

Huge demand for Birmingham New Street forgotten tunnel tour

September 10, 2021



Thirty lucky members of the public are being given tours of a forgotten underground tunnel at Birmingham New Street station as part of Birmingham Heritage Week.

More than 300 people applied to go on the Network Rail arranged tour of the 400-metre-long tunnel which used to move post between a former Royal Mail sorting office and station platforms.

The tunnel linked the huge postal sorting centre which is now the Mailbox estate.

When the sorting office opened in 1970 it was the largest building in the city with a floor area of 81,000m².

It also housed the largest mechanised letters and parcels sorting machinery in the country.

Special electric tractors known as 'Brutes' would ferry sacks of mail underground to and from mail trains using Birmingham New Street station.

The building closed in the late 90s and was redeveloped into mixed-use office and lifestyle destination,

Mailbox, which Network Rail has partnered with to arrange access for today's special tours.

However, while the former sorting office above was transformed beyond recognition, the old postal tunnel stayed frozen in time.

Few people have had access over the years but on Friday those lucky enough to gain a ticket through a public ballot have gone behind the scenes as part of Birmingham Heritage week.

Bethanie Hayton, tour organiser from Network Rail, said: "We were blown away at the number of people who applied for tickets to get a rare glimpse of this near forgotten tunnel linking New Street to the old sorting office. Delivering mail by rail used to be a huge part of railway business so it's been fascinating to arrange these tours and remember the past.

"We're proud to be working with Birmingham Heritage week and Mailbox on these tunnel tours, and I'm really looking forward to sharing its Rail Mail history with the 30 lucky people who got tickets!"

Irene de Boo, coordinator for Birmingham Heritage Week, said: "The mail tunnel is a fascinating part of Birmingham's recent history. Although in use until the 90s, the tunnel has largely been forgotten about. Birmingham Heritage Week showcases the city's rich and varied heritage and this includes places that are not normally accessible to the public.

"The mail tunnel is a good example. We are delighted to work with Network Rail and Mailbox to open this hidden, underground, and exciting space. For the lucky winners it will be a walk with difference."

Andy Jackson, estate director at Mailbox, said: "The redevelopment of the Royal Mail sorting office signalled an important phase in the regeneration of Birmingham, and as one of the city's most iconic landmarks, Mailbox is delighted to be partnering with Network Rail to celebrate this unique piece of history for Birmingham Heritage Week."

Birmingham Heritage week runs from 9-19 September.

For more information on the events taking place visit: <https://birminghamheritageweek.co.uk/>

Photo credit: Network Rail