



Press release

10 September 2009

ROCKET MAIL – THE ILL-ADVISED MODE OF POSTAL DELIVERY

Ever wondered how mail was delivered before modern vehicles? Interested in finding out how our ancestors sent letters to their families and loved ones? Want to see images of the first aerial postal service? Now is your chance with an exhibition on the weird and wonderful modes of early postal transport.

As part of the [Archive Awareness Campaign](#), The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) is holding an Archive Open Day to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the first scheduled UK airmail. The first flight of the Aerial Post took place on 9 September 1911 between Windsor Great Park and Hendon Aerodrome.

The event will chart the history of airmail from aeroplanes to lesser known modes of transport such as helicopters, pigeons and even rockets.

Helen Dafter, Archivist, British Postal Museum & Archive said: “The open day will offer a behind the scenes tour, and an opportunity to view selected treasures from the archive. It will also be a great opportunity to learn about all the unusual modes of postal transport. The event is part of the 2009 Archive Awareness Campaign “Take Flight”, and aims to encourage both new and existing users to use and appreciate archives”.

- The flight made up part of the celebrations to mark the coronation of King George V. Four pilots were hired to fly the service: Gustav Hamel, E F Driver, C Cresswell, and Claude Hubert. Gustav Hamel. The first pilot took off from Hendon at 5.13pm on 9 September 1911. The 21-mile journey took just 15 minutes. Unfortunately, Hubert crashed on take-off and broke both legs. He was eventually paid £500 in compensation from the profits of the service.

- In the 1930s, a German, Gerhard Zucker, experimented with powder rockets similar to fireworks as a mode of delivering post. After moving to the United Kingdom, Zucker attempted to convince the General Post Office that Rocket Mail was viable. The post was attached to an internal parachute which would deploy upon arrival at its destination. On 31 July 1934 a rocket packed with 1,200 envelopes was launched over a 1600-metre flight path between the Hebridean islands of Harris and Scarp in Scotland. Unfortunately for Zucker, the rocket exploded and destroyed most of its cargo.
- Pigeons have also been used as a means of postal delivery throughout history. Pigeon post offered a fast and reliable service and became a vital means of communication during the First World War; by the end of the war there were 22,000 pigeons in service.

Visitors to the Archive Open Day will be able to see an array of records held at the Archive, including posters, artwork, reports, press cuttings, maps, papers and photographs.

Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer said: “Everything you ever wanted to know about aerial postal delivery will be covered in this event. It really is a fascinating exhibition and demonstrates how archives uncover the most colourful artefacts and preserve these treasures for the nation to enjoy in the future.”

- Ends -

For further details, spokespeople or images on the Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email Angela.Owusu@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

‘Take Flight!’ – BPMA Archive Open Day takes place Saturday 12 September 10.00am – 5.00pm

- The British Postal Museum & Archive, Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DL, Phone: 020 7239 2570

- Admission is free
- Email: info@postalheritage.org.uk
- For further information contact Jenny Karlsson, The British Postal Museum & Archive, www.postalheritage.org.uk
Email: jenny.karlsson@postalheritage.org.uk, phone: 020 7239 2574
- The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) is the leading resource for all aspects of British postal history. It is a combined museum and archive, bringing together The Royal Mail Archive and a Museum Store. With collections ranging from staff records to stamps, poster design to photography and from transport to telegrams, it cares for the visual, written and physical records from over 400 years of innovation and service, illuminating the fascinating story of British communications. Records in The Royal Mail Archive are Designated as being of outstanding national importance. For more information see www.postalheritage.org.uk.
- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the National Council on Archives (www.ncaonline.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.