

**News about a new U3A Shared
Learning Project
“Our 1901 Postal Pensioners”**

Addressing Health is a three-year project funded by the Wellcome Trust* that looks at postal worker’s health in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Post Office was a major national employer and kept careful records of the amount of sickness and causes of retirement for each employee. Using approximately 30,000 pension records that contain this information, we will be able to identify how worker’s health varied over time and across different parts of the country.

The records are particularly rich for the period 1859 to 1908 and for a subset of these years based on census dates we will be tracing through each individual from retirement to their death. Drawing on information contained in the death certificates, and linking this to their census entries, we will be able to explore a variety of questions, such as how long workers survived after they retired, whether particular conditions that forced early retirement were related to the cause of death, and whether better medical care after retirement meant longer life expectancy.

In order to be able to answer these questions, we need information on individuals in each of the census years that are included in our project: from 1861 to 1901. This is where you can help by participating in the project, *Our 1901 Postal Pensioners*.

Researchers from U3A will work together to conduct research looking at the health of Post Office workers in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and South West England in 1901. These represent approximately 100 people. We have chosen 1901 because it is the first year in which a full census is available for all of Ireland, Scotland, and England.

This research will feed into a blog series, ‘Postal Pensioners in 1901’, which will be hosted on the Addressing Health project website.* Postal Pensioners will showcase pieces of original historical writing by U3A Researchers. It will also make available the data collected by U3A Researchers.

This project would be of great interest to anyone who has researched their own family history, has a relative who was employed by the Post Office or anyone interested in social or medical history.

The research can be done at home, but we will be looking into ways of meeting up regularly to share experiences. Full training and instructions will be given to make this research as easy as possible.

The Post Office

- Post Office was a major employer – 167,000 by 1900 (comparable to the peacetime regular army)
- 1 in 5 were female workers
- National institution; headquarters in London
- 1850s – 276 million letters
- 1890s - 1000 million letters
- Variety of occupations
- Part of Civil Service
- Pensions and sick pay from 1850s for established workers

Post Office medical service established in 1855 and expanded with growth of Post Office workforce.

- Small permanent staff in London and major centres; part time doctors elsewhere
- Main roles to examine fitness for office; certify sickness at work; detect malingering and confirm inability to continue

*The project is funded by a Wellcome Collaborative Award in Humanities and Social Science and is a collaboration between King's College London, Kingston University, University of Derby and University College London, in partnership with The Postal Museum.

*For further information about the project see www.addressinghealth.org.uk

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