

Glenn Morgan visits the largest sorting office
in the United Kingdom — including a visit to the
Post Office Railway.

Mount Pleasant

The 100th anniversary of the Inland Section of the Post Office at Mount Pleasant, London, EC1 was reached in 1987. It is affectionally known as 'The Mount' or, depending upon your point of view, 'The Prison' (it is built on the site of the old Clerkenwell Gaol). It is the largest sorting complex apart from the one at Chicago, USA.

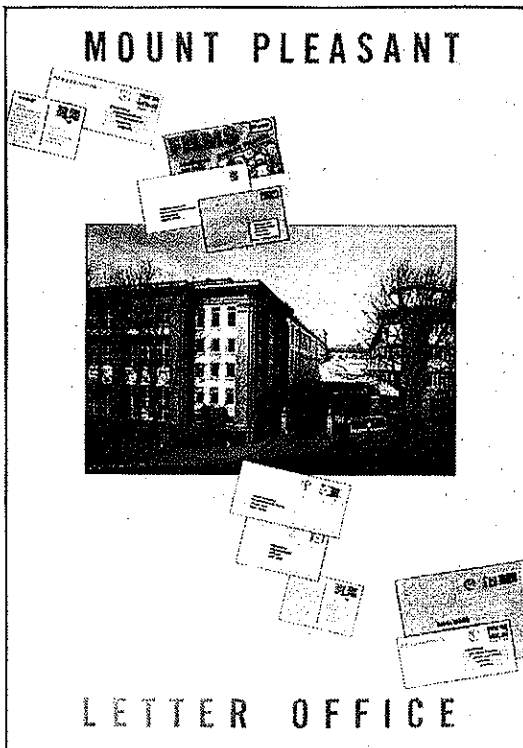
I was recently given the opportunity of attending a guided tour around the 7½ acre site, including the famous Post Office Railway, which recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. My guide for the evening told me that visitors come from all over the world to see the second underground system in London. The trains seem to run at a greater frequency than those of London Underground Limited!

My tour started, logically enough, at the section where the mail arrives from all over the country and over 350 destinations

overseas. There is a blackboard listing many countries that are suspected of importing drugs into Britain and all such mail is taken upstairs for examination by x-ray equipment and by alsatian dogs which are trained in the art of sniffing-out narcotics. I was told that the detection rate is very high and that the police are regularly involved.

During my visit mail bags were received from Sydney, Australia that had been posted the day before and it is not uncommon for mail from Germany that had been despatched at 6am to be received by midday the same day.

So, the mail has arrived. It is now sorted into machine processable items and all oversize or bulky mail has to be handled manually in the time honoured way by postal officials. There are 3,000 staff in the building including 300 women, who are apparently being recruited at a rate fast catching-up to the



Leaflet given to visitors to Mount Pleasant.

GB QEII WILDING DEFINITIVES: SPECIALISED LISTING

1958 MULTIPLE CROWNS (CREAM PAPER)

Upright 1/4 10p; 1d 15p; 1/4 15p; 2d 20p; 2/4 TII 30p; 2/4 TI £2; 3d 15p; 4d 11; 4/4 30p; 5d 12; 6d 50p; 7d £1; 8d £2.50; 9d £2.50; 10d £2.50; 1/3 £1.50; 1/3 £1.50; 1/6 49 Sideways - Crown to Left 1/4 £1; 1d £1; 1/4 £5; 2d 75p; 2/4 TI 50p.

1962 MULTIPLE CROWNS (WHITER PAPER)

Upright 1/4 3p; 1/4 Chalky £1.40; 1d 4p; 1/4 4p; 2d 4p; 2/4 TII 4p; 2/4 TI 25p; 2/4 Chalky 12p; 3d 5p; 4d Light 20p; 4d Deep 10p; 4/4 5p; 5d 20p; 6d 10p; 7d 22p; 8d 30p; 9d 30p; 10d 55p; 1/3 20p; 1/3 16p; 1/6 £2.70; Sideways - Crown to left 1/4 10p; 1d 40p; 1/4 £4.60; 2d 20p; 2/4 TI 15p; 2/4 TII 30p; 3d 10p; 4d 30p; Sideways - Crown to right 1/4 10p; 1d 40p; 1/4 £4.60; 2/4 TII 30p; 3d 10p; 4d 30p; Inverted 1/4 15p; 1/4 chalky £1.50; 1d 10p; 1/4 60p; 2/4 TII £2.30; 2/4 chalky 12p; 3d 20p; 4d 25p.

1958 MULTIPLE CROWNS GRAPHITE

Upright 1/4 £2; 1d 60p; 1/4 £30; 2d £4.20; 2/4 TII £6; 3d 30p; 4d £2.50; 4/4 £3; Set 8v £65. Inverted 1/4 80p; 1d 75p; 1/4 £18; 2/4 TII £30; 3d 25p; Set 5v £46.

1959 PHOSPHOR GRAPHITES

1/4 £3; 1d 24; 1/4 £2.25; 2d £3; 2d Wmk error £110; 2/4 TII £12; 3d 7; 4d £6.75; 4/4 £16.50; Set 8v £48.00.

1960 GREEN PHOSPHOR

Upright 1/4 75p; 1d 75p; 1/4 75p; 2d LB £16; 2/4 £1; 3d 2B 75p; 4d £5; 6d £1.75; 1/3 £3; Inverted 1/4 £3.75; 1d £3.75; 1/4 £7.50; 2/4 TII £38; 3d 2B 50p.

1961 BLUE PHOSPHOR (CREAM PAPER)

Upright 1/4 10p; 1d 35p; 1/4 40p; 2d LB £20; 2d 2B Typo £5; 2d 2B Photo £1.20; 2/4 TII 2B Photo £2.85; 2/4 TII LB Typo £2; 2/4 TII LB Photo £5; 2/4 TII LB Typo £20; 3d 2B 50p; 4d pale £1.95; 4/4 Typo £2.50; 4/4 Photo £10; 6d Photo £3; 6d Typo Buy; 1/3 £9; Sideways (Crown to Left) 1/4 £6.50; 1d £1.50; 1/4 £6.50; 3d 2B £1.20; Sideways (Crown to Right) 1/4 £6.50; 1d £1.50; 1/4 £6.50; 3d £1.20; Inverted 1/4 50p; 1d 50p; 1/4 £4.50; 2/4 2B £98; 2/4 LB £17; 3d 2B 50p.

BLUE PHOSPHOR (WHITER PAPER)

Upright 1/4 5p; 1d 50p; 1/4 8p; 2d 2B £1.50; 2/4 TII LB Photo 75p; 2/4 TII LB Typo Buy; 2/4 TII 2B Photo 10p; 2/4 TII 2B Typo Buy; 3d 2B 30p; 3d LB £2; 3d RB £2; 4d deep 50p; 4/4 Photo 6p; 4/4 Typo £1.25; 6d Photo 50p; 6d Typo Buy; 1/3 £1.15; Sideways (Crown to Left) 1/4 £8; 1d £1.50; 1/4 £8; 3d 2B £1; 3d LB £12.50; 3d RB £12.50; 4d 11.50; Sideways (Crown to Right) 1/4 £8; 1d £1.50; 1/4 £8; 3d 2B £1; 3d LB £12.50; 3d RB £12.50; 4d £1.50; Inverted 1/4 75p; 1d 50p; 1/4 £10; 2/4 TII LB £17; 3d 2B 35p; 4d 75p.

1965 VIOLET PHOSPHOR (8mm BANDS)

Upright 1/4 Typo 25p; 1/4 Photo 30p; 1d Typo £12; 1d Photo 25p; 2d 2B 35p; 3d LB 40p; 3d RB 40p; 3d RB/LB pr 75p; 4d 40p; 6d £7; 1/3 Typo £7; 1/3 Photo £5; Sideways (Crown to Left) 1d Typo 75p; 1d Flexo 75p; 3d LB Typo £2.50; 3d LB Flexo £2.50; 3d RB Typo £2.50; 3d RB Flexo £2.50; 4d Photo 40p; 4d Typo £7.50; Sideways (Crown to Right) 1d Typo 75p; 1d Flexo 75p; 3d LB Typo £2.50; 3d LB Flexo £2.50; 3d RB Typo 75p; 1d Flexo 75p; 3d LB Typo £2.50; 3d LB Flexo £2.50; 3d RB Typo £2.50; 3d RB Flexo £2.50; 4d Photo 40p; 4d Typo £7.50; Inverted 1d 20p; 3d LB £10; 3d RB 80p; 4d 15p.

VIOLET PHOSPHOR (9.5mm BANDS & 3d CB)

Upright 1d 3p; 2d 4p; 3d CB 20p; 4d 8p; 5d 18p; 6d 15p; 7d 50p; 8d 15p; 9d 40p; 10d 60p; 1s 25p; 1/3 £6; 1/6 £1.15; Sideways (To Left) 1d Typo 20p; 1d Flexo 20p; 2d 2B 5p; 3d CB 20p; 3d 2B Typo 70p; 3d 2B Flexo 20p; 3d 2B Typo 70p; 3d 2B Flexo 70p; 4d Flexo 12p; Sideways (To Right) 1d Typo 20p; 1d Flexo 20p; 3d 2B Typo 70p; 3d 2B Flexo 70p; 4d Flexo 12p; Inverted 1d 14p; 3d CB 11.40; 4d 15p.

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men, as it is no longer considered to be a male-dominated job.

The machinable mail is then taken to the Facer Cancellor Table (FCT), sorted into first and second class and cancelled with a LONDON IS MLO die. The letters are now ready for encoding with the familiar blue phosphor dots by one of 36 staff manned Coding Desks. It is here that the postcode is typed onto the letter by trained operators as each piece of mail passes in front of them. Non-postcoded items either are given a special code in the case of cities or large towns or, for smaller destinations, the first three and last two letters of the town name

are keyed-in. For short names, such as Ayr, the same principles apply, so for this example the entry would read AYRYR.

A recent piece of equipment is capable of processing 25,000 items per hour by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and prints blue phosphor lines on the envelope. It can only handle mail that has a typewritten or computer printed address, so it is used to process mail from the large numbers of companies such as banks that use Post Office Preferred (POP) sized envelopes and post many hun-

Postcard showing the underground railway.



40th ANNIVERSARY



POST OFFICE
UNDERGROUND RAILWAY
8 DEC 1967-LONDON EC1

40th ANNIVERSARY



POST OFFICE
UNDERGROUND RAILWAY
5 DEC 1967-LONDON EC1

Commemorative cover
produced in 1967 to
celebrate 40 years of the
underground railway. Three
different handstamps were
used.



GPO COMMEMORATIVE COVER

40th ANNIVERSARY



POST OFFICE
UNDERGROUND RAILWAY
7 DEC 1967-LONDON EC1



dreds of letters at once. This OCR equipment has started to appear in other sorting offices nationwide thanks to the success of the experiment at The Mount. Staff at the Post Office Research Centre at Swindon are designing a machine that will be able to read handwriting but until they perfect one it will not be possible to handle private mail at such speeds.

After encoding, mail passes through a Pre-Sorter machine that splits the letters into broad geographical groups at a rate of 25,000 each hour. From here an Automatic Sorting Machine refines the sort into 144 selections at a rate of 16,000 items per hour. They are then bundled and placed either on mail vans or onto the Post Office Railway system.

I was then taken by lift to see the Post Office trains. It was a treat to enter such a clean, quiet environment having just left behind what can only be described as organised chaos upstairs. The trains operate 22 hours each day, from Paddington in the west to Whitechapel in the east, and stop running only for essential engineering work. Apparently they can travel at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour in the tunnels. Were it not for these trains the roads of London would be even more congested than at present.

There are two pairs of tracks running in each direction — the outside line is used for Express and Datapost mail and runs non-stop from one end of the line to the other.

I never realised until it was brought to my attention afterwards that Mount Pleasant is not a delivery office and does not sort mail for the London area or for overseas. This correspondence is sent to the King Edward Street building by rail. 'The Mount' is currently sorting to nearly 1,000 destinations around the United Kingdom and processes correspondence for such places as Basingstoke, which does not have the capability locally and acts, in effect, as a clearing house.

I had not been allowed to see everywhere, as security would not permit access to the 'Tele-message and Electronic Mail Processing Centres or the Customs Depot that are all contained within the building, but when the time came for leaving I felt that I had a far greater grasp of our modern postal system and all of its complexities.

Special thanks must go to all concerned for giving so generously of their time and for imparting their detailed knowledge of the Inland Section in such a friendly manner.

NEW 2 GREAT STAMP ISSUES

ISSUE DATE 16th. OCT. 1990

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND FOR NATURE

'MARINE LIFE'

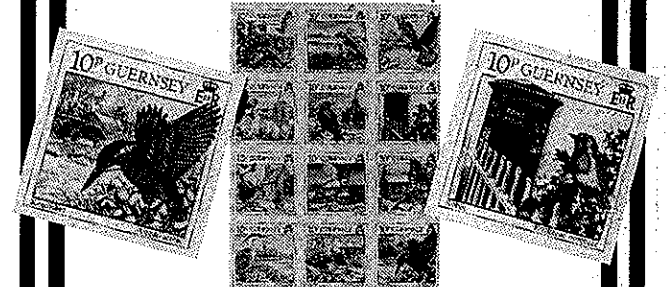
Guernsey's participation in this organisation's popular stamp programme will take the form of four stamps in the Marine Life series. The specific subjects are: Basking Shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*), Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) and the Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*).
Set Price £1.14 Presentation pack £1.39



CHRISTMAS 1990

'WINTER BIRDS'

This year's sheetlet depicts Winter Birds in a Guernsey setting. The artwork has again been prepared by Wendy Bramall whose Christmas Tree in 1989 was very well received.
Set Price £1.20 Presentation pack £1.45.



Guernsey
Post
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