Phase 7: 1987 – 1991

3rd Generation coding machinery

This section covers the development and use of the ergonomically designed '3rd Generation desks. They were specially designed for the coding of overseas destined mail.

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

1987   3rd Generation coding desks trials at Reading MLO

1988   3rd Generation coding desks at London F.S.

1991   3rd Generation coding desks in Jersey

1987 – Third Generation Coding Desks

In the mid-1980s, the Post Office Research Group at Swindon developed a new ergonomically-designed coding des, known as the 'Postec C40'.

The desks had their own built-in Translator and were designed in such a way that they could either operate in 'stand-alone' mode or be linked together to a single pre-sorter.
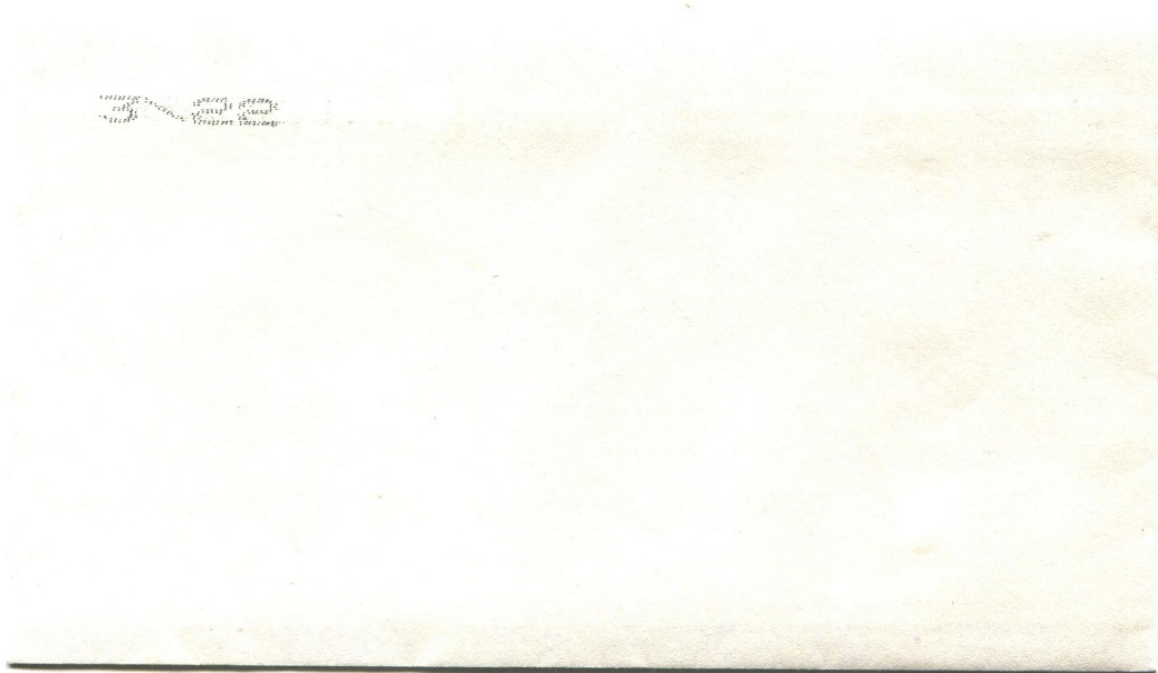
In September 1987, seven such desks, with a 'QWERTY' chord keyboard were trialled at Reading on inland mail. Each mail item processed received an ink-jet printed desk / operator ident.

After the successful trials, the desks were transferred to London F.S. in the summer of 1988 for coding overseas destined mail.

C40 coding desks at Reading MLO - photo taken on a PMSC visit, 23 Jan 1988

1988 – 3rd Generation Desks marks at Reading MLO

Test item showing 3rd Gen. Desk IJP mark (Desk 3 \ Operator 22) Jan 1988

Live mail item showing 3rd Gen. Desk IJP mark (Desk 1 \ Operator 21) Feb 1988

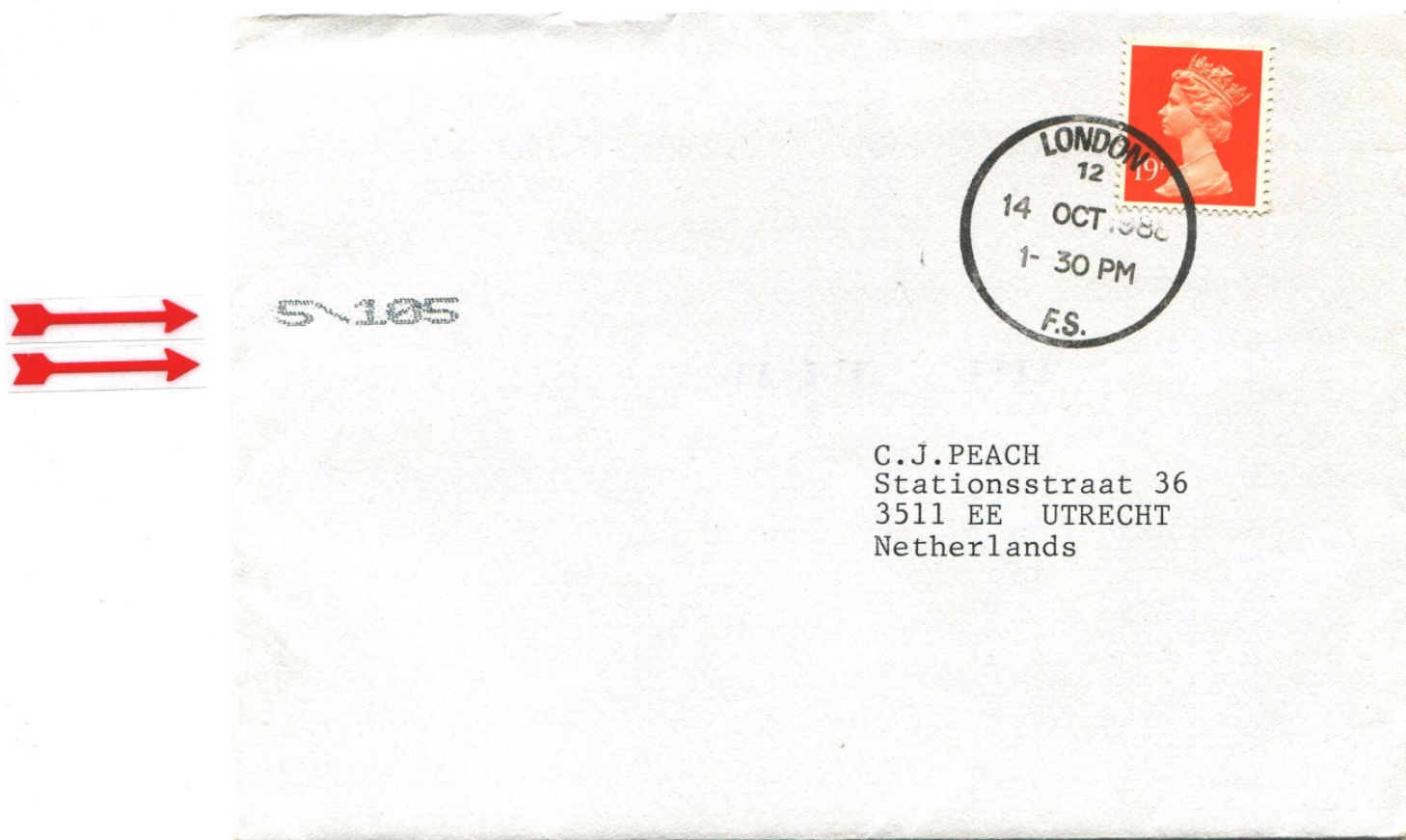# 1988 – 3rd Generation Coding Desks at London F.S.

Following the transfer of the seven C40 coding desks from Reading, commissioning trials took place at London Foreign Section during September and the first half of October 1988.

During this time the desk idents remained as 1 - 7, but engineering operator idents with numbers over 100 were used during the trials.

When the desks were fully operational, the desk idents were changed to idents 13 – 19. Coding marks were applied in the upper position.

At one stage it was planned to extend the use of these desks to other provincial Foreign Sections at Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester and reading but in practice this never happened.

The desks remained in use at London F.S. until 1996 when all outward international mail was handled by the Mount Pleasant office.
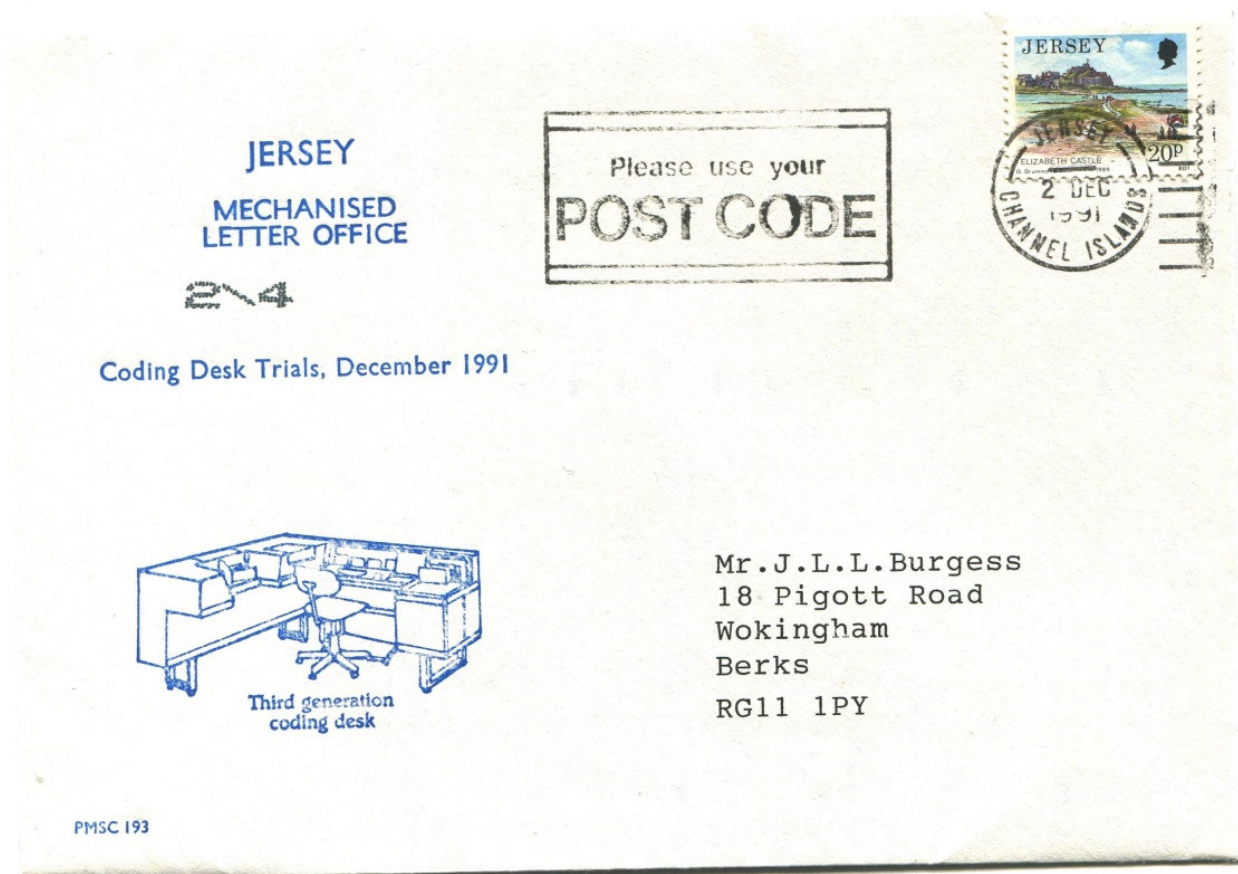

An international mail item, processed at London Foreign Section – 14 Oct 1988 showing desk ident '5', engineering ident '105' and an upper row of coding dots

Source: Automatic Letter Sorting in the UK (P.G. Awcock)

1991 – 3rd Generation Coding Desks in Jersey

On an occasional basis, during the second half of 1991, commissioning trials on nine 'free-standing' (Type C43) coding desks were conducted by the Jersey Post Office.

From 2nd December 1991, the desks became operational and were used for mail destined to the United Kingdom or abroad. The binary coding was the same as that used by the British Post Office. The coding of local Jersey mail commenced in mid-1992.

PMSC cover 193: Jersey Desk Ident '2', Operator Ident '4' – 2nd Dec 1991