

Enlivening Legal Education through The Postal Museum

Initial Search Guide

Cite as: Emily Allbon, Susannah Coster and Amanda Perry-Kessarlis (2025) Enlivening Legal Education through The Postal Museum: Initial Search Guide v. 21.10.25. Available at <https://amandaperrykessarlis.org/2025/07/16/legal-education-through-the-postal-museum/>

The Project

This project explores how we might use The Postal Museum Collections to enliven legal education; and thereby enhance legal education, as well as public interest in law and in the Collections.

We aim to co-design a set of 'Sparks'—expert, accessible, commentaries—which link items in the Collections to each of the core law subjects (contract, criminal, tort, public, land, trusts, EU, jurisprudence); and are directed to educators, students, and members of the public working from A-Level upwards.

The Postal Museum Collections

The Postal Museum Collections contain over 60,000 objects and thousands of records.

We will be focusing (at least for now) on the records in the Royal Mail Archive, which covers records from The Royal Mail Group Plc and The Post Office Ltd. They form one of the oldest business archives in the world, with items dating back 500 years. These institutions, and their earlier iterations, have long played central roles in public and private life in the United Kingdom and beyond, including as employers, communicators, regulators, distributors, and community hubs. So the Archive offers a surprisingly diverse range of rich and engaging pathways through which to explore law at the individual, local, national, and international levels; and from multiple perspectives.

This Guide

This Guide is intended to help you as our project Collaborators to conduct an initial search for items that might form the basis of a Spark in your field of expertise.

The Archive is used for a wide range of purposes, and by a diversity of people, including members of the public researching their family history, authors seeking historical context, archivists in their professional practice, and academic researchers.

In the following sections we share examples of items surfaced by an Archivist (Susannah Coster), and by academic researchers (including by Emily Allbon and Amanda Perry-Kessarlis in preparation for this project).

What to do

Please generate a short list of up to 5 items that might form the basis of a Spark, and email it to all three of us < e.allbon@citystgeorges.ac.uk, susannah.coster@postalmuseum.org, a.perry-kessarlis@kent.ac.uk > by Monday 12 January:

- Use the below examples to get a sense of what kinds of items are in the Archive, and how they might relate to your field of expertise;

- Search the online [catalogue](#) using instructions at the end of this Guide.

We have no set vision of what kinds of items you might choose. Please just follow your instincts, we are excited to see what inspires you. Please contact us any time:

- Susannah for queries about using the catalogue or finding particular types of items.
- Amanda and Emily for any other queries.

Through the eyes of an archivist

As an Archivist at The Postal Museum, Susannah Coster routinely engages with the Collections—appraising and cataloguing items, and helping researchers to find items that might be useful to them. She also has her personal favourites. These include:

- [‘Letter relating to the setting up of the public postal service’](#) POST 23/1 (1637): This is the earliest record in the Collections. It is a letter from The Master of Foreign Posts and deputy to the Postmaster General, Thomas Witherings, to the Mayor of Hull, admonishing him for not enforcing the use of the new ‘Royal Mail’, which had been opened up to the public two years earlier.
- [‘Queen Anne’s Establishment book’](#) POST 59/2 (1702): This includes lists of housekeeping, wages of the household, Custom Establishment, the Post Office Establishment, the guards, garrisons and land forces, navy, and foreign forces, including numbers, revenues and salaries. It shows how integral the Post Office was to the running of the country.
- [‘Rowland Hill’s Post Office Journal’](#) POST 100/4 (September 1839 – December 1840): This includes Rowland Hill’s entry for the day on which the Penny Black was introduced as part of the postal reform. For the first time, postage became affordable for most of the population, and this led to an explosion of letters, postcards, books and newspapers being sent by post. It coincided with the Victorian drive for education for all and self-improvement in adults.
- [‘Express delivery service: Suffragettes conveyed to Prime Minister’s residence as express letters’](#) POST 30/1655a (c.1909): At the time, the Post Office offered a service where ‘Postmasters may arrange for the conduct of a person to an address by an Express Messenger’ (page 33, Post Office Guide, January 1909, POST 92/122). In 1909, two suffragettes made a daring attempt to see Mr Asquith, the Prime Minister, by posting themselves by Express Messenger, to his residence at 10 Downing Street.
- [“‘Ulysses’ by James Joyce, First Edition, as intercepted in the post’](#) POST 23/220 (1922-c.1935): When ‘Ulysses’ was published in 1922 it was soon banned in the UK for what was deemed obscene content at the time. It was illegal to send obscene publications through the post, and this became one of the many publications that the Post Office was instructed to intercept if they came across them.

Through the eyes of academic researchers

One example of an academic project which centred the Archive is [Addressing Health](#), a three year collaboration between academics at four Higher Education Institutions, and funded by the Wellcome Trust. The project explored ‘the timing and geography of ill health, and the responses of the Post Office and the workforce’. Using pensions records of employees, it also traced ‘workers through from retirement until they died’, thereby surfacing ‘links between ill health and mortality.

A second example of an academic project is [Fantasy Legal Exhibitions](#), which was led by Amanda Perry-Kessaris and Victoria Barnes and involved eight legal academic collaborators. The project explored the potential of exhibition as a legal research practice,

and centred on a two-day multi-site experimental workshop. Prior to the workshop, participants used the catalogue to identify items in Archive that were of interest to them, for whatever reason. During the workshop they handled some of the items, sketched and photographed them, and suggested captions that might make the item meaningful to different audiences (members of the public, legal practitioner, legal academic). Items selected by participants included:

- ['Bowles's road directory through England and Wales being a new & comprehensive display of the roads & distances from town to town and of each remarkable place from London'](#) POST 21/159 (1796): A map which does what it says on the tin.
- [As to ship letters of East India Company](#) POST 74/721 (1815): Documents relating to rules around the transportation of letters by ship, including requests for the opinions of the Attorney General, and references to legislation (e.g. Ship Letters Act 1709).
- [Prison products. Mail bags. Part 1](#) POST 121/572 (1891-1949): Documents relating to contracts for the procurement of canvas and cord to make prison mail bags.
- [Details of Discharged Soldiers at the Home Depot](#) POST 47/79 (1918): A memorandum which notes details of soldiers who had been discharged at the Home Depot, and the payment of a modified wage to men in receipt of a full disability pension, and mentions a pending a report of the Committee on Employment of Disabled Soldiers in the Post Office.
- [Air Mail Letter to Betty](#) POST 2017-0051/17 (1946): A hand-written letter from John Meads, then a Battery Sargent Major in the British Army of the Rhine and stationed in Germany, to his wife, Betty Meades who was living in Hounslow.
- [Welfare facilities - employment of women in compliance with Sex Discrimination Act](#) POST 155/122 (1975-1978): Papers and correspondence relating to the impact of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 on the employment of women and men in the Post Office. These address the employment of women in roles that had previously been open only to men, and of men in roles that had previously been open only to women; and anticipate difficulties around the provision of toilets and other facilities.
- ["Be bright get it right"](#) POST 109/532 (1983): Artwork for a health and safety information poster emphasizing the need for cyclists to make themselves visible (e.g. with lights). The idea for the poster is attributed to 'L O Davis postman SWDO'.

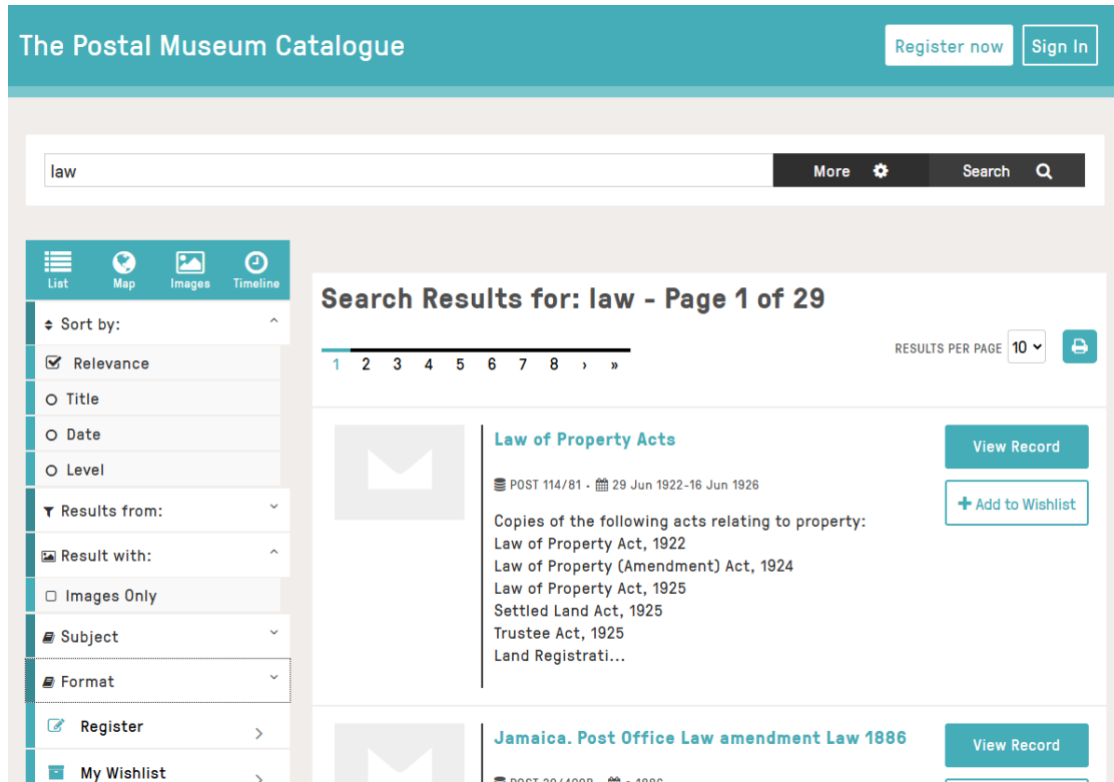
Amanda Perry-Kessarar and Emily Allbon have identified the following examples of items that appear to us to be relevant to core legal subjects and themes and, therefore, to this project. Why not explore them and see whether and why you agree:

- Crime: [Prosecution brief - Beauforte and Others – Felony](#) POST 74/205 (1934)
- Property: [Intellectual Property: What Is It, and Why Is It Important?](#) POST 108/366 (1996)
- Trusts: [British Philatelic Trust January to December 1982](#) POST 154/920 (1982)
- Contract: [Sub-Postmasters' contract](#) 2012-0187/20 (1995)
- Tort: [Libel Action](#) POST 98/2 (1807-1817)
- Public: [Abolition of metropolitan counties - general correspondence](#) POST 157/148 (1983-1985)
- European: [The Post Office. EC Notice on Postal Services. The UK Post Office Detailed Response](#) POST 72/980A (Feb 1996)
- Jurisprudence: [Post Office Rules and Staff Handbooks](#) POST 68 Sub-sub-series (1925-1983)
- Empire: [Wembley British Empire Exhibition 1924](#) POST 150 Sub-sub-sub-series (1924)
- Research Methods: [An Oral History of the Post Office: Interview with Macdonald Simpson, Morag, 1947-](#) F12268-F12272 (2 December 2002). Note: recordings of oral histories are held at the [National Sound Archive](#) at the British Library.

How to search the online catalogue

You can use keyword searches on the online catalogue:

<https://catalogue.postalmuseum.org/> and then browse the results or filter them using the menu on the left-hand side of the screen:



Alternatively, you can browse the records by Series or the whole archive, for example:

https://catalogue.postalmuseum.org/collections/getrecord/GB813_P_50

- Click on the link above, which takes you to a Series of records
- Click the 'Browse by Hierarchy' tab
- Click 'Jump to this document in the hierarchy'
- You will then see a list of Sub-series; click on the + sign next to a Sub-series you are interested in
- You will then see a list of individual records in that Sub-series; click on the title of the record you are interested in; this will show you the catalogue entry for this record. If you want to order the record to view in-person, please make a note of the 'Finding Number'.

You can register to use the online catalogue and create Wishlists of records you're interested in (please note, staff cannot see your wish lists).