Phase 4: 1968 – 1979

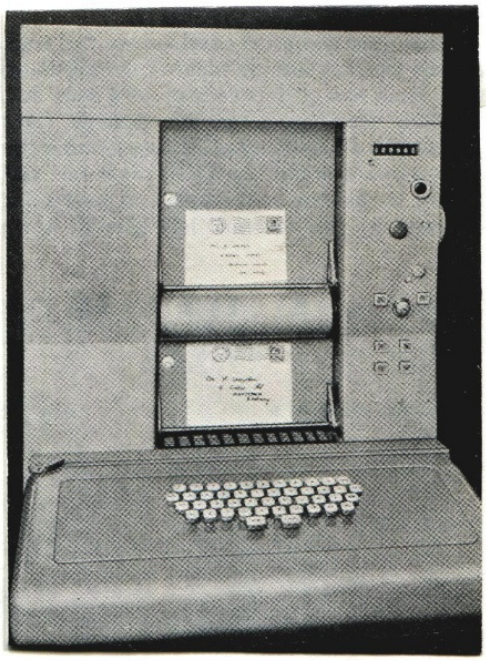
1st Generation sorting machinery

This section covers the so-called ‘1st Generation’ sorting equipment, installed in 19 offices across the country between 1968 and 1979.

The following key developments took place during this period . . . .

1968	‘1st Generation’ coding at Norwich
1968	‘1st Generation’ coding at London Bird Street
1969-79	The rollout of equipment to the other ‘1st Generation’ offices
1970+	The Facer Canceller Tables, installed in smaller offices
1976	The Norwich remote video coding experiment

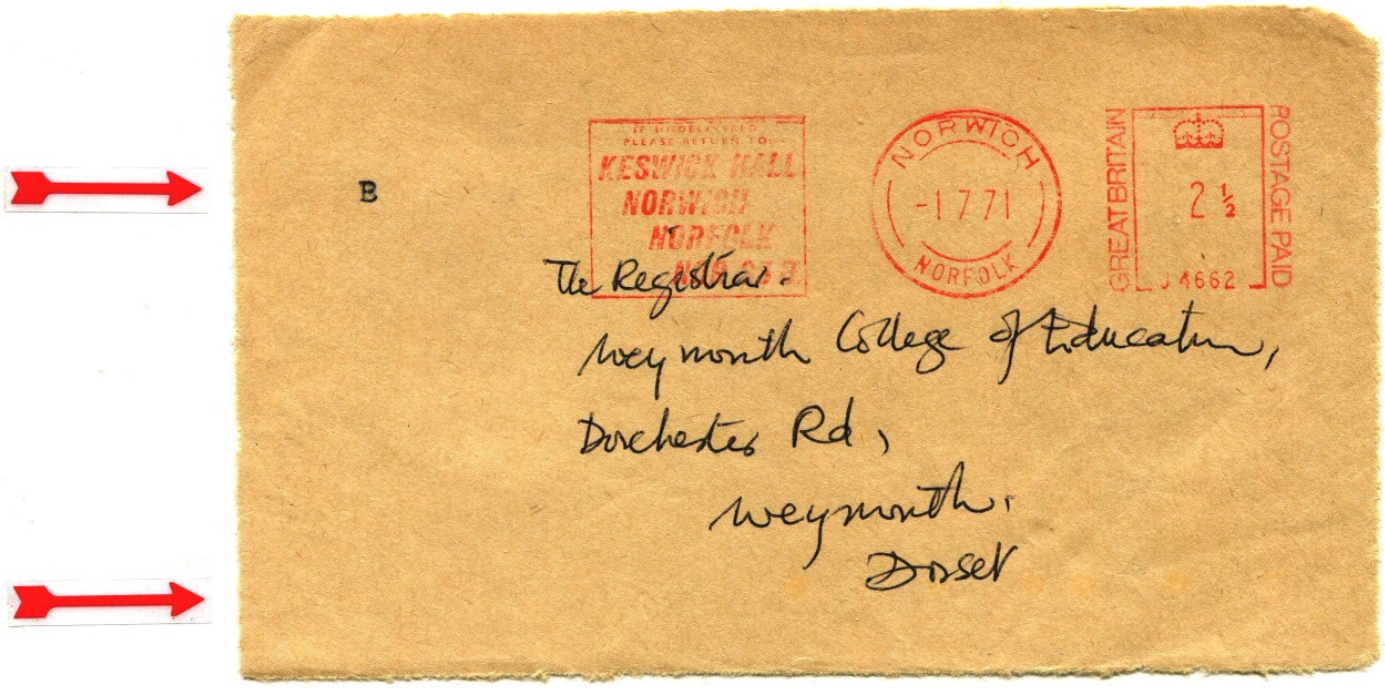
1968 – '1st Generation' Coding at Norwich



The first production coding desks were installed at Norwich in February 1968 following field trials in 1966-67. Initially, six desks were fitted, followed by six further desks in 1969.

The desks were fed with mail items from above and two envelopes at a time were visible to the operator, one above the other as seen here.

Desk idents 'A' to 'L' were used to indicate the desk where the coding took place. The coding patterns used were different from those used at Luton. Circular phosphor dots were 'punched' onto the envelopes using a roll of special tape - visible when the cover is held at an angle.



Norwich '1st Generation' coding marks on 'Desk B' (1.7.71)

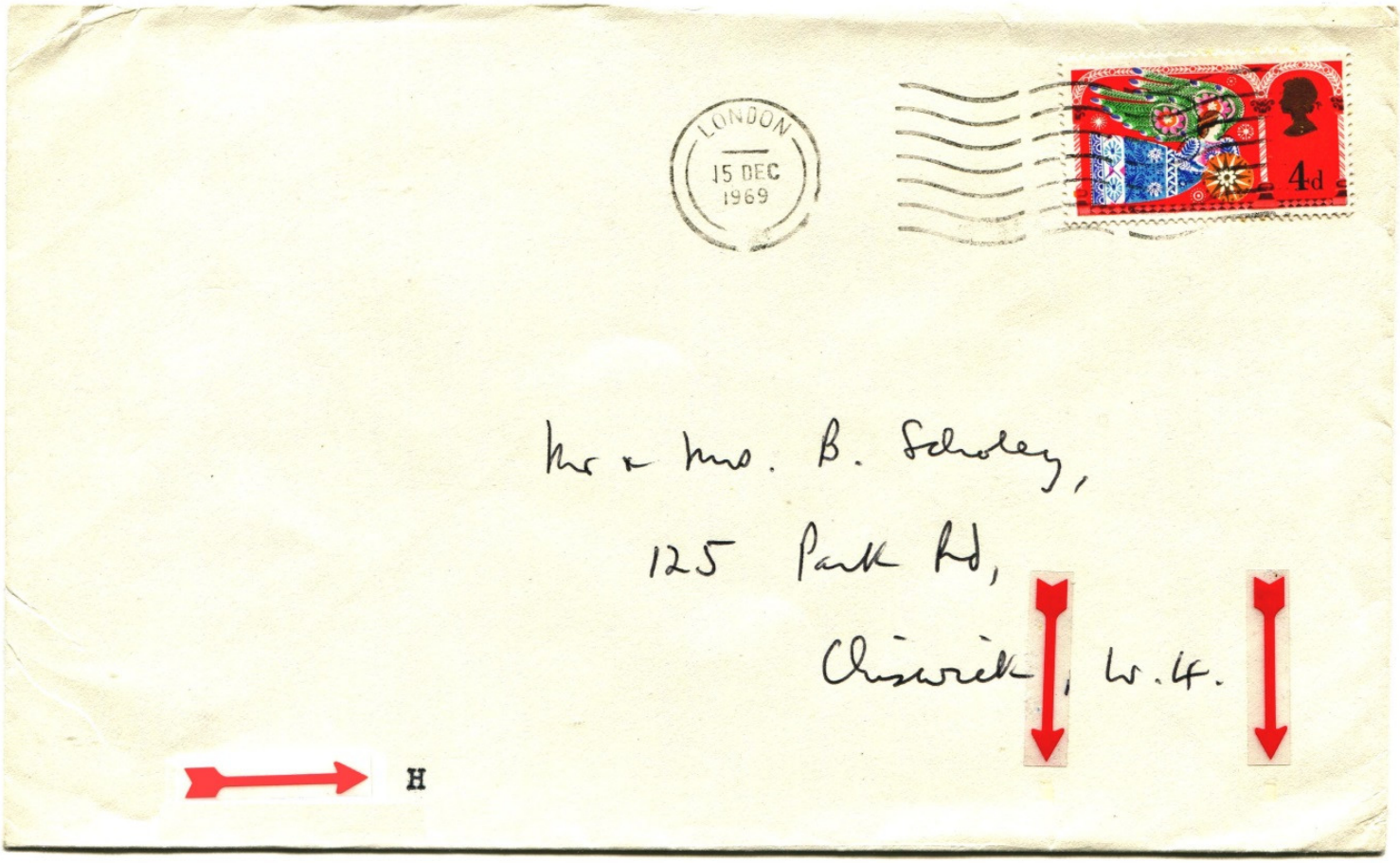
Source: PMSC "Introduction to Postal Mechanisation" booklet

1968 – '1st Generation' Coding at London Bird St.

In June 1968 twelve prototype coding desks were installed in London at the Bird Street sorting office where mail, collected from the EC area with a London destination address, received coding marks.

A unique coding system was used at Bird Street until the national system coding system was introduced in October 1969.

The cover here was coded on Desk H, soon after the introduction of the national coding system and bears two (barely visible) rectangular shaped phosphor dots.

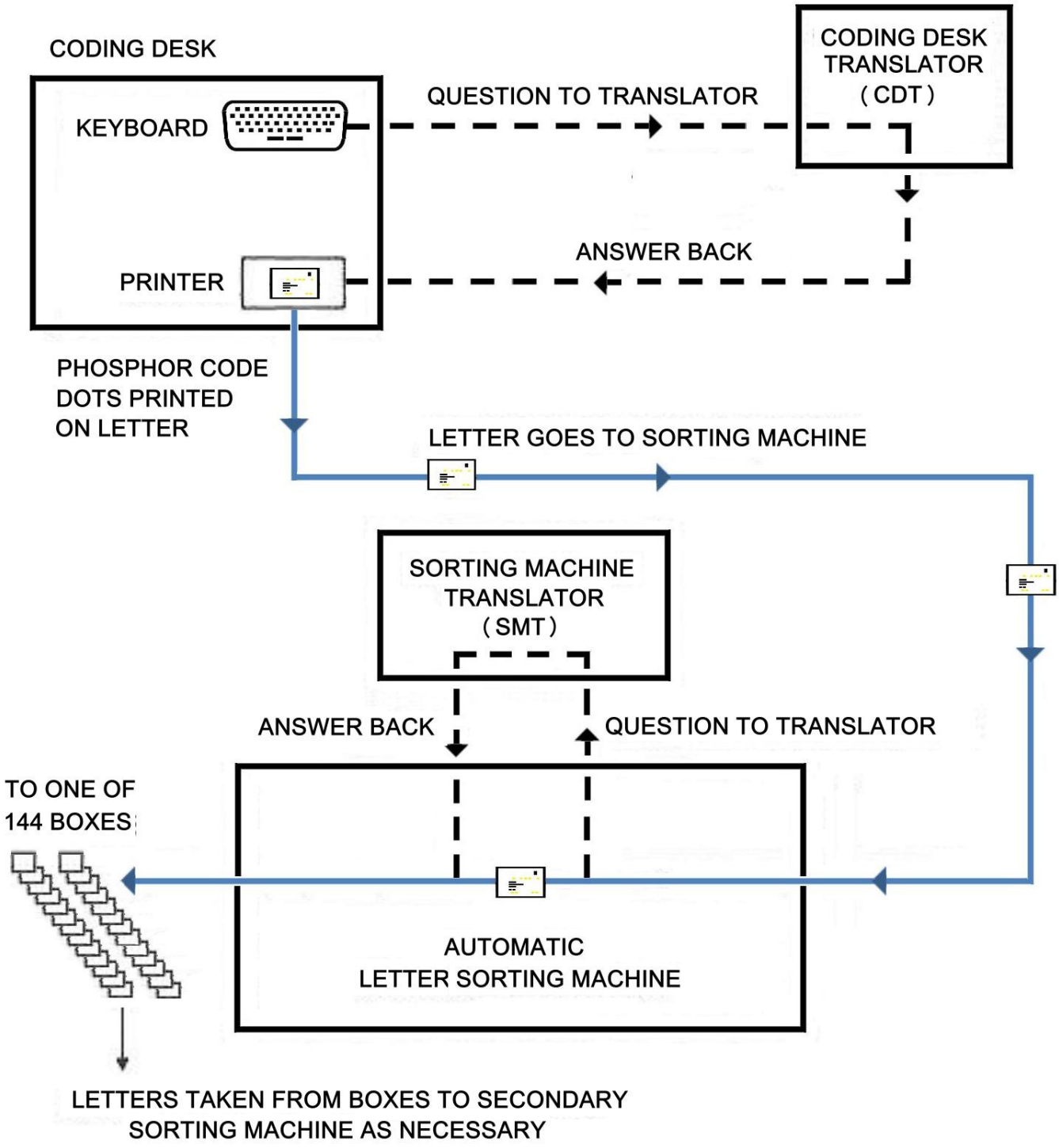


London Bird Street '1st Generation' coding marks on 'Desk H' (15.12.69)

Source: PMSC "Introduction to Postal Mechanisation" booklet

Coded Letter Path

The diagram below illustrates an early code-sort system and explains what happened to a letter after a coding desk operator had keyed the appropriate post, short or extract code.



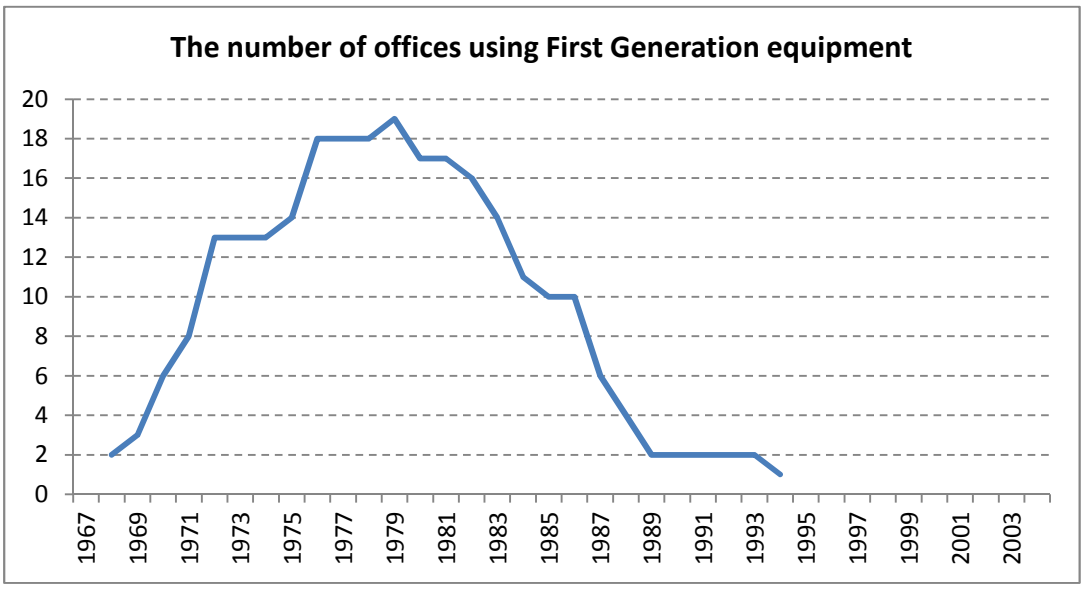
First Generation Offices

The following is a list of the 19 offices fitted with 'First Generation' equipment, i.e. Segregators, ALFs, First Generation Desks and Automatic Letter Sorting machines and the range of dates when they were operational with this equipment (before they were replaced with Second Generation equipment).

Years	Office
1968-79	Norwich
1968-79	London EC
1969-84	Croydon
1970-81	Southampton
1970-86	Newport, Gwent
1970-83	Preston
1970-83	Stoke-on-Trent
1970-87	Aberdeen
1970-88	Brighton
1970-86	Huddersfield

Years	Office
1972-88	Cambridge
1972-87	London WC
1972-72	Sheffield
1975-82	Cardiff
1976-86	York
1976-86	Doncaster
1976-93	Dartford
1976-83	Guildford
1979-93	Romford

The following shows the above information graphically:



Processing in Smaller Offices – Facer Canceller Tables

In smaller offices, the processing of mail during the Segregation and Facing stages of sorting was handled differently. Cheaper and semi-automatic machines called Facer Canceller Tables (FCTs) were used instead of Segregators and ALFs.

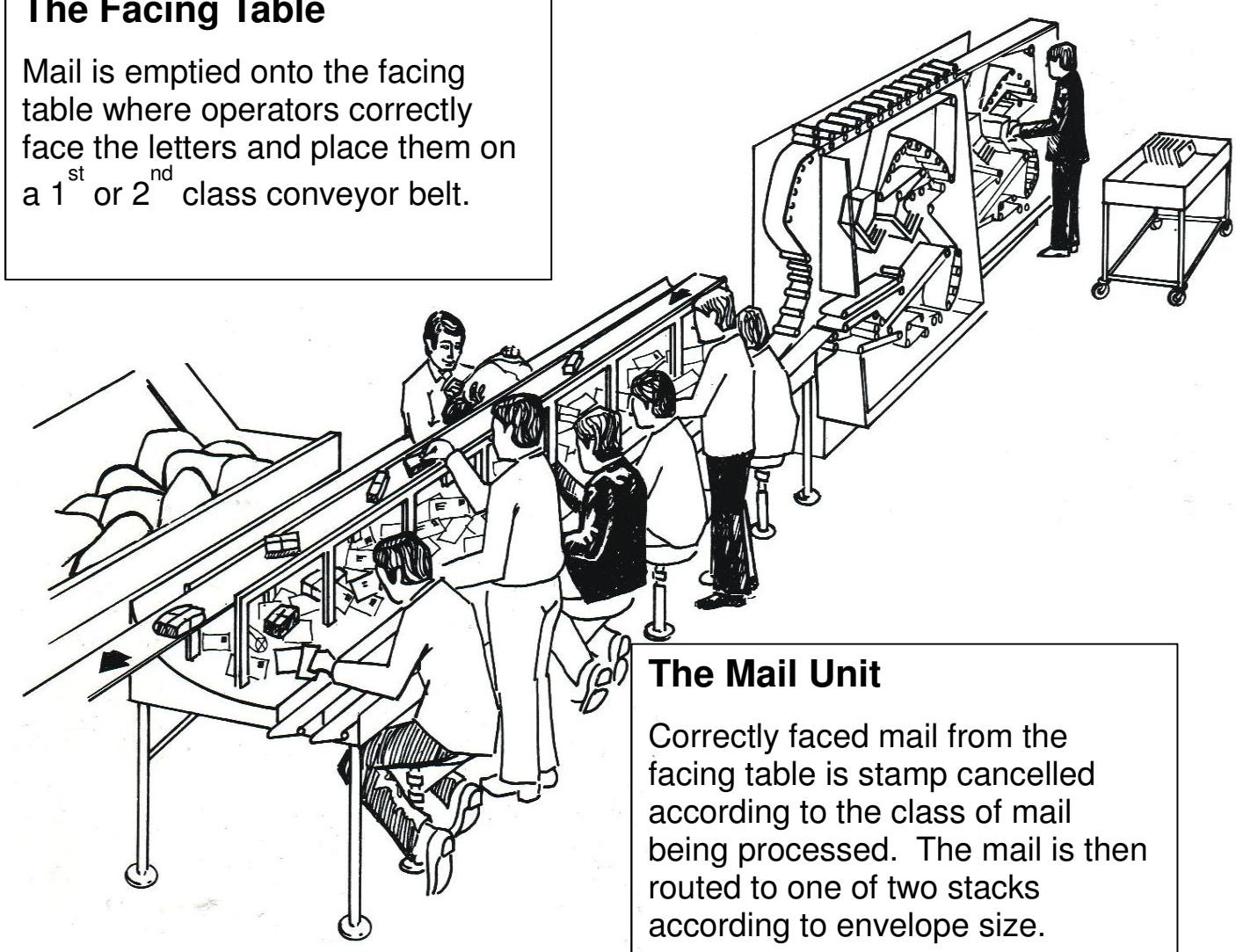
The FCTs comprised two sections:

1. A 'Facing Table' with conveyors for letters and packets.
2. A 'Mail Unit' to cancel the pre-faced items and to stack them.

The mail items were then taken to coding desks or destination sorted by hand.

The Facing Table

Mail is emptied onto the facing table where operators correctly face the letters and place them on a 1st or 2nd class conveyor belt.



The Mail Unit

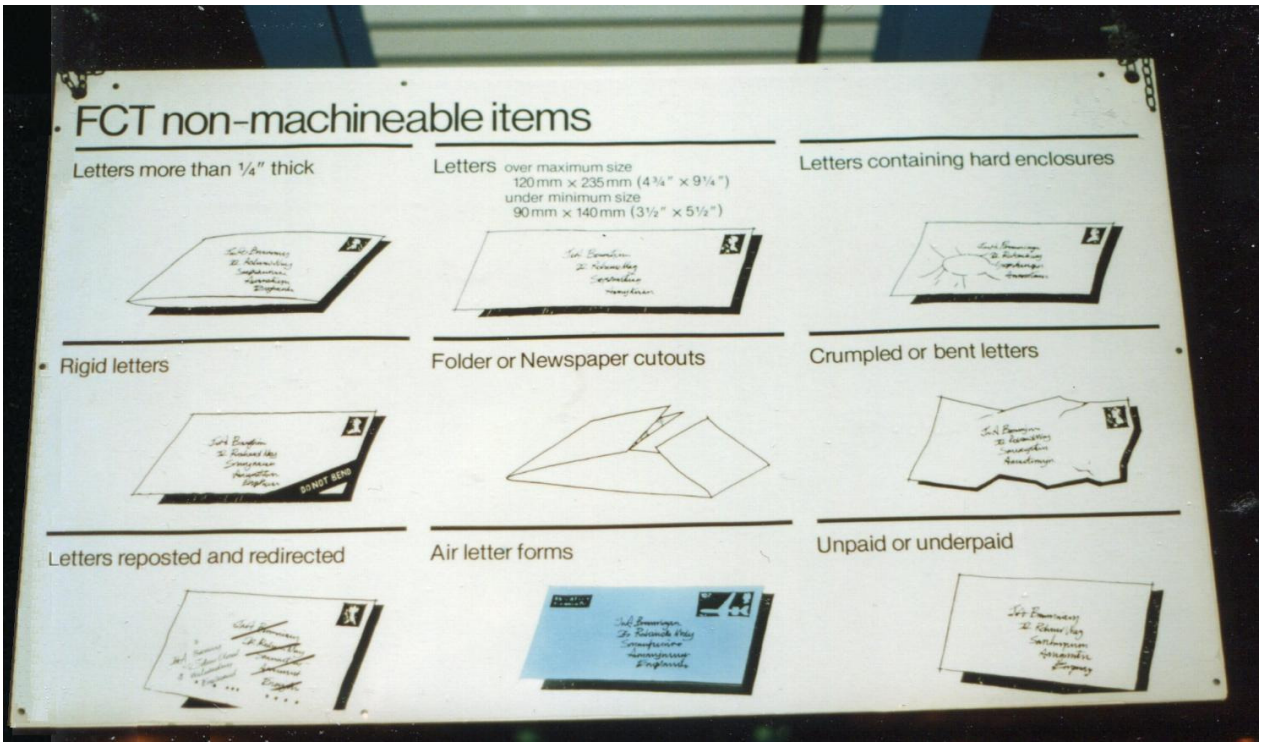
Correctly faced mail from the facing table is stamp cancelled according to the class of mail being processed. The mail is then routed to one of two stacks according to envelope size.

FCT Non-machineable Items

The following is a list of non-machineable items that could not be processed by the FCT or subsequent machinery. FCT operators were instructed to remove such items manually.

1) Letters more than ¼” thick.
2) Letters bigger than 4¾” x 9¼”.
3) Letters smaller than 3½” x 5½”.
4) Letters containing hard enclosures.
5) Rigid letters.
6) Folder or newspaper cut-outs.
7) Crumpled or bent letters.
8) Letters reposted or redirected.
9) Air letter forms.
10) Unpaid or underpaid items.

Below is a photo, taken at Reading MLO in January 1988, of a notice that reminded FCT operators of these requirements.

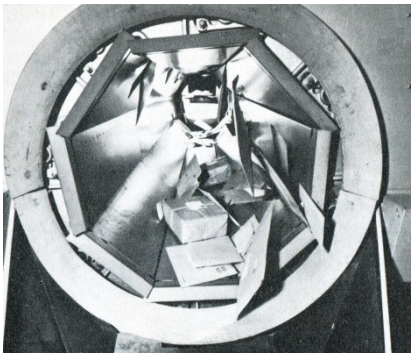


Typical Mail Processing in the 1970s

These are the four stages of processing to typically occur in a sorting office in the 1970s.

1 - SEGREGATION

Using Segregator machines.



The segregator separates letters from packets in a rotating drum. Letters pass through slots and fed to a conveyor.

2 - FACING

Via Automatic Letter Facers (ALFs). Postmarks are applied at this stage.

The ALF turns the letters round so that the stamps are all in the same position. Separated into 1st & 2nd and cancelled.

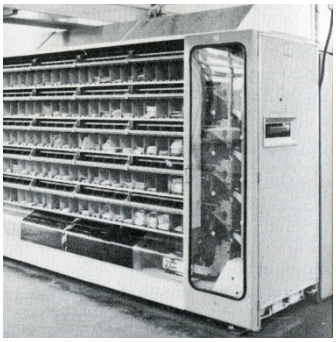
3 - CODING

Mail is fed to coding desk operators.

The postcode is read and typed on the keyboard. Phosphor dots are printed on the envelope as a binary pattern.

4 - SORTING

Automatic Letter Sorting machines.



These machines read the code pattern of phosphor dots at high speed and sort the items according to the destination.