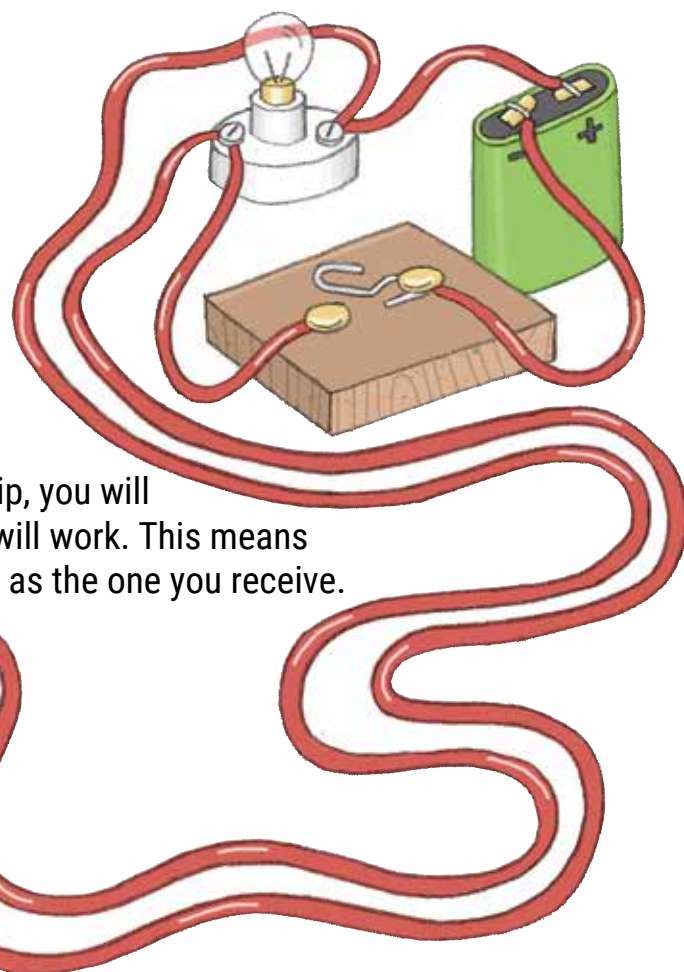
Connect the batteries and bulbs at the ends of the 2 long wires (see diagram).

**Step 3**

When you touch the drawing pin with the paper clip, you will complete the circuit and both bulbs and buzzers will work. This means you can see the message you are sending as well as the one you receive.

**Step 4**

To send a message use the Morse code.



► **British and French soldiers sending messages by Morse code**

Bet I could have done that just as quick!





**Overview of the lesson:**

This lesson uses the pigeon post to make pupils aware of different ways in which messages were transmitted during the First World War.

*Pupils recreate sending a message by pigeon across the sea and land!*

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

- ◆ Tried writing messages in as few words as possible without loss of meaning
- ◆ Thought about the weight and the type of container
- ◆ Considered how to attach a message to a container that a pigeon could carry

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **Science, D&T:** Completing the Morse code activity
- ◆ **Science, D&T, English:** Exploring other ways of sending messages e.g. drums, light, semaphore, missiles and rockets
- ◆ **Science, D&T, English:** Comparing how urgent messages are sent today
- ◆ **English, ICT:** Making up and writing secret codes
- ◆ **English:** Developing drama and role play and reading stories based on the idea and dangers of sending secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **History:** Researching The Postal Museum online collections to find out more about secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **Science, D&T:** Explore other ways of sending signals e.g. light houses
- ◆ **Music:** Investigating messages in music e.g. Inspector Morse theme, drums patterns and durations
- ◆ **Maths:** Looking at mathematical patterns in codes; investigating distances to see how far messages could be transmitted

**To do:**

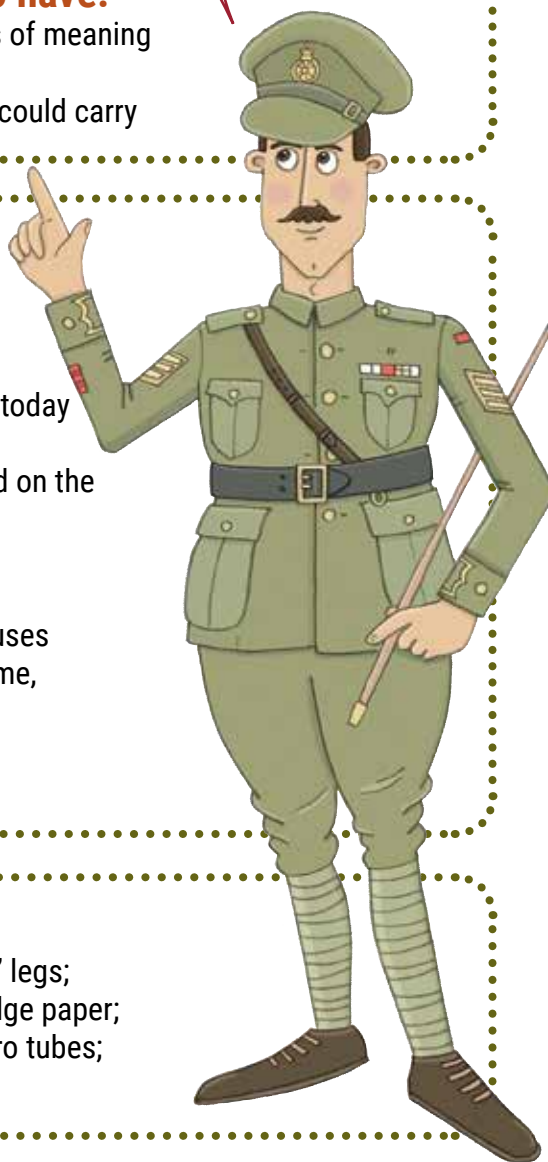
- ◆ Assemble material and equipment e.g. twigs to represent pigeons' legs; different weights of paper e.g. airmail paper, tissue, sugar and cartridge paper; different types of container for messages e.g. drinking straws, old biro tubes; materials to attach the message e.g. string, twine, thin wire

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

- ◆ All will have increased knowledge of how some messages were transmitted in the First World War
- ◆ All will be familiar with the pigeon post
- ◆ Most will have developed their understanding of design restrictions required to send messages by pigeon post and the advantages and disadvantages of sending messages in this way
- ◆ Some will want to find out more about communications during the First World War

**Key terms**

Pigeon post  
Carrier pigeon



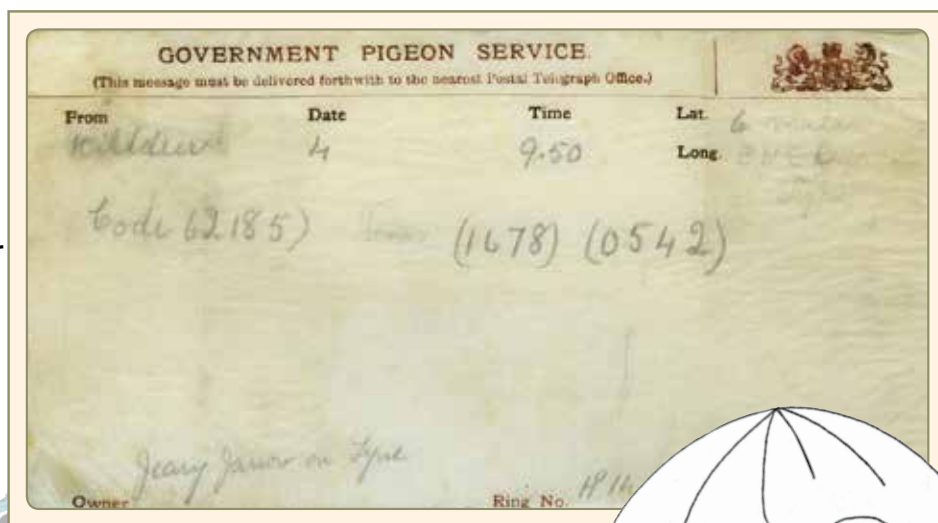


## Pigeons

Carrier pigeons were used to carry secret messages during the First World War. The birds were dropped by parachute. Agents collected the pigeons and looked after them until they had secret information to send home.

► This coded message was sent by pigeon post

© British Library Philatelic Collection - The Scott Collection. With permission.



**You are a secret agent living in France.  
You must send an urgent message back  
to London by pigeon post!**

### Things to think about:

Pigeons can't carry much weight.

Messages have to be short and written on small pieces of paper.

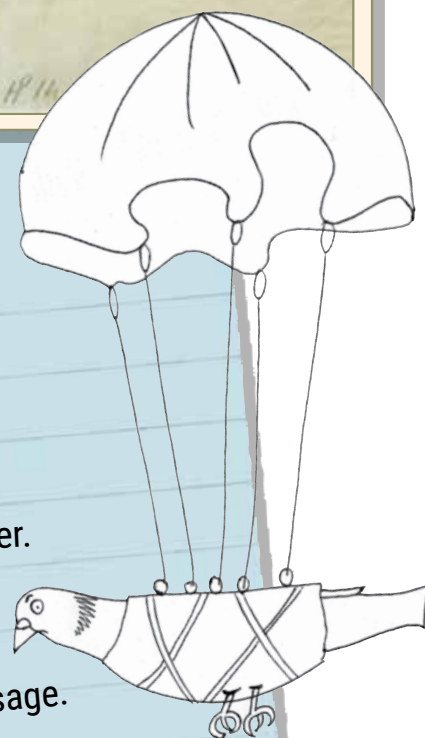
Messages are attached to the pigeon's legs.

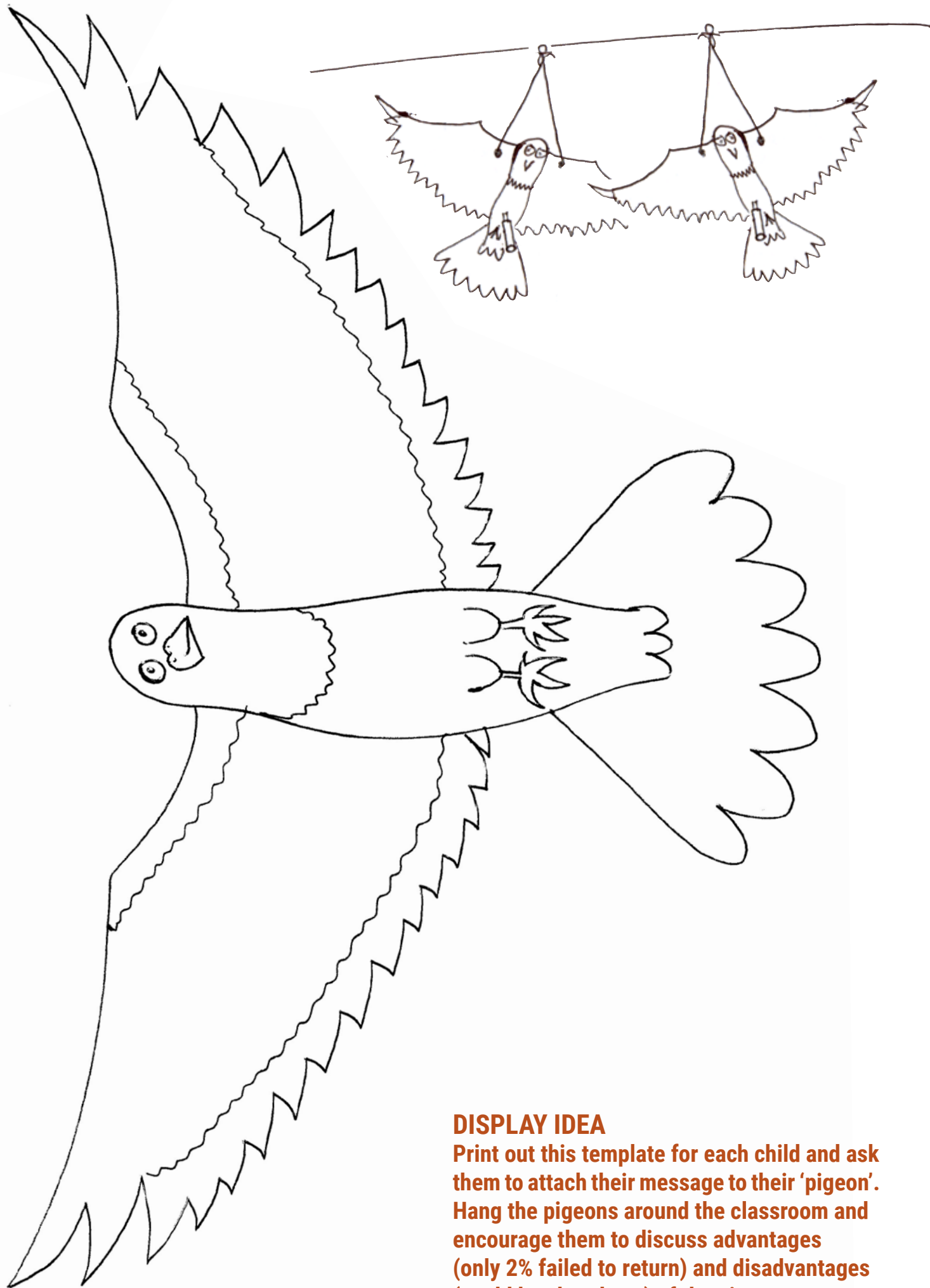
### What to do:

- ◆ Decide what important information to include in your message.
- ◆ Write your message. Include the date and time and who the message should go to. Remember to use as few words as possible.
- ◆ Choose the paper. Which is the lightest? Which can be folded up into the smallest space?
- ◆ Decide how you will attach the message to the pigeon's legs.

### Evaluate:

- ◆ Does your message contain all the vital information?
- ◆ Are there any words that could be cut out without losing sense?
- ◆ Is the message in the container light enough for the pigeon to carry?
- ◆ Is it fixed firmly to the pigeon's leg so that it won't drop off?
- ◆ Could you improve on your design?





### DISPLAY IDEA

Print out this template for each child and ask them to attach their message to their 'pigeon'. Hang the pigeons around the classroom and encourage them to discuss advantages (only 2% failed to return) and disadvantages (could be shot down) of the pigeon post.

# POSTWOMEN

## Recruiting women

Before the First World War, women had been employed by the General Post Office working mainly as clerical staff, operators and counter staff. After war broke out, many

more women were recruited and transferred to men's jobs. Unlike today postwomen did not receive equal pay and the understanding was that they were only there until the war was over.

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▲ **Sorting broken parcels, a job previously confined to men in case women saw 'indecent material' in opened parcels**

*'We postwomen are a curiously assorted army.... having at least two things in common, the desire to do some necessary work and the physical strength for negotiating endless steps and stairs and for carrying bulky burdens'*

*Mary Hughes, postwomen*



► **Postwomen were issued with heavy, rigid boots that many found painful to wear, tarpaulin capes and hat coverings for bad weather**



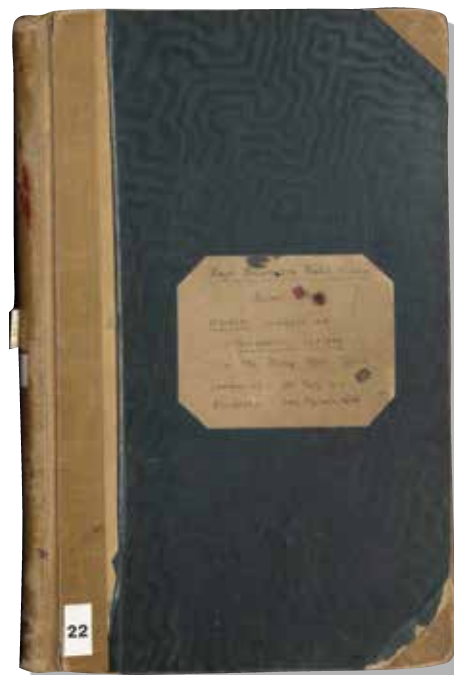
©The Postal Museum, 2010-0535



## On the rounds

'This rising so early is an unwonted experience for some of us. There are sorting duties to be done before setting out on the rounds of delivery, which necessitate attendance at the office at 6 or sometimes 5 a.m..... In the early morning, when the only other people in the streets are stray policemen, milkmen, and road-sweepers, there is a quality of freshness and cleanness in the air that strikes one with wonder, and seems reward enough for having to be astir at an unaccustomed hour, at any rate in summertime. In winter the experience, if more mysterious, is less enticing!'

Mary Hughes, postwoman



©The Postal Museum, POST 47 29

▲ This record of women employed in the Royal Engineers Postal Section (REPS) as temporary sorters from 26 July 1915 to 11 March 1916, holds personal details, accidents, incidents on duty and attitudes to work

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Clarke, Lilian Heathcote

Date of Birth: 4 February 1885

Condition: Single

Address: 17 Birchwood Meadows, Muswell Hill, N

Date of Appointment: 25 August 1915

Wages: 2/6 2/6 2/6 2/6 2/6

Office: 1/6 2/6 2/6 2/6 2/6

Was Bonus: 3. 17

Increment: 1/6 2/6 2/6 2/6 2/6

23rd June 17

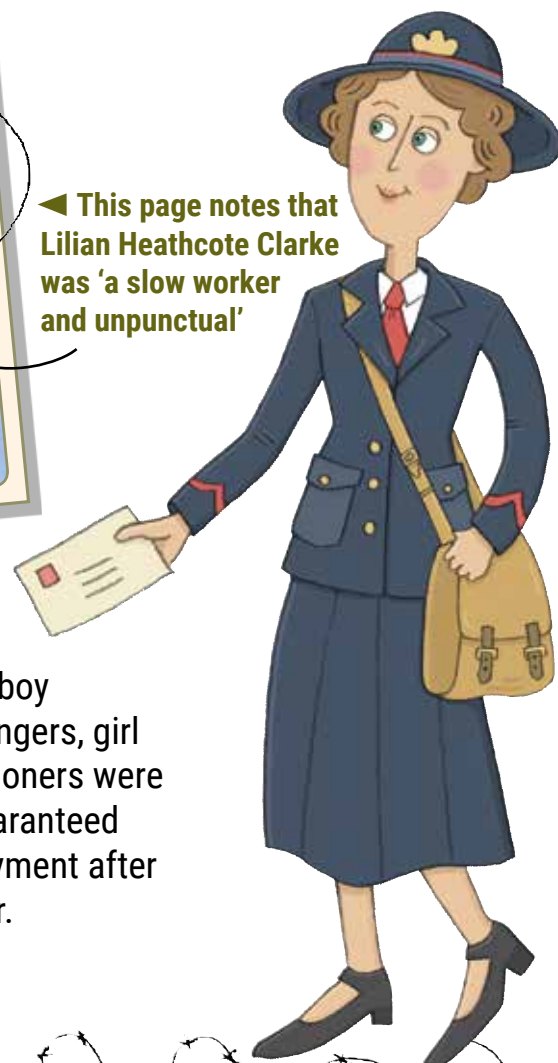
Record of Conduct etc. Received.

She was a very slow worker, and unpunctual. Her late absences having been recorded since January this year (Sd) S. H. Koolhaas

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ACTIVITY ALERT

◀ This page notes that Lilian Heathcote Clarke was 'a slow worker and unpunctual'



## Girl probationers

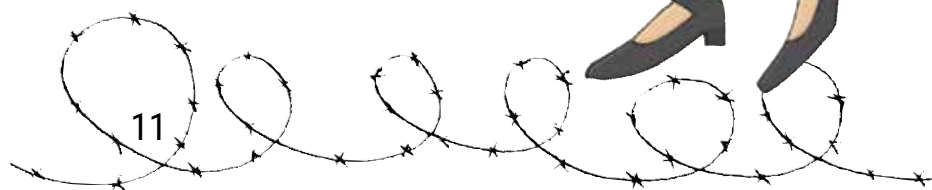
One postwoman recruited as a Girl Probationer (messenger) when she was 15, knew when a telegram contained news of a son, father or husband being missing or killed in action. She felt strongly that as a teenager,

'she was required to do something that no young person should have to do.'

Unlike boy messengers, girl probationers were not guaranteed employment after the war.



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## First World War attitudes to postwomen

There were many examples of positive but patronising reactions to postwomen as in this poem published in St Martin's Le Grand, the General Post Office staff magazine.



▼ A cartoon published by St Martin's Le Grand, illustrating a fictional representation of postwomen

**The War Maiden at Home**  
 When the soldier's tramp is o'er the land  
 And "Civvies" do not count,  
 When Luxury's severely banned  
 And prices upward mount,  
 When each man over forty-one is put upon the shelf  
 The thoughtful maiden sits up straight and says unto herself:

"Now where's the place where I come in?  
 How can I lend a hand?  
 I'll knit and sew, but can't I take  
 A still more useful stand?"  
 While all around the soldiers gay in every house were billeted:  
 The people hardly knew their homes, but said the place was filleted.

There! These conditions do provide  
 The maiden's useful part –  
 To do the undistinguished jobs  
 With all her willing heart.  
 She won't get the Victoria Cross – no, not by any means!  
 But the fighting man can't fight without the help behind the scenes.



SUPT.—"Now then, you musn't sort Liverpool letters to Manchester because they have blue envelopes."  
 SISTER SUSIE (late expert at coloured wool work).—"Oh, you're too fussy."

## Remembered

Several female General Post Office workers were honoured for bravery during the First World War. Mabel Eleanor Clarke, a telephonist,

'(came) on duty on every possible occasion of emergency through bombardment and gunfire.'



©Royal Mail Group Ltd 2014, courtesy of The Postal Museum, illustration from St Martin's Le Grand 1918, POST 92



**Overview of the lesson:**

This activity links to KS3 Citizenship, uses archival material to develop enquiry skills and encourage questioning, understanding and empathy towards the role of female postal workers in the First World War.

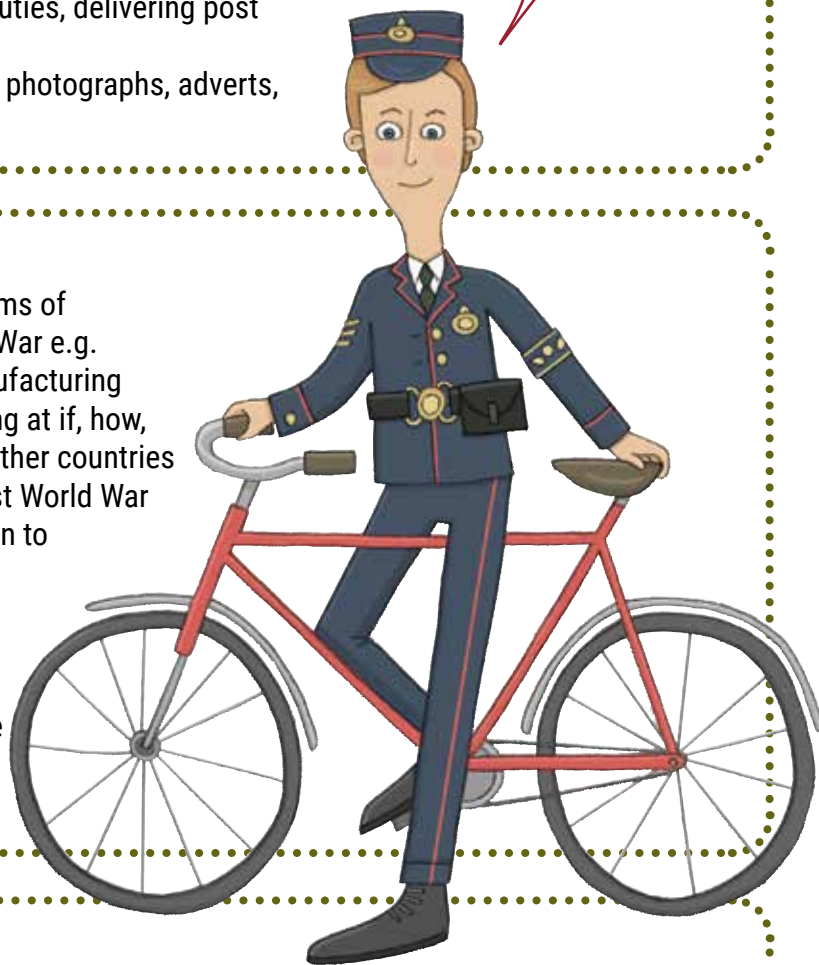
*Pupils use drama to explore attitudes to female postal workers in the First World War.*

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

- ◆ Researched the type of work female postal workers were employed to do during the First World War (censoring letters, sorting broken parcels, packing parcels for PoWs, counter and office duties, delivering post and telegrams)
- ◆ Studied a range of archival material such as photographs, adverts, cartoons, poems, official records and diaries

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **History, Citizenship:** Investigating other forms of employment for women during the First World War e.g. in the Services, nursing, work on the land, manufacturing and engineering industries, teaching etc; looking at if, how, and to what extent, women were employed in other countries such as France, Russia and Germany in the First World War
- ◆ **D&T:** Designing posters to encourage women to work for the General Post Office in the First World War
- ◆ **English:** Developing drama and role play around women at work in the First World War
- ◆ **KS2 History, PHSE:** Hot seating, conscience alleles, story telling or freeze frames can all be adapted for Upper KS2

**To do:**

- ◆ **You will need:** printouts of original archival material including adverts, poems, cartoons, diaries and the extract from the Code of Conduct book. See The Home Front Powerpoint

**Key terms**

Protagonist  
Archive  
Censorship

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

- ◆ All pupils will understand more about attitudes to working women at the beginning of the 20th century
- ◆ All pupils will be aware of the wealth of archival material relating to the First World War held in The Postal Museum collections
- ◆ Some pupils will want to explore this topic further



## ACTIVITY

3

## WOMEN'S WORK?

When the men went off to fight, women were called upon to take their place. Although women had been employed by the General Post Office before the First World War, their jobs were mainly restricted to clerical tasks. During the war they were required to do jobs previously only done by men.

Look carefully at a range of material from The Postal Museum such as poems, cartoons, adverts and diaries.

### Things to think about:

Do you think women were welcomed in the General Post Office? In all jobs? In certain jobs? Or not at all? Back your answers up with evidence.

How would you describe the type of work available to female postal workers?

Can you think why some people were threatened by the idea of female postal workers? Give reasons for your answer.

Were female postal workers unfairly treated? And if so, how?

What happened after the war was over? Were women encouraged to carry on working? Back your answers up with evidence.

### Your task:

◆ **Hot seating:** using the Rowntrees advert for cocoa, one of your group is appointed as a male advertising executive. He/she is responsible for portraying women in adverts for his company. You question him/her about his attitudes to working women in the First World War.

◆ **Conscience alley:** organise your group/class into two lines. One person takes the role of protagonist and walks between the two lines as each member of the group gives their advice.

◆ **Story telling:** use the archival sources as inspiration to write a story about one woman's experience of postal work during the First World War.

### Power POINT



▲ An advert for Rowntree's cocoa using a postwoman



# A HELPING HAND

## Help for families

The General Post Office was a major benefactor during the First World War. It set up a relief fund in 1914 to help the elderly relatives, widows and orphans of General Post Office staff who had gone off to fight. It funded hospitals and convalescent homes, food parcels were sent to prisoners of war and employment was provided for widows.

*'We have now going on in the Post Office....one of the most wonderful cooperative efforts ever made for the benefit of suffering colleagues and their dependents'*  
R W Hatswell, St Martin's Le Grand, 1915

► Concerts were held to raise money for the relief fund. Performers offered their services free

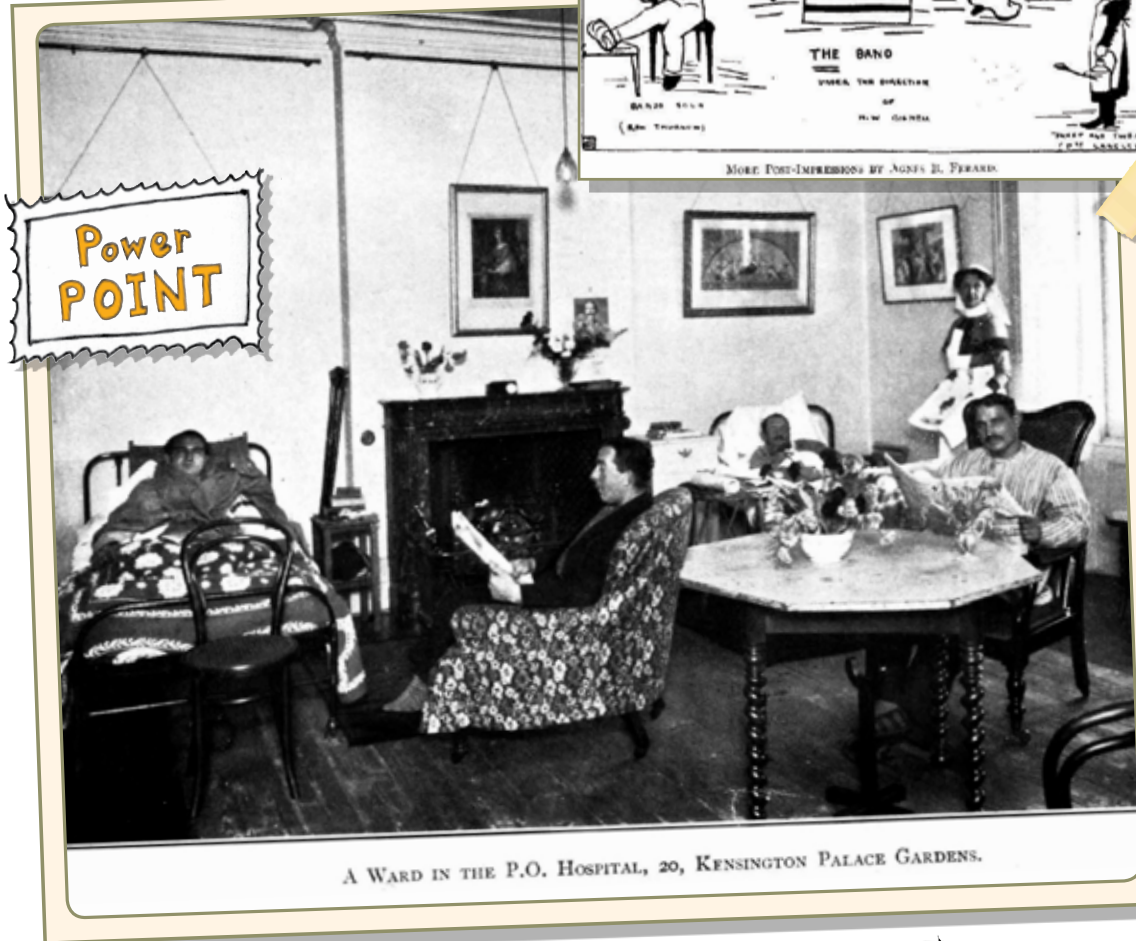


▼ This hospital in 20 Kensington Gardens, London was funded by the General Post Office

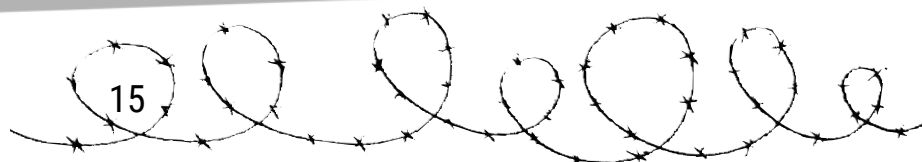


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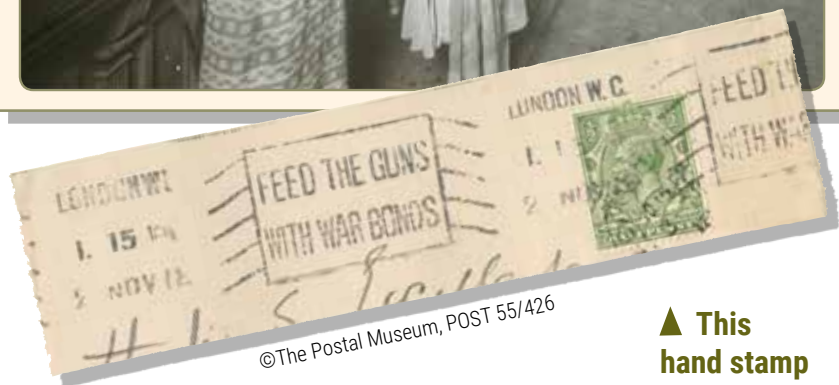
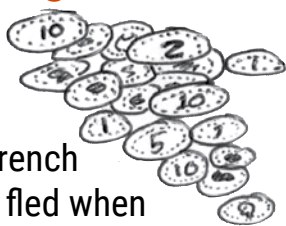
## Separation allowances

The General Post Office was responsible for making sure that Separation Allowances reached the wives of men in the armed forces. These were state funded payments for millions of women whose source of income disappeared when their men left to fight.

► The General Post Office also distributed ration books

## Help for refugees

Postal staff could donate to a fund for Belgian and French postmen who fled when the German army invaded. Refugees were given work in London postal and telegraph services and some General Post Office staff offered their houses for somewhere to stay.



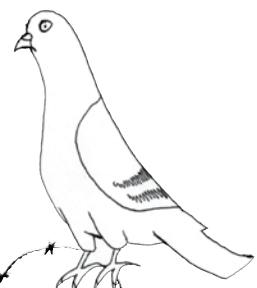
©The Postal Museum, POST 55/426

▲ This hand stamp for letters encourages the purchase of war bonds

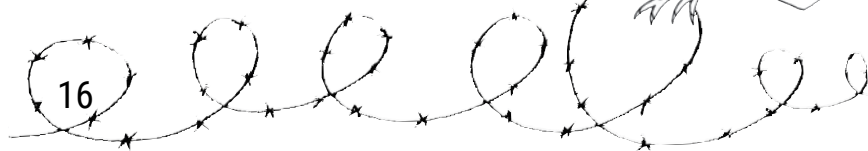
◀ Belgian postal refugees arriving in Ilford, Essex



©Royal Mail Group Ltd, courtesy of The Postal Museum, St Martin's Le Grand, 1915, POST 92



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# HELPING TO FINANCE THE WAR

## Investing in the war

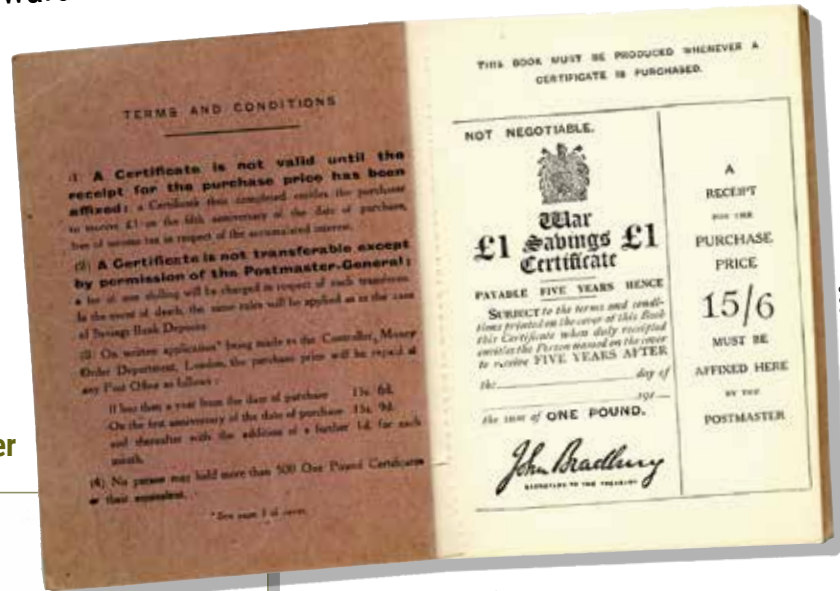
The General Post Office was used in a number of ways to help finance the war. It established a war time savings scheme and encouraged the public to buy War Bonds and War Savings Certificates.

► War Savings Certificates were designed to raise money at short notice



▼ A cartoon published in *Punch* portraying the General Post Office as a wartime profiteer

'...the Post Office is daily besieged by applicants who are for the first time in their lives interested in these problems. They write ...."Is it safe?" "Is it true we won't see our money until 1925?" "If the Germans invade us will the War Loan help them or us?" "Should I insure my certificate against an air raid?"  
Edward Bennett, Savings Bank department employee, 1915



©The Postal Museum, E10280



ANOTHER WAR-PROFITEER.  
From *Punch*.



## Making do

When the war began, the General Post Office offered its entire stock of cloth to the War Office to make army uniforms. The result was all postmen and messenger boys had to make their uniform last for an extra year. It also caused offence by asking for the return of uniforms of men who had left to fight.

*'It can only be characterised as brutal and callous, for in several cases wives collapsed on being asked to return the uniform, the dominant thought being that they would not be worn again'*  
J. Homewood, Catwood Sorting Office employee, 1914



St. Martin's-le-Grand.

JULY, 1917.

*Eat less  
Bread*

## Eat less

In 1917, the General Post Office delivered letters throughout Britain, addressed 'To the head of the household' urging everyone to be economic with food.

◀ The cover of St Martin's Le Grand, General Post Office staff magazine, 1917, urging readers to be more frugal



▲ The Penny Black introduced in 1840, was the world's first pre-paid postage stamp

©Royal Mail Group Ltd, 2014, courtesy of The Postal Museum



▲ This stamp, with the head of George V, was introduced in 1918



## The price of postage

By 1918, the War Office needed to raise revenue for the war, so the (old) penny rate for postage was raised by half a penny. It was the end of 'the penny post' that had been maintained for 75 years.



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# DELIVERED TO THE FRONT

## Up and running

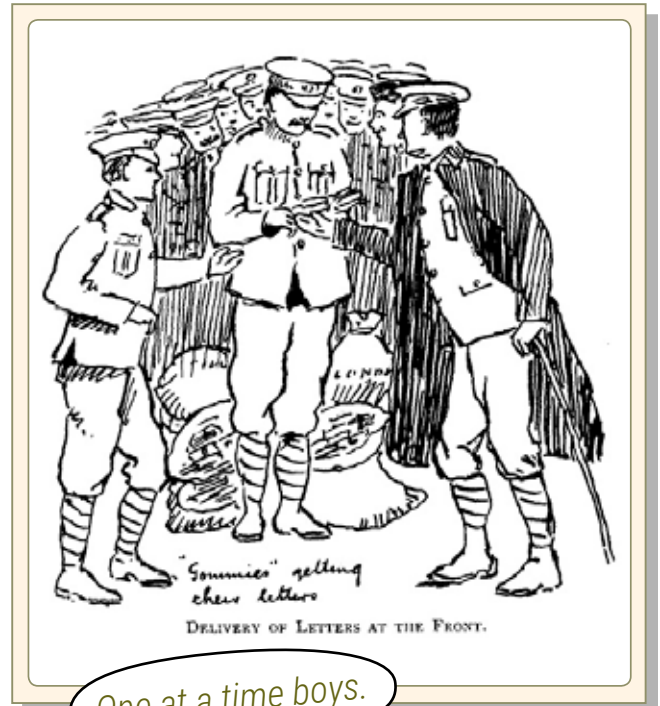
In August 1914, at the start of the First World War, the General Post Office worked in complete secrecy. It was instructed to prevent any letters from reaching troops and vice versa.

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



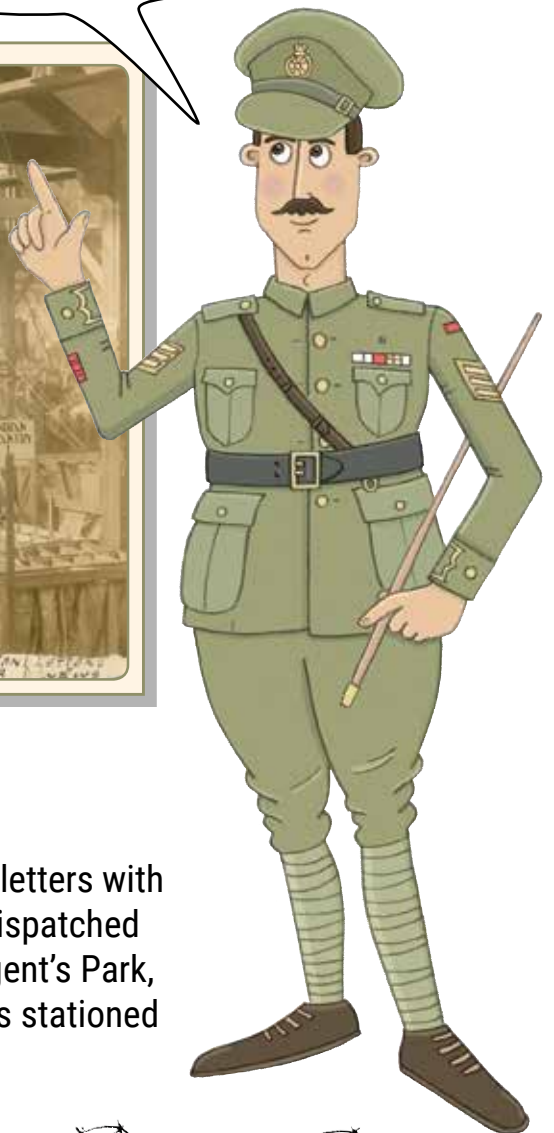
©Royal Mail Group Ltd, courtesy of The Postal Museum, St Martin's Le Grand, 1915, POST 92



### ▲ 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.





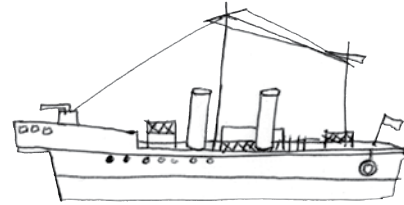
## The boat train

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.



©Royal Mail Group Ltd, courtesy of The Postal Museum, POST 56/6

*'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

©Royal Mail Group Ltd, 2014, courtesy of The Postal Museum, POST 56/6



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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**

©Royal Mail Group Ltd, courtesy of The Postal Museum, POST 56/6

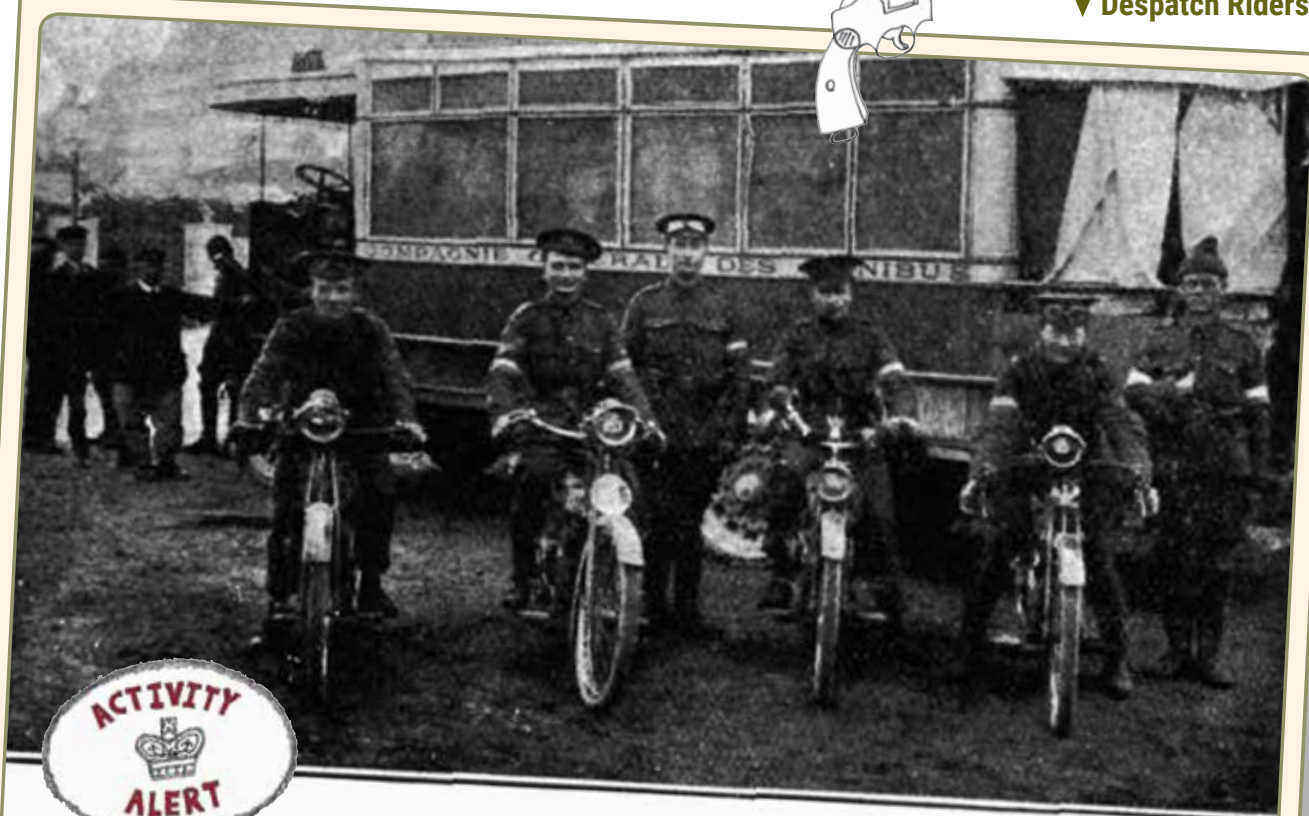
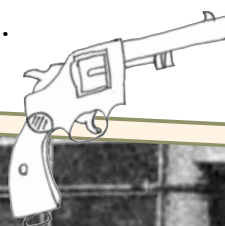
## Dangerous deliveries

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.

©Royal Mail Group Ltd 2014, courtesy of The Postal Museum, St Martin's Le Grand, 1915, POST 92



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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.

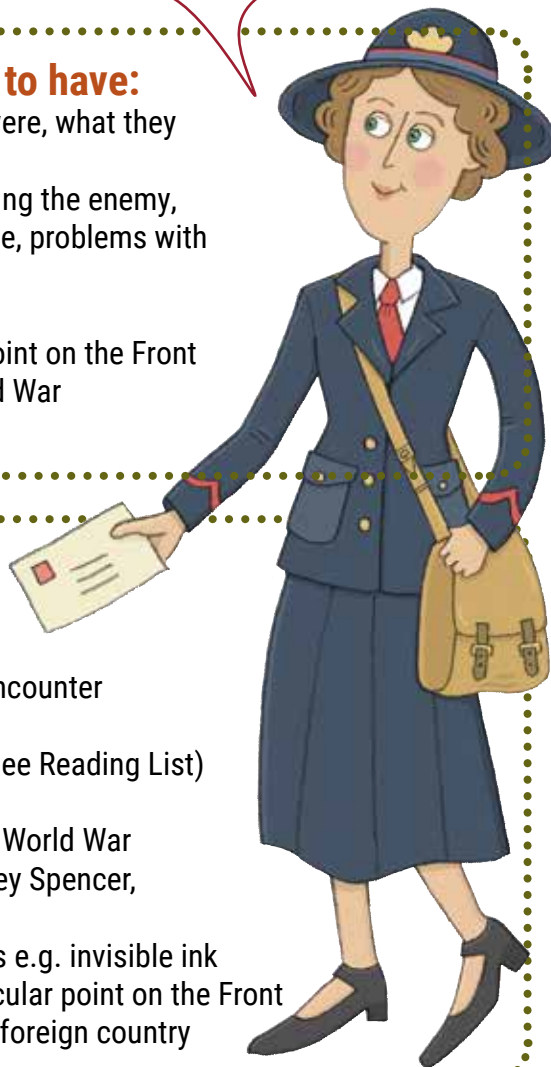
*Pupils make a secret miniature map that fits into a matchbox.*

**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.

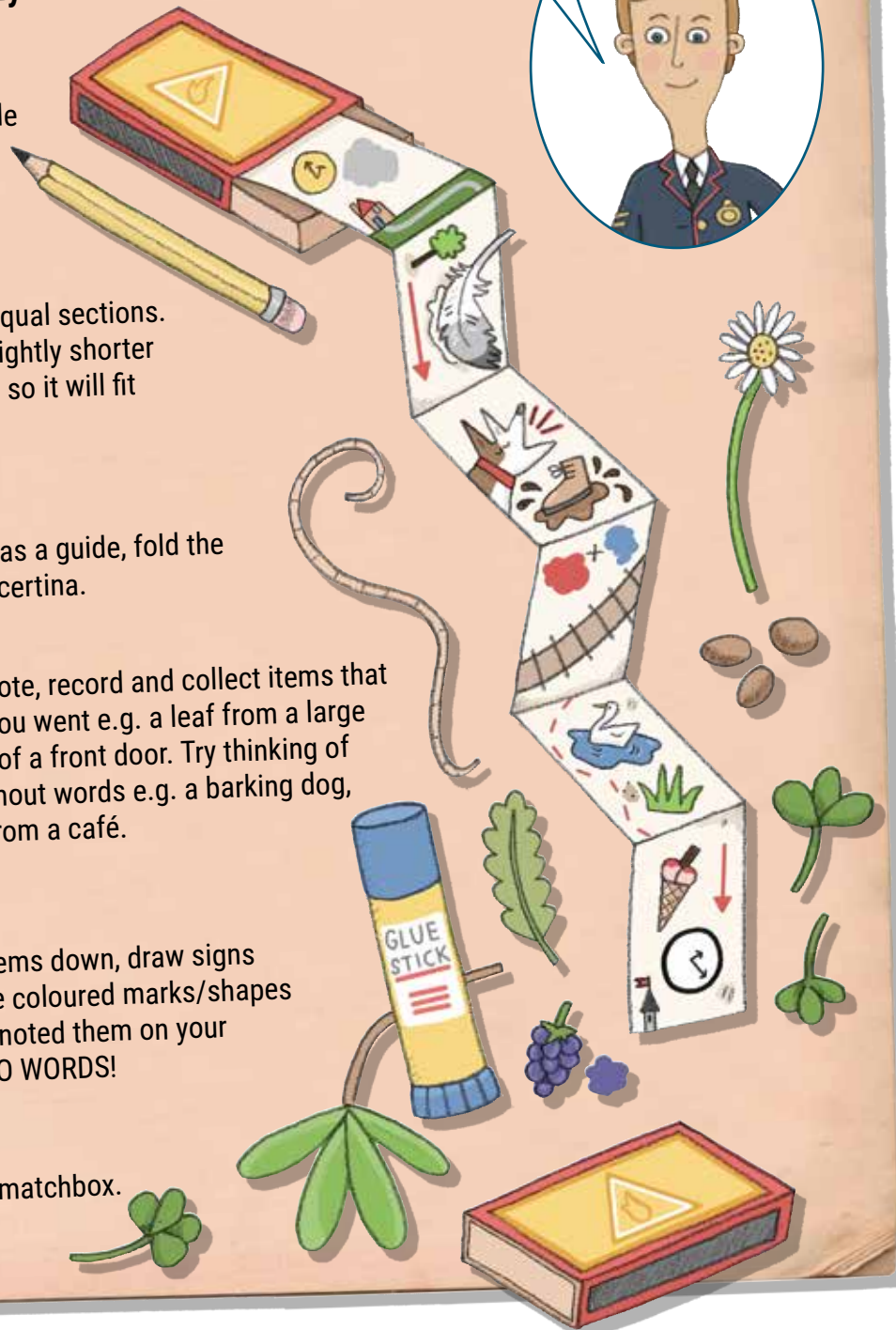
**Step 5**

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

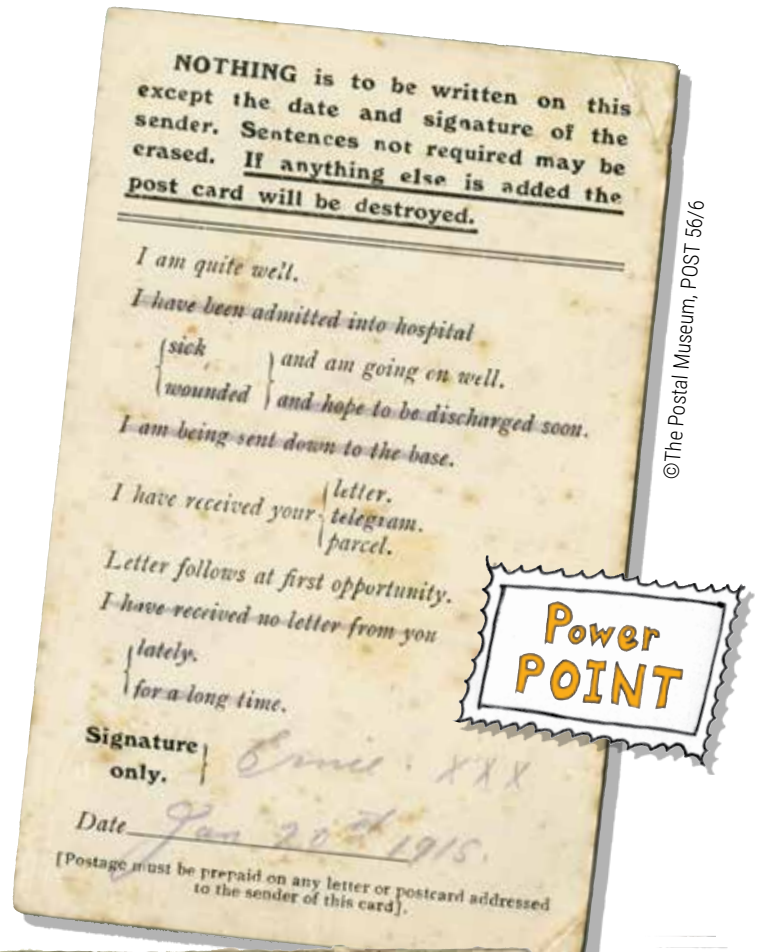
At the beginning of the 20th century, letters were the main way soldiers could stay in touch with their loved ones.

*'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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©The Postal Museum, PH32/27

### ▲ 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



©The Postal Museum, PH12-05



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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



## 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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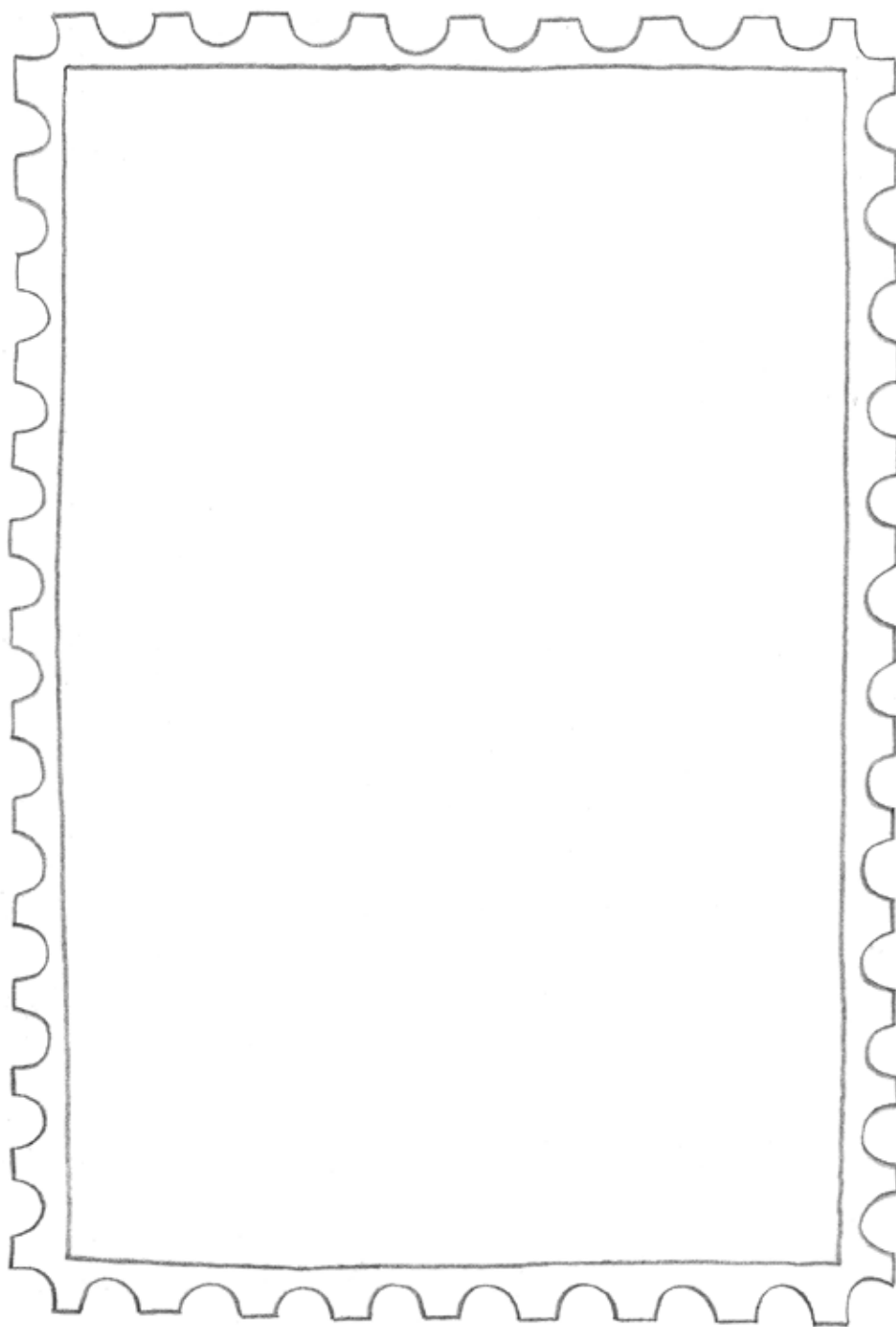
### To make

- ◆ 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'*

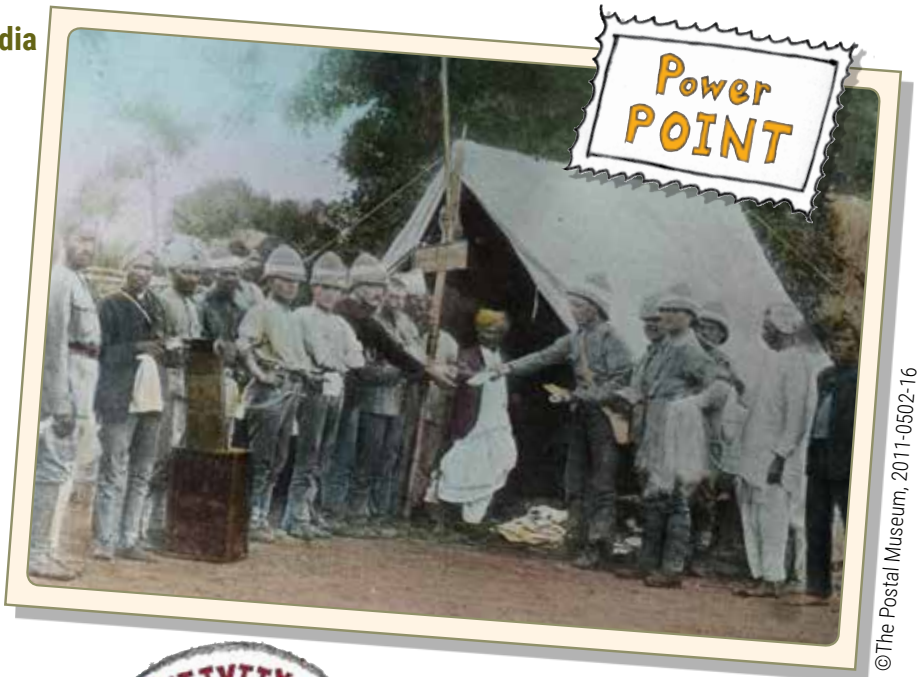
Sir Evelyn Murray,  
Secretary to the Post Office

► A tent acts as a military camp in India

▼ Illustration of Indian Base Post Office in France



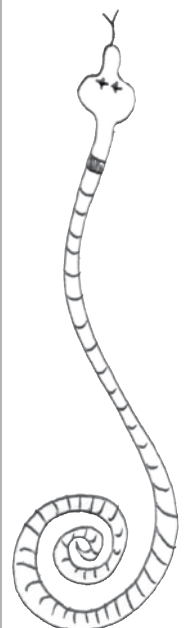
©The Postal Museum, 2012-0030-19



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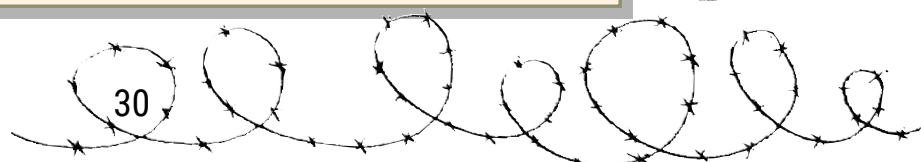
◀ The British Post Office, Madras



©The Postal Museum, 2012-0030-19

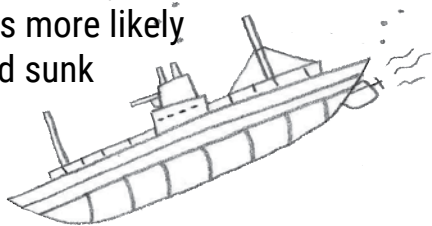


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## Delivering mail by ship

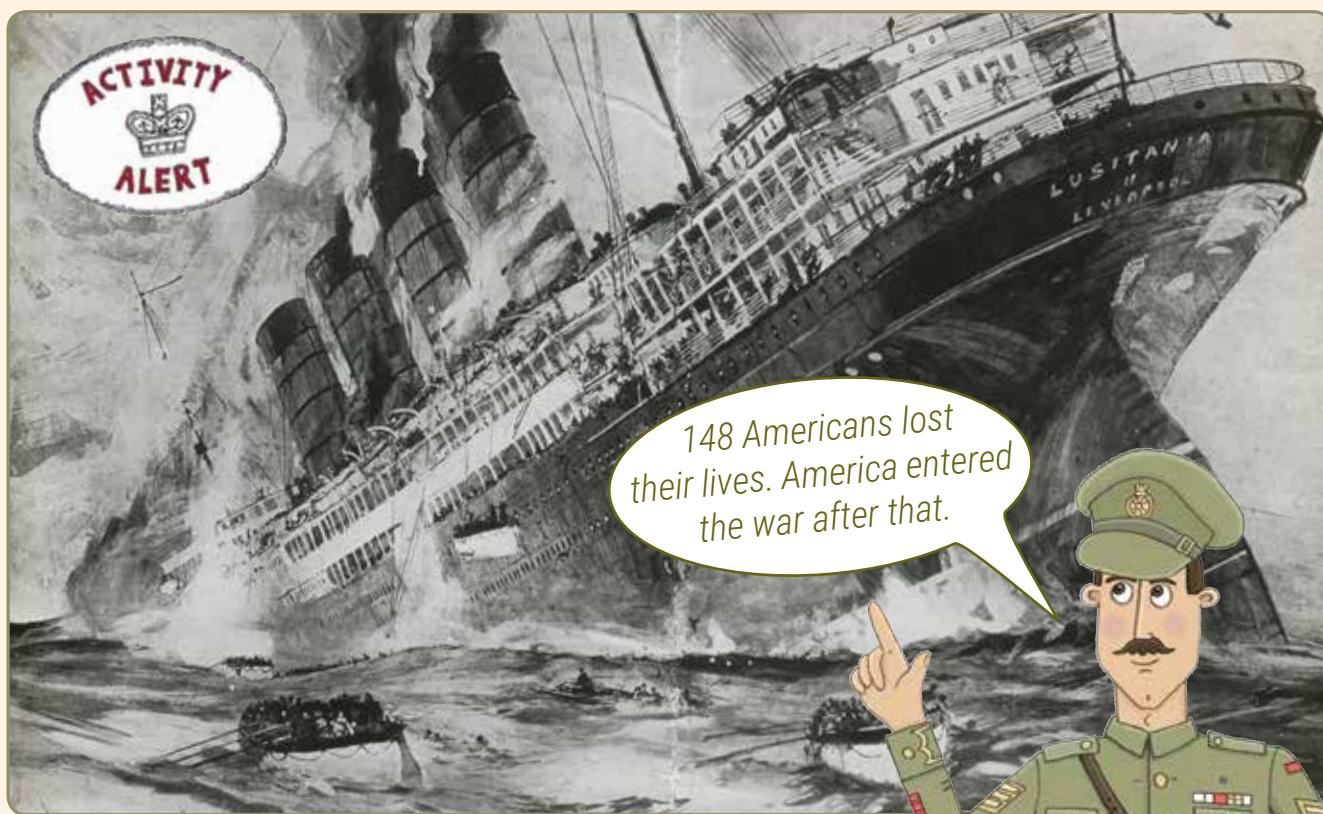
The main means of transporting mail to far-flung countries was by ship. But seagoing mail was more likely to be attacked and sunk by enemy ships, submarines and mines.



▼ 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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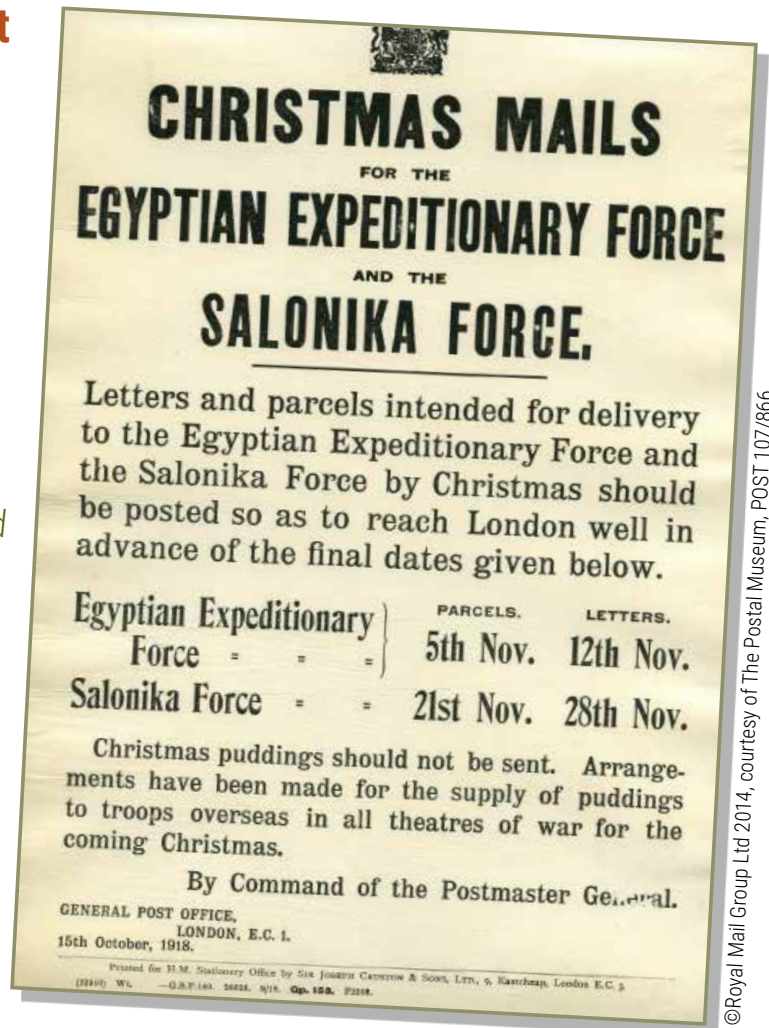
## International work at Home Depot

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.'



©Royal Mail Group Ltd 2014, courtesy of The Postal Museum, POST 107/866



▲ 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.

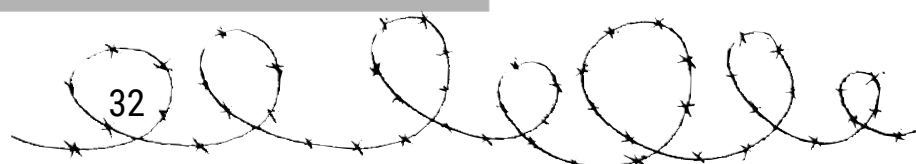
◀ Delivering the Christmas mail in 1918



©The Postal Museum, 2012-01/49/01



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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?



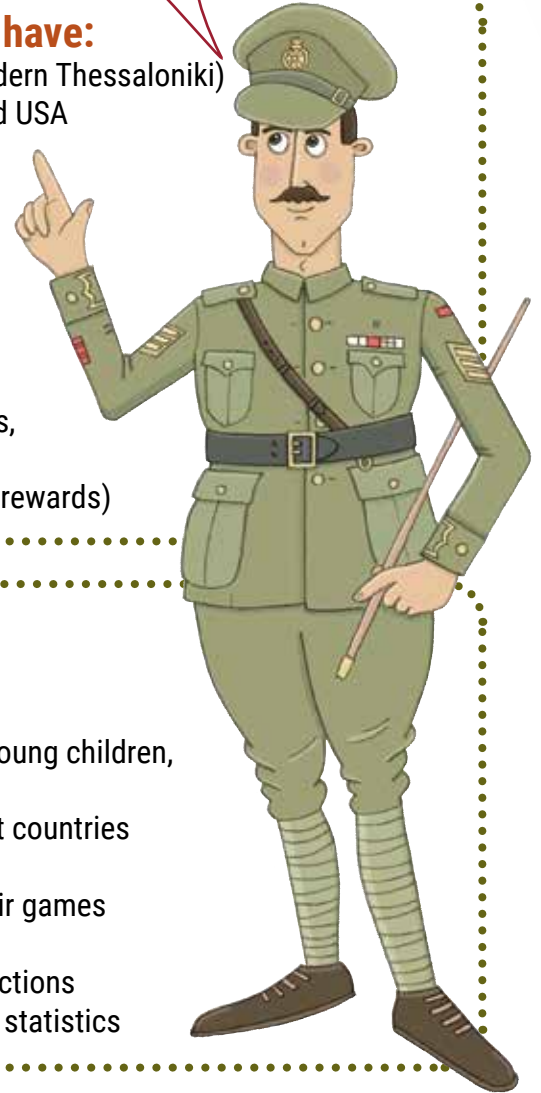
**Overview of the lesson:**

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**

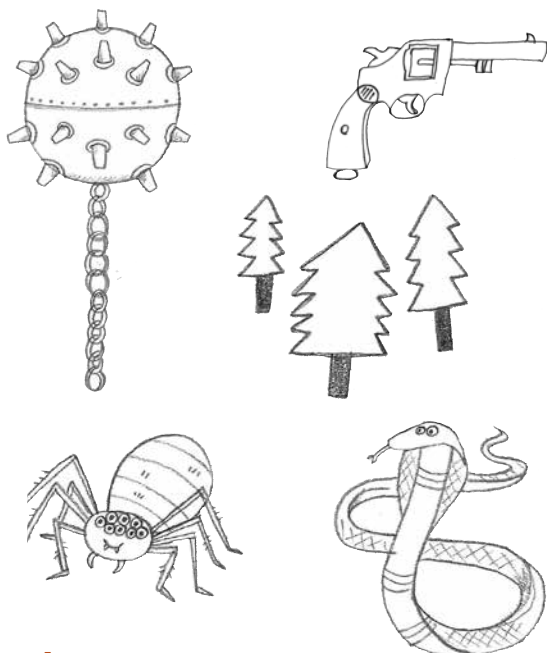
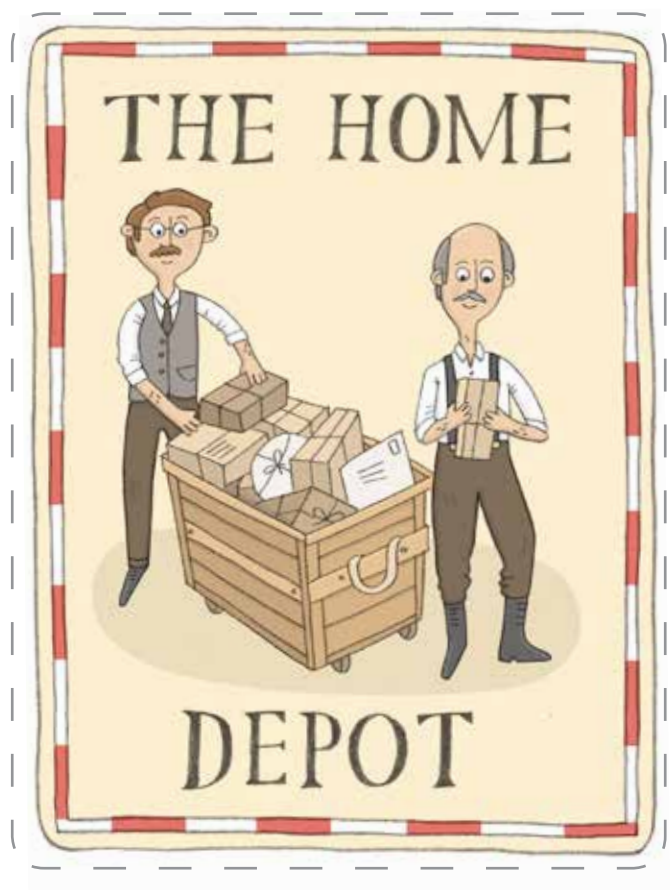
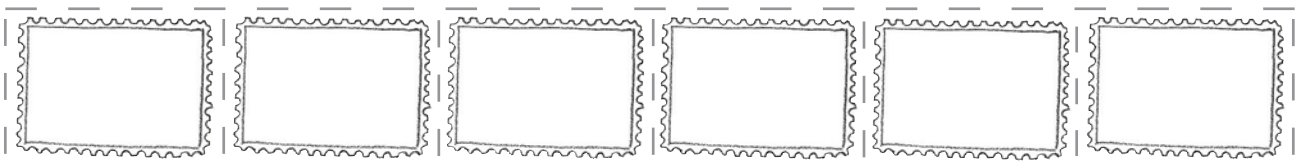
Mines  
 Submarines  
 Torpedoes  
 Wild animals  
 Angry local people  
 Enemy tanks  
 Bomb damage  
 Zeppelins  
 Fire  
 Floods  
 Gas attacks  
 Spies  
 Terrible weather

**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



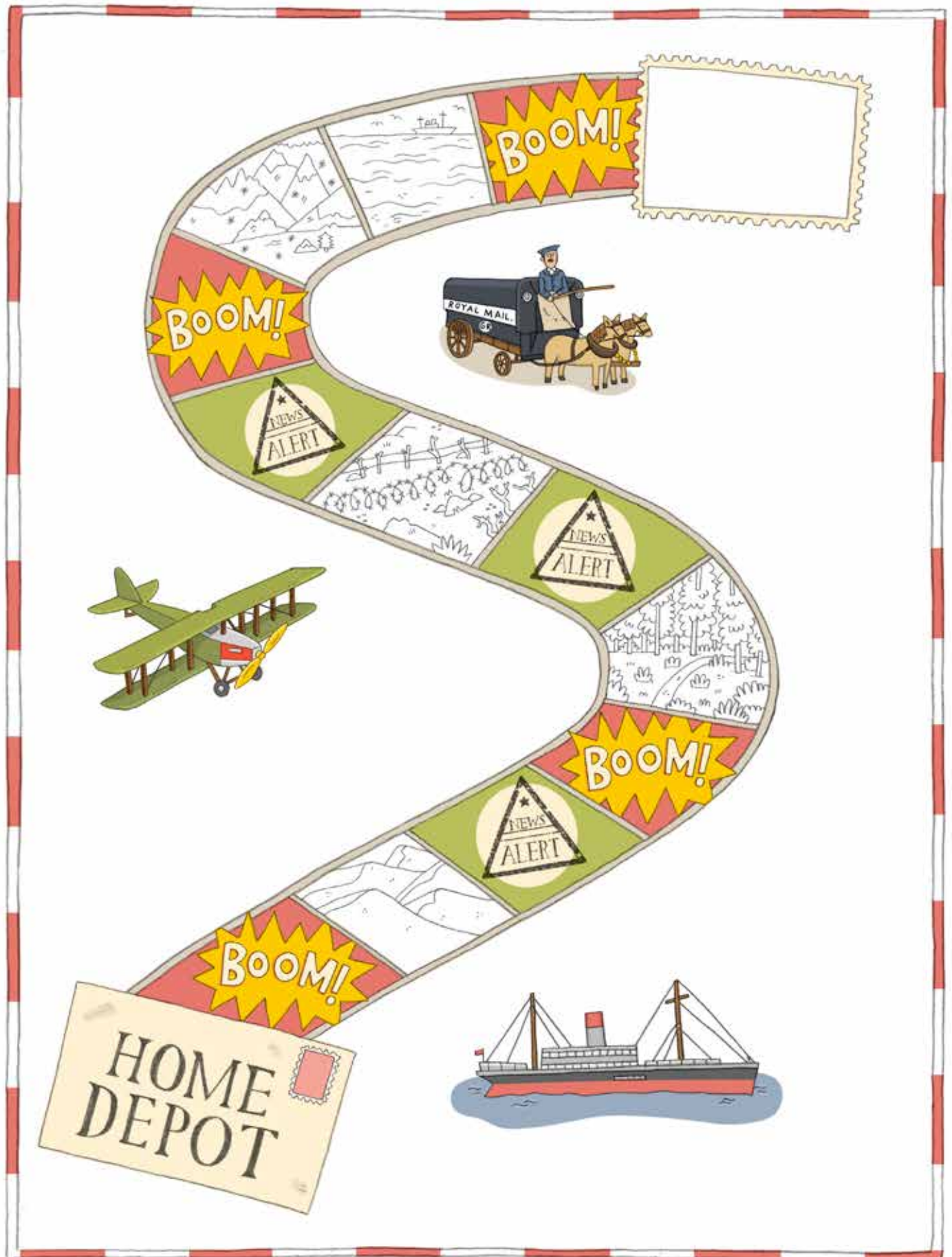
Miss a go

GENERAL POST OFFICE



Forward 1 square

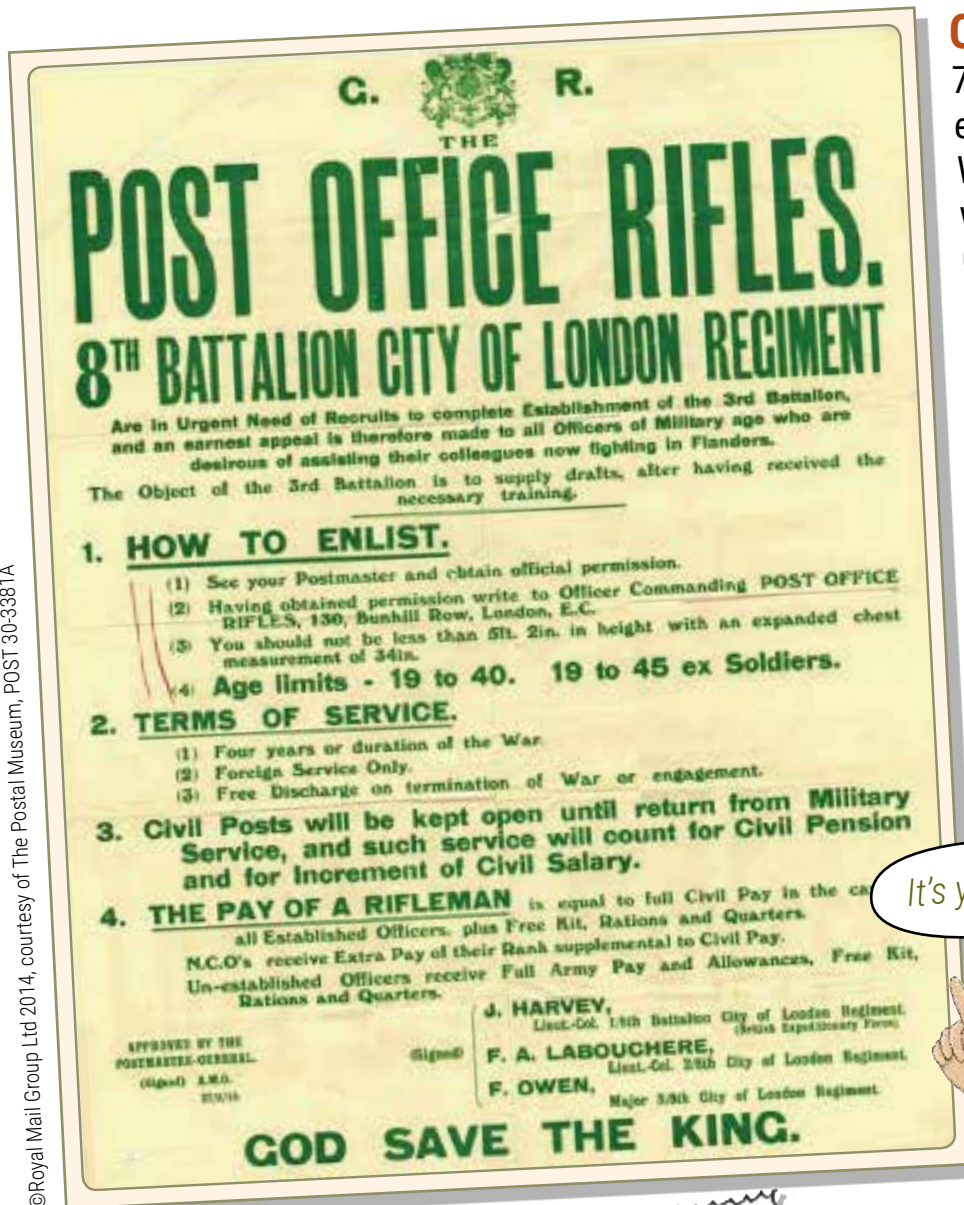
# ACTIVITY 7 MAKE A BOARD GAME





# THE POST OFFICE RIFLES

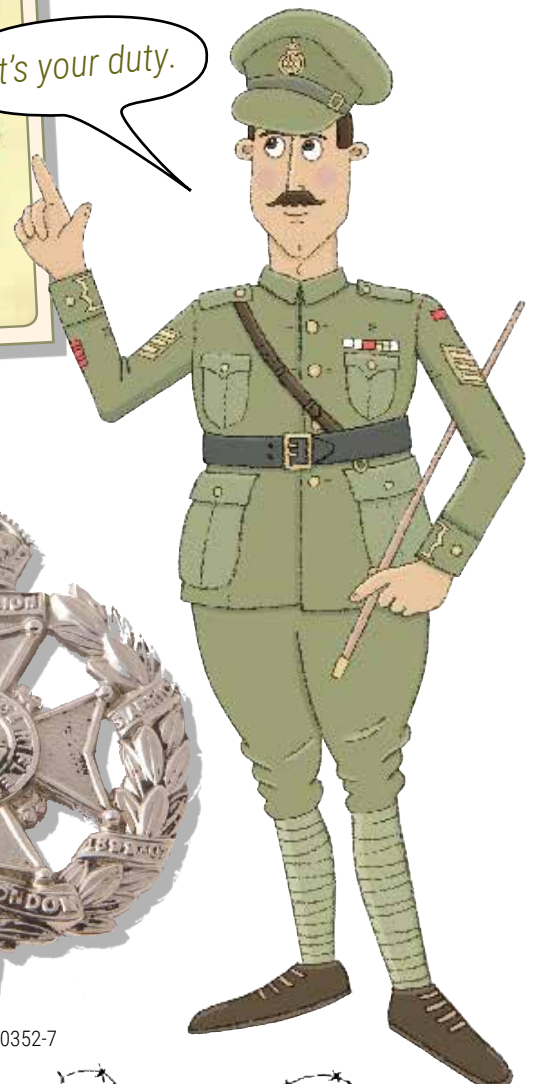
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## Off to war

75,000 General Post Office employees fought in the First World War including 12,000 workers who served in the General Post Office's own regiment, the Post Office Rifles (PORs).

Postal employees also joined the Army Postal Service (APS). The APS travelled with the British Army through all campaigns including the Dardenelles, Egypt, Palestine, Salonika (modern Thessaloniki), East Africa, Italy and North Russia.



## ▲ A recruitment poster for the PORs

## 'Britain Needs YOU'

The General Post Office played an important role in recruiting men for the armed forces throughout the war. The famous Lord Kitchener poster was displayed on Post Office vans, circulars appealed for men to join the PORs and recruitment rallies were held at Post Offices throughout Britain.

## ► The 8th Battalion Post Office Rifles regimental cap badge



©The Postal Museum, 081998-0352-7



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## On the Western Front

POR descriptions of fighting on the Front capture the grim realities of trench warfare.

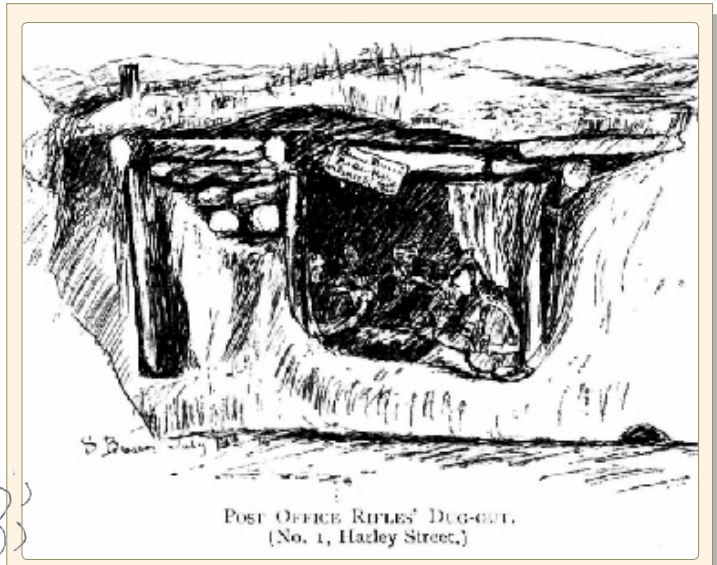
*'We were shelled without stop, day and night... Our casualties became very heavy and to see pals you have known and worked with for years killed and wounded; it nearly broke our hearts – especially when the dead had to be buried in a quickly dug hole'*

**POR 1st Battalion,  
Battle of Festubert, May 1915**



*'For several hours at a time, they [the enemy] would pound and tear at the parapets behind which the men crouched, unprotected by parades, with no head cover, not even a tin hat'*

**POR describes Battle of Passchendaele**



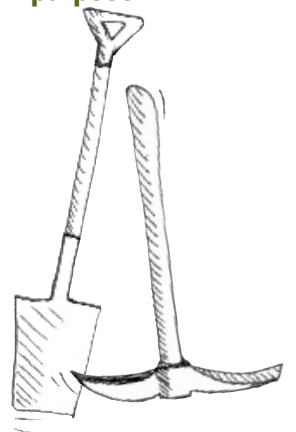
### ▲ A POR dugout in the trenches

*'I thought you were a lot of stamp lickens, but the way you fought ... you went over like a lot of bloody savages'*

**Army Divisional General after an attack, 1917**



◀ **Conditions in Dartmoor were poor and COs were made to do heavy labour, often to no purpose**



©The Peace Pledge

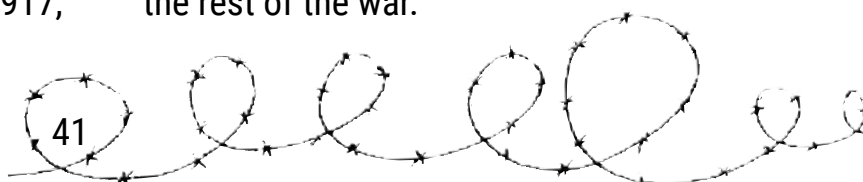
## Conscientious Objectors

Over 400 General Post Office employees who had strong anti-war beliefs became Conscientious Objectors (COs). Henry Horace Peacock was a Letter Sorter and a deeply religious man. Ordered to report to Mill Hill Barracks in 1917,

he refused to obey orders, pick up arms, put on a uniform or sign documents. As a result he was sentenced to hard labour first in Wormwood Scrubs and then in Dartmoor Prison Camp where he spent the rest of the war.



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## Battlefield wills

All soldiers were encouraged to write a will before leaving to fight. Many soldiers were teenagers and had nothing to leave to loved ones on their death.

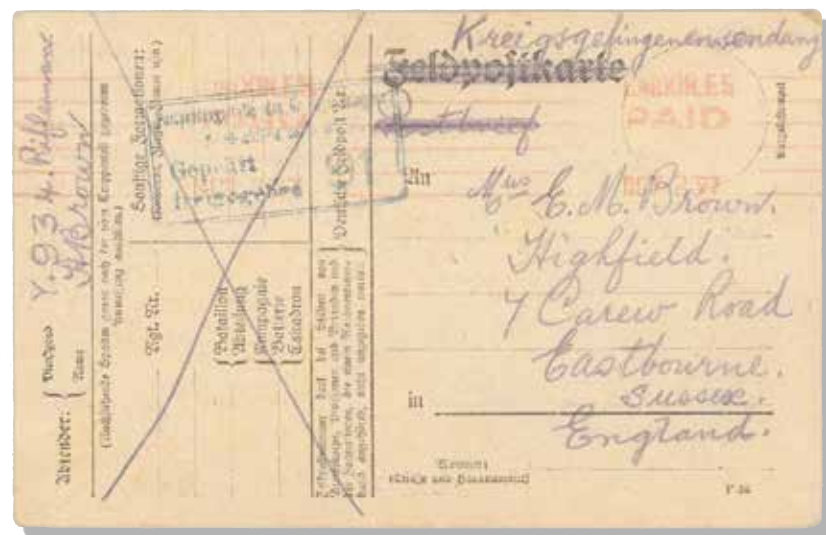
### ▼ POR prisoners of war, Germany



► Private Leonard Eldridge left a plant to his girlfriend and his army pay to his mother

## Prisoners of War

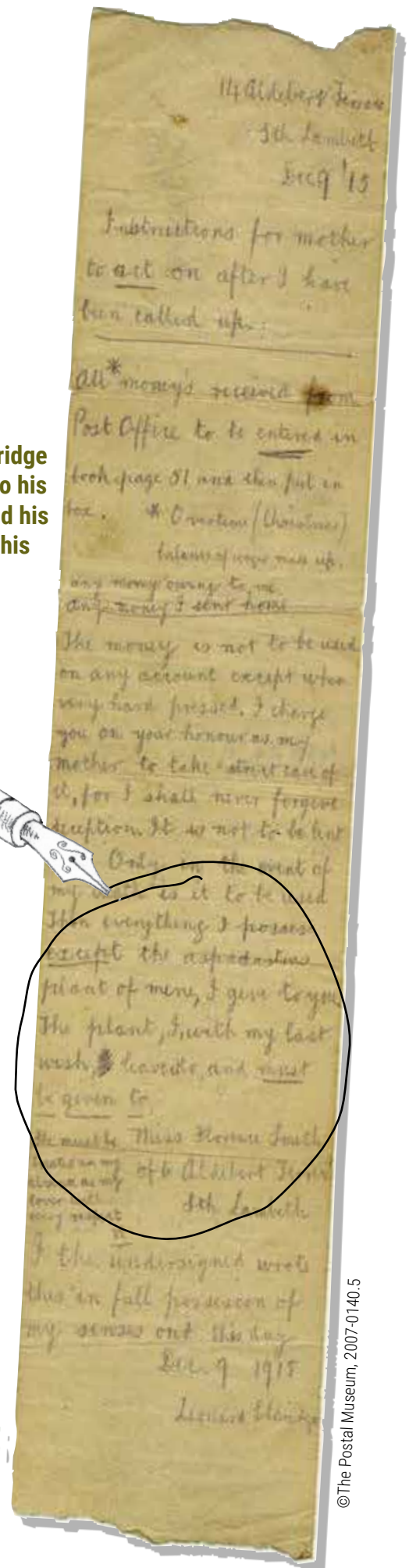
Many PORs who had left to fight were taken captive. Outward bound mail for British Prisoners of War (POWs), (and inward bound mail for German POWs), passed through neutral Holland.



### ▲ Postcard from a British POW in Germany to his mother

## Secret laboratories

All correspondence to German POWs was examined in a special laboratory to detect secret writing. In Britain, enemy prisoners could only write on glazed patterned paper that prevented the use of invisible ink. No envelopes and very few photographs or pictures were allowed.



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## Food parcels

The Post Office Relief Fund regularly sent food parcels to prisoners of war. Typically, they consisted of foodstuffs such as biscuits, jam, cheese and cocoa to help relieve a monotonous diet and to keep spirits up. Tinned receptacles were avoided in case the metal fell into enemy hands.

*'You should have seen the smile on my face when I opened the first parcel from the Post Office Relief Fund.'*

A soldier writing to his wife, 1915

## Mementoes

At Christmas in 1914, every soldier in the trenches received a tin containing gifts and a message from Princess Mary, daughter of George V, who had the idea. Soldiers could keep the tin and fill it with things that had special meaning to them.



▲ William Cox sent home this tin containing a button from the GPO uniform of a friend killed in action and a piece of shell that

*'burst over the office and dropped in the yard'*

© The Postal Museum, 2007-0141



▲ A winning design for a Roll of Honour erected by the General Post Office in 1917

## War memorials

The entire length of the Western Front is marked with graveyards and memorials to those who lost their lives in the First World War. Royal Mail and Post Office Ltd are custodians of around 300 war memorials commemorating postal workers who lost their lives in war.

## Awards for bravery

The Post Office Rifles received 145 awards for gallantry. The Victoria Cross, the highest military award was awarded to Sergeant A.J. Knight at the Third Battle of Ypres in France.

Three other GPO workers serving in other regiments also won the Victoria Cross. Major Henry Kelly and Sgt John Hogan who survived the war and returned to their jobs with the postal service and Sgt Albert Gill who was killed in 1916.



▲ Sgt Alfred Knight's Victoria Cross

© The Postal Museum, OB1997\_211\_1







▲ Captain Home Peel

## Killed in action

Sadly, on 24 March 1918, Captain Peel was killed in action near Longueval in France. This was one of the last German offensives of the war when 90,000 men were taken prisoner. The 8th Battalion Post Office Rifles lost over 300 men of all ranks killed, wounded or missing.

## ▼ Captain Home Peel's obituary

### Westchester Medal Verification Service

35 EDGEWOOD RD.  
PEEKSKILL, N.Y.  
10566



T. KISSANE  
R. CRAWFORD

#### OBITUARY:

"Captain Home Peel, D.S.O., M.C., London Regiment, was reported missing on 24th of March and is now officially reported killed on that date, was the only son of Mr. & Mrs. Charles Peel of Fairview, Buntingford, and privately, and 1895, he was educated at Charterhouse and privately, and entered the India Office in 1906. He became assistant private secretary to the Secretary of State. In the following year he was appointed private secretary to the Parliamentary Under Secretary, and in 1912 was promoted senior clerk. He obtained leave to join the army in September 1914, and was given a commission on 29th October, 1915. He was attached to the Staff from July 1916 to July 1917 and was attached to his regiment during the battle of the Somme. Appointed Staff Captain in July 1917 and Brigadier Major 15th November, 1917. Captain Peel was awarded the Military Cross in January 1916 and the Distinguished Service Order last January, and was three times mentioned in Despatches. He married in 1913, Gwendolen, elder daughter of Lord and Lady Emmott, and leaves two daughters."

London Times, 15th May, 1918

# CAPTAIN HOME PEEL

Home Peel joined the PORs as a Second Lieutenant in the 8th Battalion in 1914. In May 1915, he was promoted to Lieutenant and in the same month was awarded the Military Cross for 'gallantry in action' at Festubert, France.



©The Postal Museum,  
OB1997.212.1

## ◀ Medals awarded to Home Peel

## High flyer

In 1916, Home Peel took part in the Battle of the Somme in France, and was mentioned in 'despatches'. He became a Captain and Adjutant (an administrative assistant to a superior office) then finally Brigade Major in 1917.

## A humanitarian gesture

A letter of comfort written on German military stationery was sent to Mrs. Peel by E.F. Gayler, a German officer who may have lived in England both before and after the war:

*"Although enemy and sometimes deeply hurt by the ridiculous tone of your home press, I feel it a human duty to communicate this sad news. Capt. Peel was killed in action near Longueval and died, as it seems by the wounds received, without suffering."*

► Captain Peel's widow wanted to purchase his field grave - the piece of land where he had fallen. Unfortunately his body had been moved to the Guards' cemetery near Les Boeuf in France





▲ Harry Brown in the uniform of the 2nd Kings Royal Rifle Corps, taken before he set off to fight in France

## RIFLEMAN HARRY BROWN

Rifleman Harry Brown was a soldier in the King's Royal Rifle Corps. Although he was not a POR, the British Postal Museum & Archives holds valuable documentation about him in Field Service postcards and letters (some returned unopened), as well as official correspondence.

### A prisoner of war

Harry's mother, Mrs E.M. Brown, wrote to her son throughout the war. On 12th July 1917 her letter was returned with 'Missing 10-7-17' written on the envelope. She immediately wrote to the Red Cross asking for information and had her letter acknowledged on 30th July, with the promise that enquiries were being made.

Harry had been captured after a battle at Nieuport les Bains in France on 10th July 1917. On 31st August he wrote a postcard from a German prisoner of war camp reassuring his mother of his good health and saying,

*'Don't worry about me as I have finished with the war'.*

Gefchrieben, den August 31 1917  
Dear Mother,  
I am in good health + if you send to the address below it will find me. No doubt my last card reached you + I am looking forward very much to hear how all of you are getting on. The Post Office will give me some very particulars if you are in doubt when forwarding anything. I have been here for all and kindle Peter and Alice, but mine all at present. Don't worry about me as I have finished with the war. Give my love to May + all at West End. I don't love to talk to you.  
Y. 934 Rfn H. Brown  
2nd Kings Royal Rifle Corps.  
Postbriefangestelle  
Limburg-on-Lahn  
Deutschland.

▲ The postcard sent by Harry from a prisoner of war camp in Beyreuth, Germany

Sadly, a letter sent to Mrs Brown on 17th February 1919 gave her the awful news that her son had died of inflammation of the lungs on 27th November, just 16 days after the end of the war.





▲ Sgt Alfred Knight in uniform with medal ribbon

## SERGEANT ALFRED KNIGHT

Sergeant Alfred Knight joined the General Post Office as a clerical assistant in 1909. In 1912, he moved to Nottingham with the Post Office Engineers and in 1914 joined the PORs.

### Wurst Farm Ridge

During the Battle for Wurst Farm Ridge (Third Battle of Ypres) on 20 September 1917, when more than half the POR fighting force was killed, Sergeant Knight single-handedly captured an enemy position.

*'Showing no regard for his own personal safety'*

he took control of his unit and others when their officers were killed or wounded.

### The Victoria Cross

Alfred Knight was later promoted to Second Lieutenant. He was one of four General Post Office employees, and the only Post Office Rifle to win the Victoria Cross.



In 1920, Sergeant Knight returned to the General Post Office and was transferred to the Ministry of Labour. He retired in 1951.

◀ Sgt Alfred Knight in action on Wurst Farm Ridge painted by Terence Cuneo

**ALFRED KNIGHT WAY** 15

▲ Alfred Knight Way, in Birmingham, Alfred Knight's home town

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## SERGEANT THOMAS MAY

Thomas May entered the General Post Office as a telegram boy aged about 14 and in 1915 joined the PORs.

During the war, Thomas kept a diary. This extract shows the discomfort, cold and hunger encountered while on the move to France after enlisting.

### ▲ Sergeant Thomas May

*Wed 17th March 1915: Paraded at 2am. Marched to Watford and entrained for Southampton at 6am. Arrived at Southampton 10.30am. Stayed in docks all day without food, and embarked on the S.S. Atlanta 7.55pm.*

*Thurs 18th: Arrived in Harve Harbour after a smooth passage but by no means comfortable. Taken to Canva Camp 2 miles situated very high, here we stopped for 24 hours. Very Cold.*

*Fri 19th 12.15pm: Left camp taken to Rly [railway] siding at Harve, here we stopped til 4.30pm entrained 37 men in each truck most uncomfortable journey. Lasted 23 hours.*

*Sat 20th: Detrained at Berguelte. Left here at 4pm for Auchel 3 hours march. Here we were put into Billets, by no means a clean place this I think is due to it being a coal mining village.*

*Sun 21st Parade at 9am: C.G. inspection, after this a short march, Officers Pow Wow on surrounding Country. At 2pm we had a practice alarm.*

*Mon 22nd: We were to have paraded at 10.30am and after waiting 4 hours Sir John French arrived and inspected the Battalion.*

### Survived

Although badly wounded in the trenches by shrapnel, Sergeant May survived and eventually returned to the General Post Office, retiring in 1952.



**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS2/3 Design & Technology activity is linked to Royal Mail's online database of the war memorials in its care and launched to mark the centenary of the First World War. [www.royalmailmemorials.com](http://www.royalmailmemorials.com) provides searchable information of around 300 memorials and their inscriptions.

Remembering the Fallen tasks pupils with designing a memorial to one of the men featured in the case studies.

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

- ◆ Researched the database for information on the men featured in the Case Studies (see pages 44-47)
- ◆ Searched the database for memorials in the school's location
- ◆ Discovered other types of memorials within walking distance of the school e.g. animals, natural disasters, foundation stones, street names, pub signs, plaques etc.
- ◆ Thought about how memorials reflect the opinions and values of those who built them
- ◆ Investigated the role of artists and craftspeople in designing and building memorials

**Extension activities could include:**

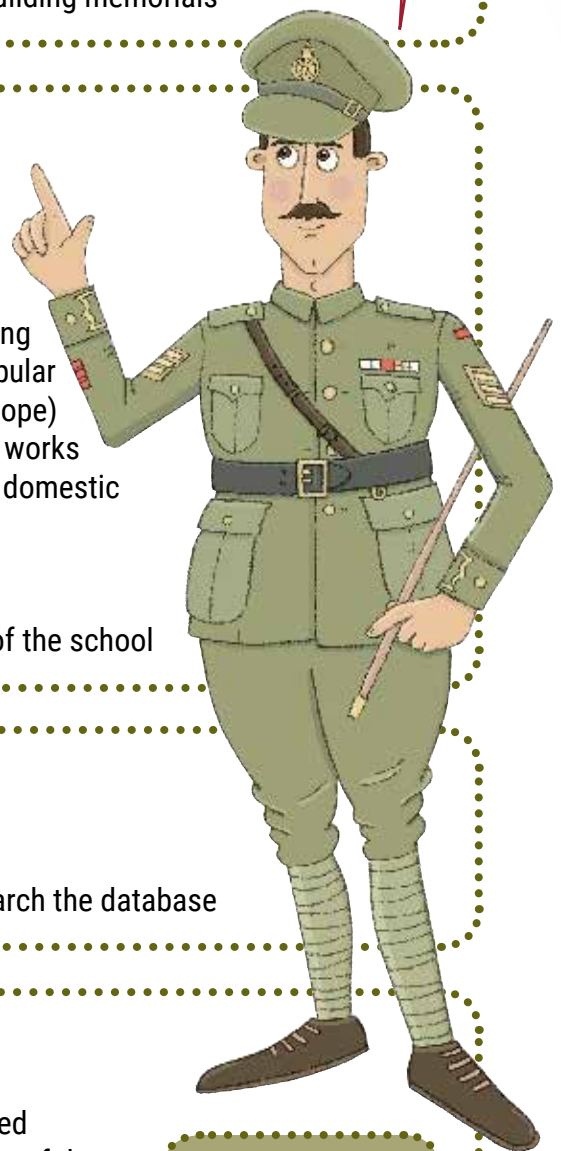
- ◆ **History:** Looking at memorials of different periods e.g. prehistoric memorials (round barrows), Roman tombstones, Celtic crosses etc.
- ◆ **English:** Using the memorials to unlock the stories behind them through drama, role play, poetry
- ◆ **PHSE/Citizenship:** Using conscience alleys with protagonists arguing for and against the erection of a public memorial (too expensive, unpopular design, against recognising emotional need to express grief, sorrow, hope)
- ◆ **Art and Design:** Investigating taste and fashion related to other art works of the time (sculpture, painting, architecture, medals and examples of domestic memorials such as needlework and pottery in museums)
- ◆ **Music:** Investigating music commemorating significant events e.g. Benjamin Britten's War Requiem, soldiers' songs
- ◆ **Geography:** Mapping all types of memorials within given distance of the school

**To do:**

- ◆ Visit [www.royalmailmemorials.com](http://www.royalmailmemorials.com) and search local memorials
- ◆ Walk the area around school to find different types of memorials
- ◆ **Assemble equipment:** art materials and/or laptops for pupils to search the database

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

- ◆ All pupils will be aware of why, where and when memorials are raised
- ◆ All pupils will have designed, made and evaluated a memorial to one of the men featured in the case studies
- ◆ Some pupils will want to investigate memorials further

**Key terms**

Memorial  
Commission  
Dedication  
Inscription

## ACTIVITY 8

## REMEMBERING THE FALLEN

Public memorials are built to remember important events and people in the history of a country. After the First World War, the General Post Office and employees erected memorials to honour the Post Office workers who were killed in the First World War.

► The war memorial at Mount Pleasant

**Your task is to design a memorial for a Post Office Rifle or a postal worker you find on the Royal Mail database.**

**Things to think about:**

**Subject:**

Who will be the focus of your memorial?

◆ What design features will you use in the memorial e.g. a portrait, the action for which he is remembered, his medal, etc.



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**Design:** Your memorial should give details of why your soldier is being remembered

**Make:**

- ◆ When considering the size and shape think about where your memorial will be sited e.g. in a park, on a wall, in a town square
- ◆ Choose your design materials for example, drawing and painting materials, clay, photography or a computer

**Evaluate:**

- ◆ Look at memorials of all types Which ones stand out and which ones don't?
- ◆ Will your design stand out when placed in its location?
- ◆ What could you do to improve the design?





**Overview of the lesson:**

This KS2 activity links with English and PHSE and focuses on the mementoes postal workers at war sent home to loved ones.



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*Pupils assemble a small box of 'mementoes' and a message to send someone fighting in a foreign war*

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

- ◆ Talked about aspects of their lives that inspire special memories – happy, funny and sad
- ◆ Considered what it means/meant to soldiers to have reminders of home
- ◆ Thought about items that would remind them of their home and family
- ◆ Researched The Postal Museum collections for information about items that soldiers sent home during the First World War
- ◆ Discussed practicalities such as weight, postage, size and perishability

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **English:** Reading *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae (see Reading List) writing a poem to enclose in the box
- ◆ **Design & Technology:** designing and making a box in which to save/send mementoes
- ◆ **KS3:** Ask pupils to assemble mementoes to an ex pupil or other significant person in their lives who has died; relate the activity to modern day conflict e.g. Afghanistan

**To do:**

- ◆ Ask pupils to bring in items that they take with them when away from home, and a small box
- ◆ Assemble materials for writing messages and drawing small pictures to enclose in the box

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

- ◆ All pupils will be aware of the need for comfort at certain times such as war
- ◆ All pupils will have compiled mementoes and messages to send 'home'
- ◆ All pupils will know how to address and send a parcel correctly
- ◆ Some pupils will want to investigate this topic further

**Key terms**

Memento  
Memorial  
Memory



## ACTIVITY

9

## A BOX OF MEMORIES

Imagine a loved one is fighting in a war  
a long way from home

**Your task is to put together a small box of things to remind him or her of home and to keep their spirits up.**

**Things to think about:**

- ◆ Choose something to remind him or her of your family for example a photograph, a small toy, a tiny favourite object
- ◆ Write a short message to keep his or her spirits up
- ◆ Draw a picture of something to remind him or her of family life.

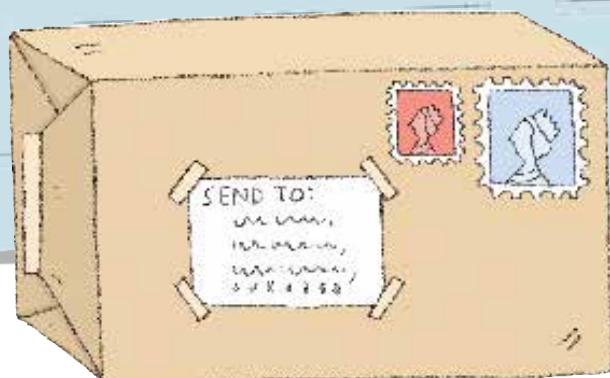


**Things to find out**

- ◆ Weigh your parcel and find out on the internet on Royal Mail's website how much it might cost to send.

**Things to do**

- ◆ Wrap your box up neatly and write the address for the country your parcel may be going to. Don't forget post codes.
- ◆ Draw some pretend stamps including the correct sum of money.





# TIMELINE

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**4 August 1914**  
Britain declares  
war on Germany



**1914**  
Home Depot, the largest  
wooden building in the world,  
built in Regent's Park, London



**1915**  
Women are  
recruited to fill  
jobs left by male  
postal workers

**August 1914**  
1st Battle of Ypres

**1914**  
General Post Office  
establishes relief fund

**1914**

**1915**

**August 1914**  
Naval battle of  
Heligoland Bight

**1914**  
11,000 General Post Office employees  
join the armed forces. This rises to  
over 75,000 by the end of the war

**1915**  
Army Post Office establishes  
communication in the field



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**April 1917**

Sinking of the RMS Lusitania.  
USA declares war on Germany



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**July 1916**

Battle of the  
Somme

**11 November 1918**  
**THE WAR ENDS**

**1916**

**1917**

**1918**

**1915**

Inter-Army  
Postal Service  
begins on the  
Western Front

**September 1917**

Wurst Ridge Farm  
(3rd Battle Ypres)

**1918**

Cost of Penny  
Post raised by  
half a pence

**1918**

General Post Office  
issues ration books



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**1918**

PORs enter the trenches  
and suffer heavy losses.  
Sgt Knight's bravery in  
battle is commemorated  
with a VC

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# READING LIST

## Ten top recommendations for KS2/3 fiction about the First World War

### **Angus, S. Soldier Dog**

It's 1917 and Stanley Ryder is one of many young boys enlisting in the army in spite of the fact that he is underage. Leaving his difficult family life behind him, he is soon assigned to working with messenger dogs and is drafted to the Western Front. Upper KS2/KS3

### **Burleigh, R. Fly, Cher Ami, Fly!**

Cher Ami was one of 600 carrier pigeons used by the American Army during World War I.

### **Foreman, M. War Game**

Michael Foreman's account of the 'Christmas Truce' when a group of World War One soldiers lay aside their animosities to play a game of football in No Man's Land.

### **McCrae, J. In Flanders Field: The Story of the Poem**

The author interweaves lines of the poem with information about the war. Accounts of poet-doctor John McCrae's experiences in the field are included.

### **Morpurgo, M. The Best Christmas Present in the World**

Echoes of Christmas 1914 in the trenches call to the present day when a letter found by chance in an antique desk brings one soldier's experience hauntingly to life.

### **Morpurgo, M. War Horse**

Young Albert enlists to serve in World War I after his beloved horse is sold to the cavalry. Albert's hopeful journey takes him out of England and to the front lines as the war rages on.

### **Morpurgo, M. Private Peaceful**

Private Peaceful is a novel about a soldier called Thomas "Tommo" Peaceful, who is looking back on his life from the trenches of World War I in Belgium. KS3

### **Wells, R. The Language of Doves**

A story passed down from grandfather to granddaughter about his early enlistment in World War I, working with carrier pigeons and the role they played in the war.

### **Wilding, V. The Road to War: A First World War Girl's Diary 1916 -1917**

When Daffy Rowntree's brother goes missing in action, she refuses to sit safely in England, and decides to do something to help win the war. Soon she finds herself in the mud and horror of the battlefields of France, driving an ambulance transporting the wounded of the trenches. KS3

### **Williams, M. Archie's War**

In 1914, 10 year-old Archie is sent a scrapbook in the post by his Uncle Colin, and through the years that follow, we see the world through Archie's eyes.

