

Pitney Bowes Visit

On 6 July 2012, a group of Friends spent a fascinating day at the premises of Pitney Bowes in Harlow, Essex. Whilst the company's heritage lies in producing postage meters, it now specialises in producing tools and technology to help businesses of all sizes manage their physical and digital communications. Our host for the day was Terry Kirkby, the Corporate Liaison Officer, who, as a collector of old bottles and pot lids himself, could relate to our interests in all things postal.

We met in reception and went immediately across to the training building where a large display of historical machines had been laid out for our viewing pleasure, along with magazines, photographs and ephemera for us to leaf through. Roughly 200 more machines dating back to the 1920's are in the archive and these have all been lovingly collected down the years thanks to Terry's personal interest in preserving the history of the company.

Following coffee, we had an in-depth demonstration of the current range of mailing machines. This equipment was an eye-opener as they are now so sophisticated, one model even enabling internet browsing by the operator while the mail items 'fly' through the equipment at great speeds! The current Royal Mail tariff provides a 16p discount on meter mail so a business sending just six letters a day can now benefit financially from having a franking machine.

Lunch followed in *Frankie's Diner*, the logo above the door resembling a red meter town die. We then toured the manufacturing building, although with most production now undertaken offshore we witnessed the huge operation that repaired and upgraded machines for sale to countries not requiring the sophisticated elements found in the latest machines. It is here that "harvesting" is undertaken where re-usable parts are extracted and non-reusable parts are separated out for recycling.

Following afternoon tea, our five hour visit was over and we were on our way home much more aware of the complexities of ancient and modern mailing machines. It is clear that the 15 Friends will never look at a meter marking the same way again.

Report by Glenn H Morgan

(340 words.)