Phase 5: 1975 – 1990

2nd Generation sorting machinery

This section covers the '2nd Generation' sorting equipment, installed in Mechanised Letter Office (MLOs) right across the country between 1975 and 1990.

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

1975   '2nd Generation' coding desks at Redhill MLO

1975   The concept of the 'Mechanised Letter Office' (MLO)

1975 – Second Generation Coding Desks

'Second Generation' coding desks were first introduced at Redhill MLO in 1975. These were colloquially known as 'Easy View' desks and were an improved version of the 'First Generation' desks.

The desks were designed so that letters passed horizontally across the operator's line of vision. Several letters were in view at any one time, with a light indicating which item was next to be coded. The speed at which they passed through was selectable by the coding desk operator.

Photo of a 'Second Generation' Coding Desk

1975 – 2nd Generation Coding Desks at Redhill

Below is a special commemorative "Easy View Automatic Letter Sorting" cover that marked this important postal mechanisation development.

The cover was postmarked 13 Oct 1975 – the official launch date at Redhill Mechanised Letter Office (MLO). The coding dots and the operator ident 'F' are indicated.

Ident 'F'

J-tool

DTS/C	08.14	10	26.21
1	40.02	11	03.52
2	40.02	SP7	24.59
3	40.03	SP8	27.64
4	40.03		
5	19.05		
6	04.35		
7	15.41		
8	02.60		
9	25.06		

P 32 16 8 4 2 1 32 16 8 4 2 1 S

BOURNEMOUTH M.L.O

P 32 16 8 4 2 1 32 16 8 4 2 1 S

Source: The Mechanised Sorting of Mail, H. Dagnall

1975 – The "Mechanised Letter Office" (MLO)

The term "Mechanised Letter Office" (MLO) was first introduced at Redhill in 1975 and co-insided with the introduction of the Second Generation coding desks. On 1 March 1976 "MLO" was included in the town die of the Redhill postmark.
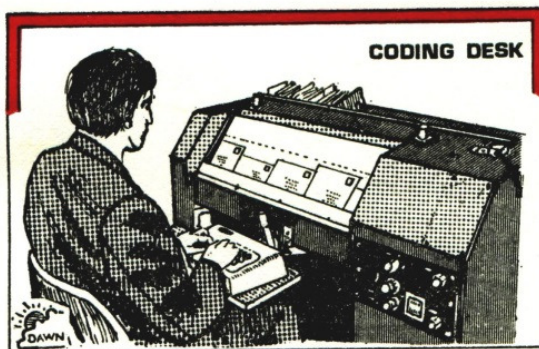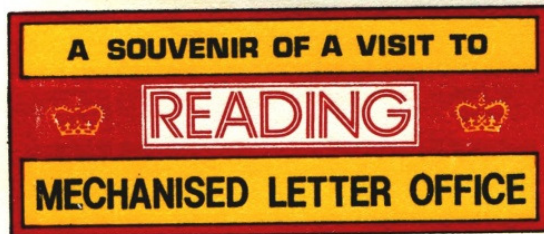
The term "MLO" remained in use until 1997 when it was replaced by "Mail Centre". The term "Automated Processing Centre" was used at newly-built offices between 1992 and 1997.

Redhill postmark with "MLO" at the top of the town die – 24 Oct 1977

1981 – 2nd Generation Desk Souvenir Cover

This souvenir cover was given to visitors at Reading MLO on 21 Mar 81.

READING HEAD POST OFFICE

Reading is the fifth mechanised letter office in the South Eastern Postal Region, following Brighton, Redhill, Guilford and Portsmouth. Five offices remain to be mechanised : Slough, Medway, Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells.

Reading Head Post Office has a wider range of responsibilities than any office in the South East. It handles parcels posted in Berkshire and Oxfordshire and is the national distributing office for letters addressed to Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Wiltshire. As a Foreign Office of Exchange, Reading deals with much of the mail from England to those parts of the globe that used to be coloured red.

Very importantly, it also handles all the letters posted in the Reading and Henley areas. These areas are shown on the postcode map as RG1 to RG10. It is their mail that will be the first to pass through the sorting machinery now installed at the Friar Street sorting office. Eventually, mail posted in the entire RG postcode areas will be concentrated into Reading. (This postcode area includes much of Berkshire and north Hampshire).

Reading Head Office's vital part in the national postal network is largely a result of the town's geographical position, with it's excellent transport links with the surrounding area, with London, the West Country and the Midlands. It is also conveniently close to Heathrow Airport.

The Head Office was a pacesetter before the dawn of the 20th Cesntury. Buried in the archives is a letter from the General Post Office to HM Treasury. "There is," says the letter, "an urgent need of improvement in the arrangements in collecting the letters . . . from the various post offices in the town of Reading."

A familiar story, perhaps, but the post office's suggestion for solving the problems was highly radical. On May 31st 1888 the Treasury replied, authorising the suggestion that Reading mail be collected by Daimler Motor Car.

It was the start of an important chapter in the history of postal mechanisation. The present Head Postmaster is pleased to write another page of history 92 years later.

USE THE POSTCODE —
You're not properly addressed without it !

Source: Reading MLO

1987 – Birmingham Quality of Service (QoS) marks

Between August 1987 and early May 1988, a trial took place whereby the coding desk idents were changed from 2-digit numbers (in the range 01 to 48) to 3-digit numbers (in the range 101 to 148).

For two days only, on the 5th and 6th May 1988, these were changed to numbers in the range 701 to 748 as shown here.
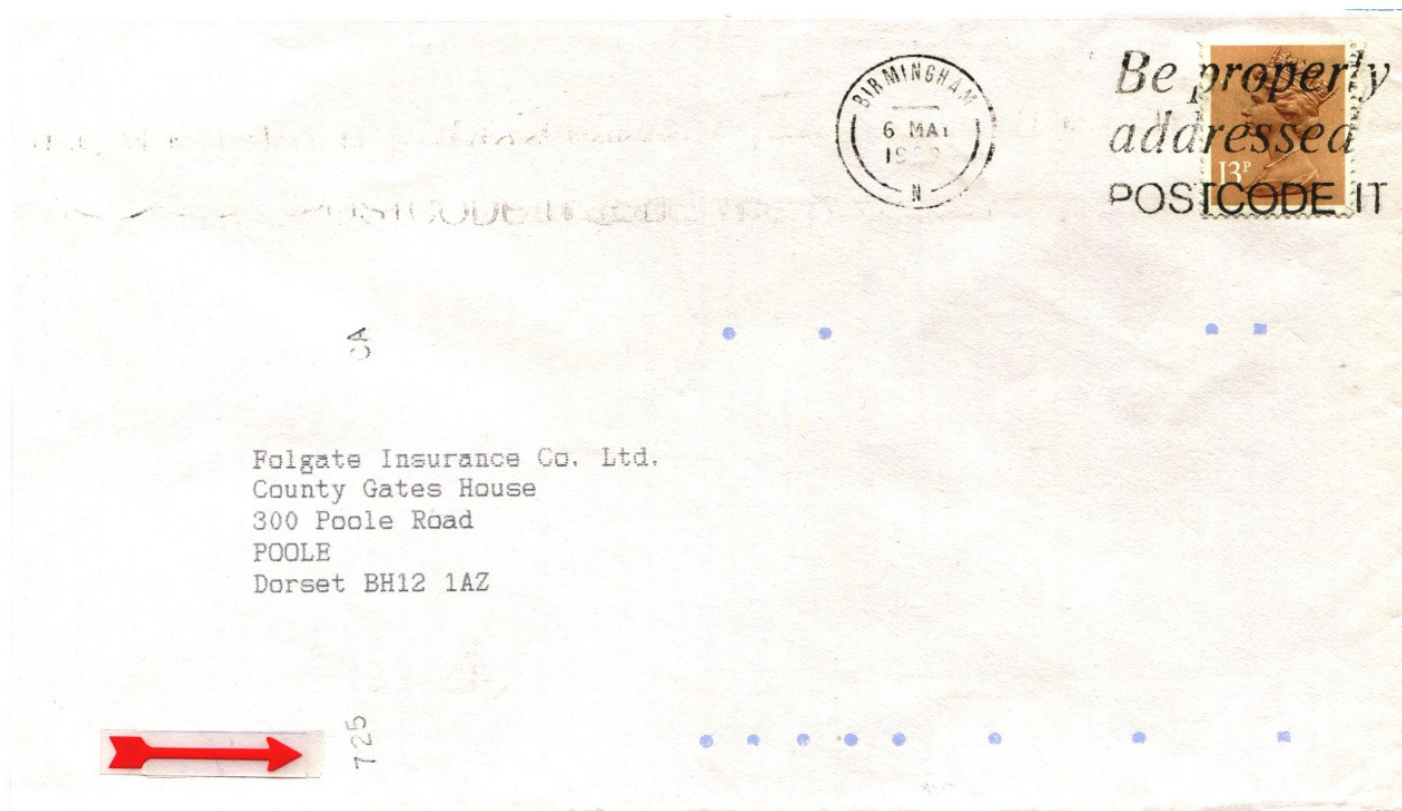
Desk Ident '725' – 6 May 1988

From 9th May until 1st February 1989, the desk numbers were changed each day to reflect the day of the week (1xx = Monday, 2xx = Tuesday 3xx = Wednesday etc.). The trial was stopped - presumably because of the time taken to manually change the idents every day.