

I was in our local shop this week, and one of our posties was at the till. Every time someone came in, they threw a jibe at him – asking if he was on strike, and would anyone notice if he was. He was far more good natured with them than I would have been, and pointed out that it was late afternoon and, anyway, a day off. He cleverly avoided getting into any debates about the rights and wrongs of the postal dispute and I don't know if he is one of the strikers or not. Actually it doesn't matter to me either way, because he is a lovely man and does a great job. At the end of the day that's all that matters to me.

The reason I'm not sure if he was on strike or not is that I get so few letters that he could have spent weeks picketing in front of a brazier before I would even notice. We are coming up to the time of year when I look forward to seeing what has popped through the letterbox, but most of the year it's just bank statements and appeals from charities.

We are being told that the management is trying to “modernise” while the employees are concerned with “protecting the level of service”. At least that's what we hear on the news, but I'm sure there is much, much more to it than that. My own experience of the post office is excellent; I can't think of anything that went missing, and all the cards and parcels I send arrive in time for birthdays provided I post them early enough. I understand that it will take an extra day to reach my island relatives, but we all know that and post accordingly.

I think part of the problem with this modernisation attempt is about customer expectations more than anything. There is a lot of talk about what time post arrives and the reduction in the number of deliveries. At work, our post comes about 9:30 which is earlier than many of the staff. I have a look through my letters when I get them, but only deal with about half of them on the day. Post going out gets taken away about 4:30, so anything produced after then will not get sent until the following day. It all works very well.

My post at home is a different thing entirely. I believe it arrives late morning, although when we lived in the farm cottage we were one of the last deliveries of the shift and it arrived quite late in the day. None of this matters though, because as a full-time worker, I don't look at it until I get home in the evening anyway.

My point is that, for domestic post, it would be no great hardship if I got deliveries even once a week. My week could be fish van on a Tuesday, library Tuesdays and Thursdays, bins on a Wednesday and post on a Friday. I was also quite used to the bin being at the end of the farm lane and not outside my front door. I am sure it would be no great hardship for me to collect my post from a box at the road end. I appreciate that this would be more difficult for less able people, but surely no different to their access to shops and other services?

We could even adopt the practices of other countries and collect our mail from a central point (I am thinking here of post offices and local shops rather than the sorting office in Inverness). The disappointment of bills instead of longed-for greetings could be made up for by being able to immediately take the pain away with chocolate from aforesaid shop.

I am writing all of this while carrying the pain of my own failure to make it in the postie stakes. A few years ago I applied for a job with the post office in Fort William. The round was in the town rather than rural which appealed to me as someone who gains little pleasure from driving but is happy to walk around in ever decreasing circles for hours on end.

I passed the test with flying colours and even though I did OK in the interviews, sadly was not one of the chosen two. There were four of us turned down on the day, but we were told our details would be held for any future vacancies. You might have guessed by now, that eventually all the applicants except myself were taken on in the end. I wouldn't want to accuse any employer of sexism, but I do wonder what these five men had that I didn't.