

# THE PENNY BLACK STAMP

## ROYAL APPROVAL

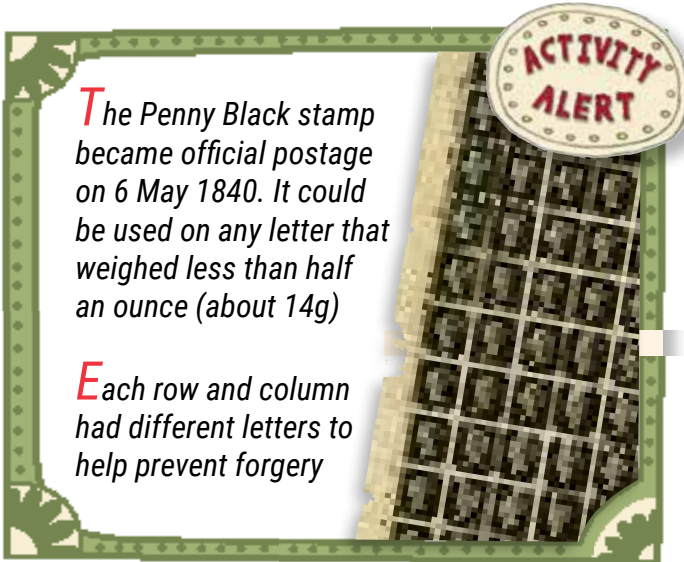
The Penny Black stamp was the world's first postage stamp. Queen Victoria referred to Penny Postage in her speech at the opening of Parliament in January 1840.

*I trust that the beneficial effects of this measure will be felt throughout all classes of the community*



## The Penny Black stamp

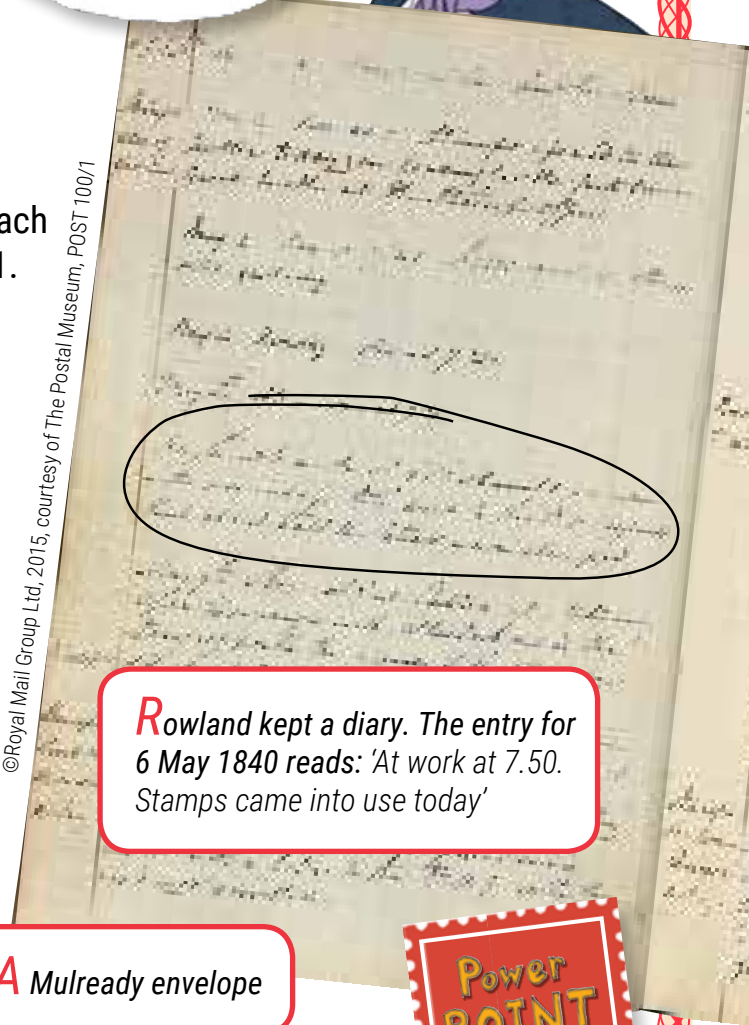
Penny Black stamps were printed in sheets of 240. They had to be cut by hand because perforating machines had yet to be invented. There were 12 stamps to a row and 20 rows on each sheet. Each sheet of stamps could be sold for £1.



*The Penny Black stamp became official postage on 6 May 1840. It could be used on any letter that weighed less than half an ounce (about 14g)*

*Each row and column had different letters to help prevent forgery*

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*Rowland kept a diary. The entry for 6 May 1840 reads: 'At work at 7.50. Stamps came into use today'*

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*A Mulready envelope*

**Power POINT**

## Mulready envelopes

Illustrated prepaid envelopes designed by William Mulready were developed at the same time as the Penny Black stamp. People felt they were too fancy and made fun of them. They were withdrawn shortly after they were introduced in 1840.

## Cheats!

Officials were worried that people would reuse stamps by removing cancellation marks with water or chemicals. So in 1840, shortly after the Penny Black stamp was introduced, the Rainbow Trials took place.

## Experiments

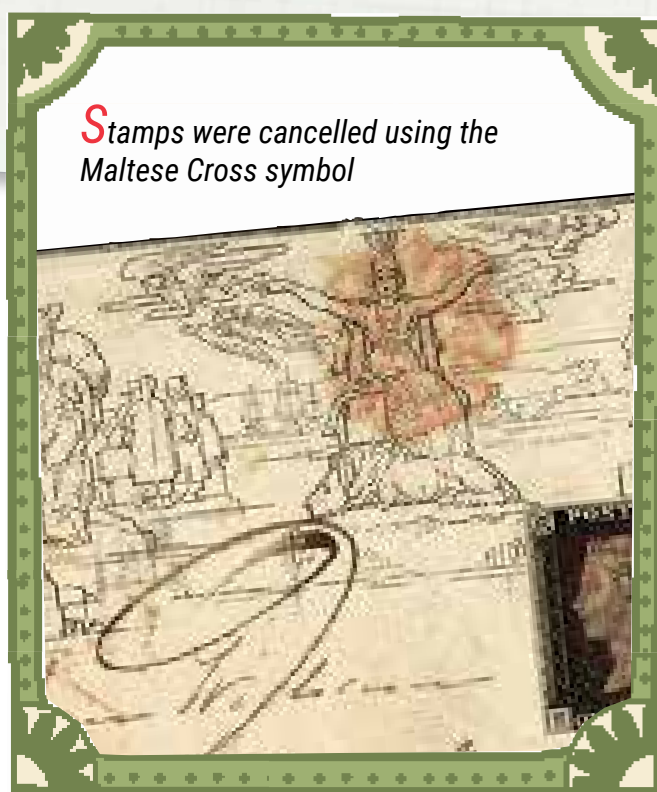
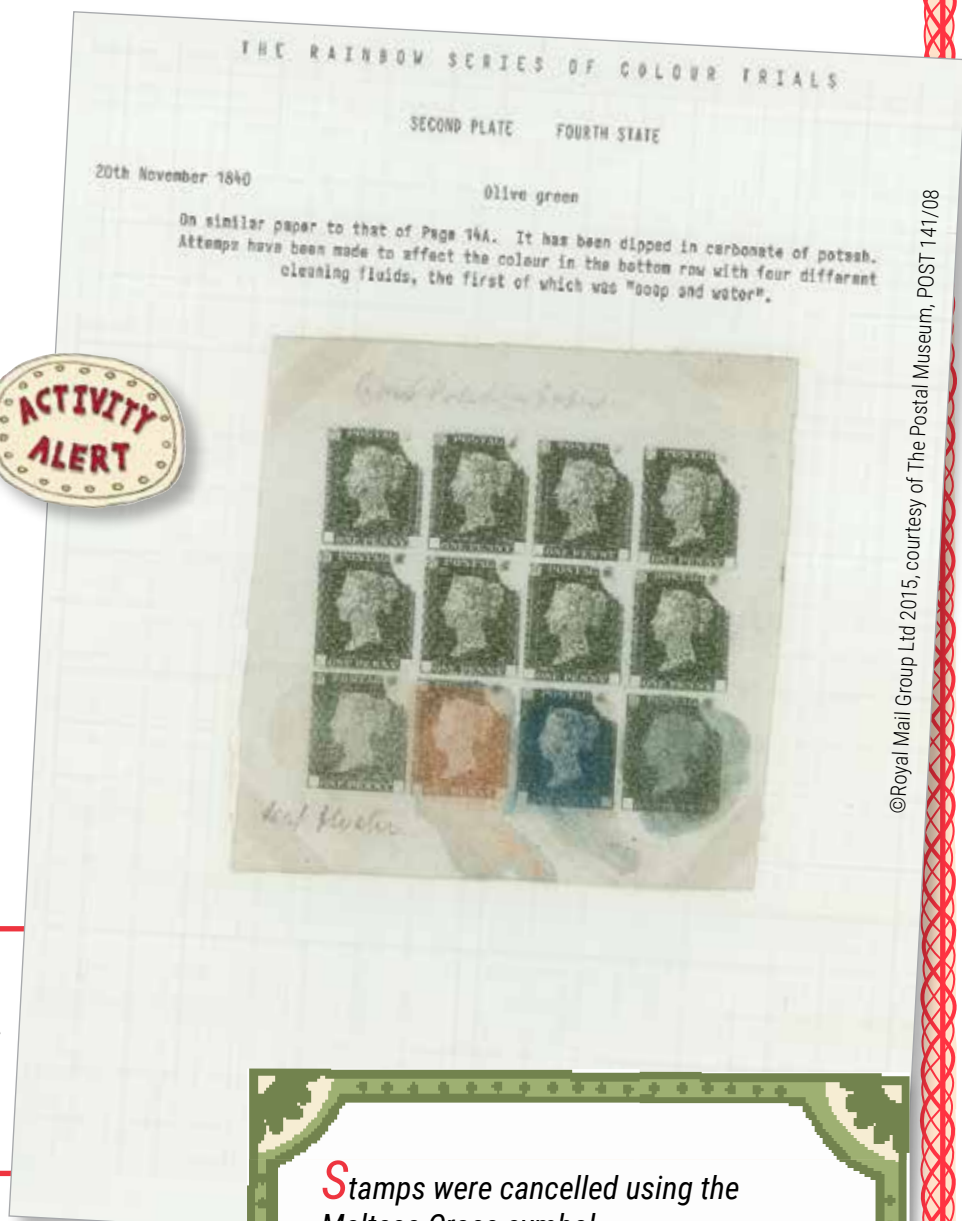
Many coloured inks were tried out on the stamp design and cancellation marks (which is why they were called the Rainbow Trials). Scientists were particularly interested in 'fugitive' inks – inks that ran when liquid was applied to them.

*This trial on 20 November 1840 uses four different cleaning fluids to change the colour of the ink. The first was soap and water*

## From black to red

Scientists found that the only ink that couldn't be removed without damaging the stamp was black. So in 1841, the Penny Black stamp was changed to red (the Penny Red stamp). Cancellation marks changed from red to black because black cancellation marks wouldn't show up on black stamps.

*The Penny Red stamp*



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## Postboxes

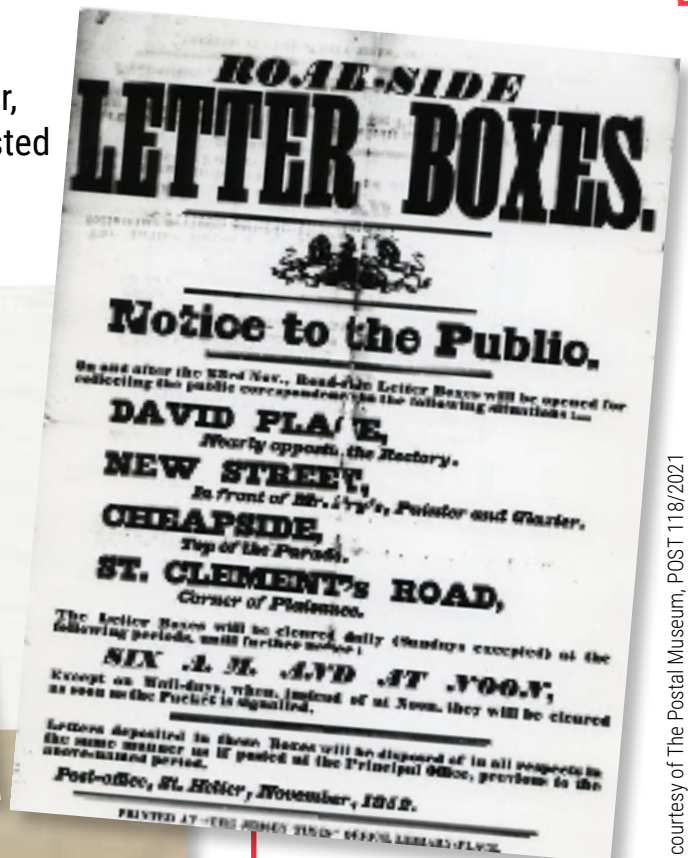
Anthony Trollope, a well-known Victorian writer, worked for the General Post Office. He suggested the idea of postboxes so that people wouldn't have to walk too far to post their letters.

### From *He Knew He Was Right* by Anthony Trollope, 1869

*'Miss Stanbury ... had not the faintest belief that any letter put into one of them (postboxes) would ever reach its destination'*

Early postboxes were all shapes and sizes

Power  
POINT



A public notice announcing the first road-side letter boxes in the Channel Islands



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### From green to red

The first postboxes could be painted in any colour. People complained that green postboxes were difficult to spot, so in 1874 most were painted bright red – and they have been.

The first postboxes were set up in the Channel Islands in 1852

The first postbox in London was installed in Fleet Street in 1855



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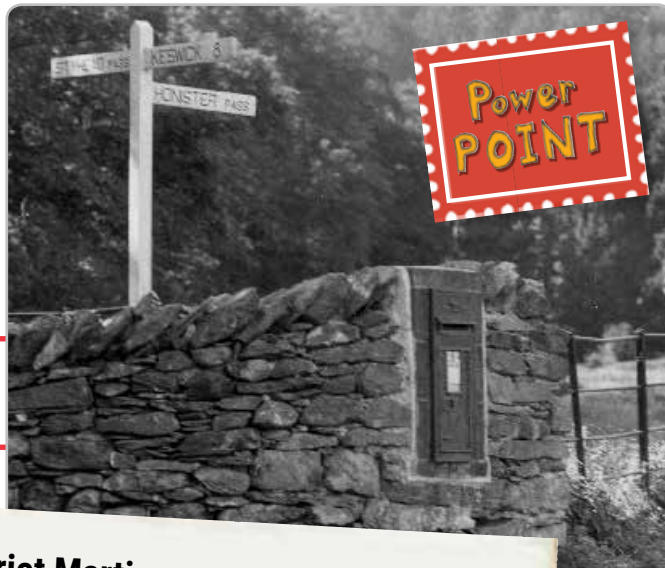


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## Wall letter boxes

Postboxes were expensive. In 1857, the General Post Office designed a small, less expensive letter box that could be built into a wall. The first ones were built in towns and later in country areas as well.

*This wall letter box is in Cumbria*



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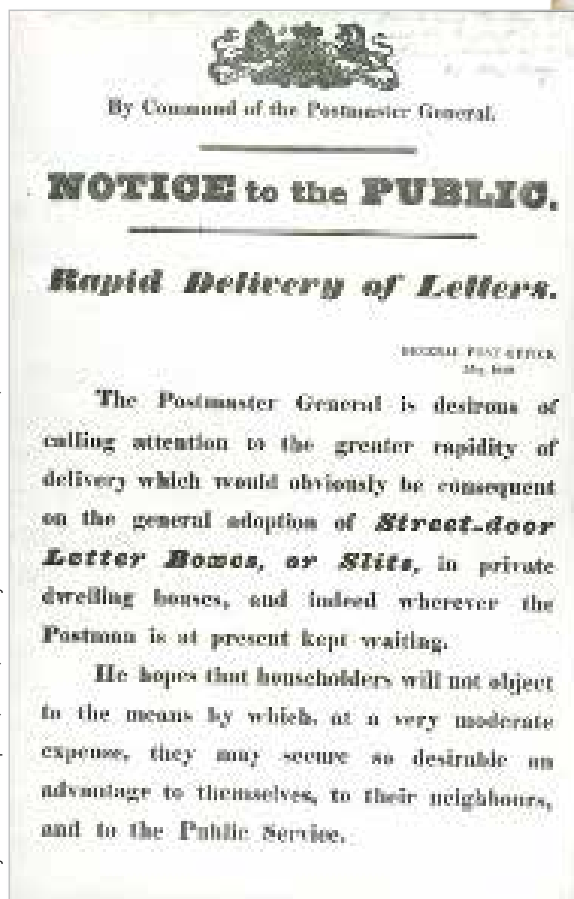
## Letter boxes in doors

Letterboxes in doors were invented to make delivering the post more efficient. Some people thought it was a great idea – but others didn't.

**Harriet Martineau wrote:**

*'We are all putting up our letter-boxes on our hall doors with great glee, anticipating the hearing from brothers and sisters – a line or two almost every day'*

**The Marquis of Londonderry asked:**  
*'...whether the Postmaster-General actually expected that he should cut a slit in his mahogany door?'*



**A notice dated 1849, encouraging the public to provide letter boxes in their doors**

*This is a song about the postman's knock at the door*



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## Waiting for an answer

Before letter boxes, letter carriers had to wait for an answer. They knocked twice and handed letters directly to people.

## Letter carriers

Letter carriers worked hard to deliver thousands of letters posted each day in towns, cities and villages. They walked miles in all weathers, but only a few had uniforms to protect them.

## Town posties

Since 1793 London letter carriers had worn a free uniform consisting of a bright red coat and a top hat. They had to look smart when delivering letters to people in their homes.

In 1855, letter carriers in towns were issued with new free uniforms including, for the first time, trousers and a waterproof cape.



**A** London letter carrier in uniform carrying letters and rolled-up poster. He announced his arrival with a bell

We could be suspended from duty if we were found not wearing our complete uniform



**W Bokenham, Controller,  
8 May 1855**

*'Letter Carriers, when delivering Letters are acting as Guards to Post Office Carriages, must appear in their complete official uniforms (Capes when necessary), and be at all times neat and clean in their persons and clothing.'*

## Country posties

Country letter carriers didn't receive a free uniform until 1891. They had to walk further and work for longer hours for smaller wages than letter carriers employed in towns. Extra duties included selling stamps and taking letters for posting. But unlike letter carriers in towns, country letter carriers were allowed to take their hats and jackets off if necessary.



**A** country postman who announced his arrival with a whistle

### Overview of the lesson:

This **Science** activity focuses on the Rainbow Trials and whether black was the best colour to use for the first stamp.

*This trial shows stamps printed on various type of paper*

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

- ◆ Discovered that General Post Office officials were worried about the reuse of stamps because of the loss of revenue
- ◆ Found out about the 'Rainbow Trials'.



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### Extension activities could include:

- ◆ **Science, D&T:** Trying the same experiment with a modern postage stamps
- ◆ **Citizenship:** Discussing the fact that Britain is the only country in the world not to show the name of the country on its stamps (obligatory for all other countries); should British stamps still have the head of the reigning monarch on them today? And if not, how could the country be represented?
- ◆ **Literacy:** Writing letters from 'scientists' to General Post Office officials about the experiments and offering recommendations.

### Did you know?

... The Twopenny Blue stamp was issued for heavier letters



### To do:

**You will need:** tubes of 'Smarties'; coffee filter paper/ blotting paper/thick kitchen paper; straws; plates; water

### Success criteria

By the end of the project:

- ◆ All pupils will know how and why the Penny Black stamp was changed to the Penny Red stamp
- ◆ Most pupils will understand the meaning of fugitive inks

### Key terms

- ◆ Revenue
- ◆ The Rainbow Trials
- ◆ Fugitive inks

Imagine you are a Victorian scientist. Your task is to find out if black was the best colour to use for the world's first postage stamp.

**Try this:**

- 1 Put the filter paper on a plate
- 2 Put a 'Smartie' in the centre of the paper
- 3 Using a straw, put drops of water on the 'Smartie' until the patch of water is about 5cm across
- 4 Now repeat the same test with another colour

**A fair test**

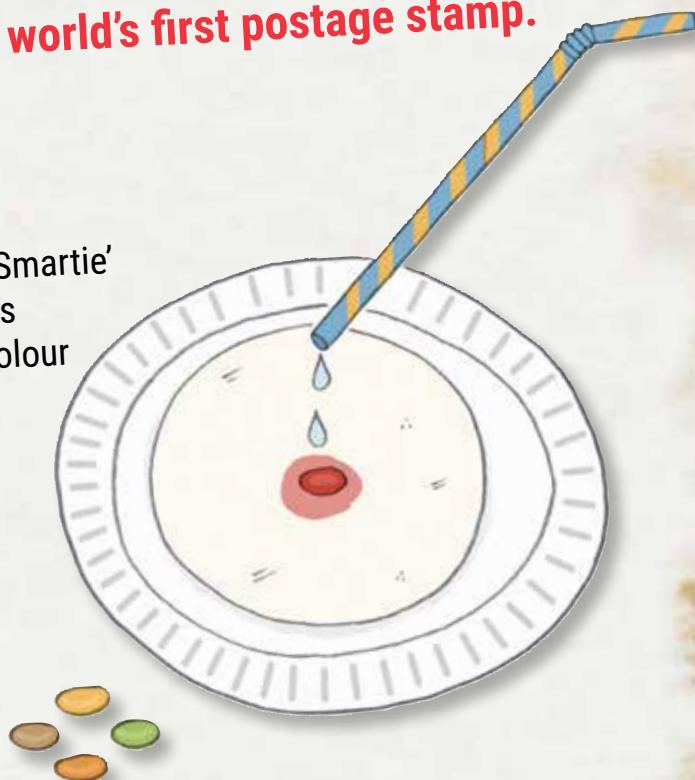
- ◆ Check that you use exactly the same amount of water for each test

**Result**

- ◆ Which colour runs the most?
- ◆ Which colour runs the least?

**What happens?**

- ◆ This experiment works because different dyes in Smarties travel at different speeds and become separated.
- ◆ The speeds vary because of the different sizes and shapes of the colour particles that are used to make up the dye. The heaviest dye particles travel less than the lightest dye particles.



**Evaluate**

Are you sure your test was fair? .....

.....

Could you improve on the experiment? .....

.....

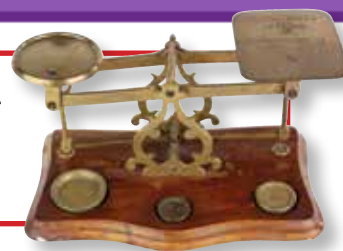
Would it work as well or better with felt-tips? .....

.....

### Overview of the lesson:

This activity is linked to **Maths** and **Citizenship** and compares the cost of sending a letter in Victorian times with today.

**P**eople bought letter scales so that they could check the weight of their letters



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

- ◆ Talked about old and decimal currency. Pre decimalisation in 1971, money was divided into pounds, shillings and pence; there were 20 shillings in £1, 12 pennies in a shilling, 240 pennies in £1
- ◆ Discussed what one (new) penny could buy today
- ◆ Found out what one (old) penny could buy in Victorian times
- ◆ Researched how a postman sorts his deliveries today and compared it to a Victorian postman whose duties included taking letters for posting and selling stamps
- ◆ Discovered that people bought domestic letter scales to weigh their letters.



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**L**etter sorting in Victorian times

### Extension activities could include:

- ◆ **D&T:** Design a simple balance suitable for weighing a letter
- ◆ **Citizenship:** Researching postal rates today; debating the way we communicate today and the up- and downsides of social media
- ◆ **History:** Visit a local sorting office to see how letters are sorted and delivered today; invite a local postman into school and interview him/her on his/her day

### Success criteria

By the end of the project:

- ◆ All will be aware of the cost of sending a letter in Victorian times relative to the value today
- ◆ All will be familiar with the differences between pre-decimal and decimal currency
- ◆ Some may want to find out more about the cost of living in Victorian times.

### Key terms

- ◆ Decimalisation
- ◆ Letter scales

**When the Penny Back stamp was introduced, the cost of sending a letter cost one old penny. Do you know how much it costs to send a letter today? Let's find out!**



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**Name**

**Date**

**1** Use the internet to find out how much it costs to send a first class letter in the UK.

**It costs** .....

Does it cost the same to send a letter many miles away as it does locally?

**Yes/No**

**3** Does the cost of postage depend on the size of the envelope?

**I found out that** .....

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

**2** What is the difference between first class and second class postage?

**The difference is** .....

.....

**4** Imagine that you are going to send a letter to a friend who lives in another country.

First of all choose a country.  
 Then find out how you would send a letter.

**My friend lives in** .....

**It costs** ..... to send a letter there

**It will take** ..... days to get there

**Did you know?**

**... Victorian thieves put sticky tar onto the end of string and fished for letters through the slot in letterboxes!**



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