

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in January 2026, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who worked for the Post Office.

Mary Braund née Carter and the Post Office

The first reference to Mary Braund in the Post Office Archives is in the appointment books. On 16 April 1741, Mrs Mary Braund was appointed housekeeper, in the room [place] of Mrs Dennis Chapman, deceased.



The General Post Office, Lombard Street, London

Image from Wikimedia Commons, in the public domain

“The Post Office on Lombard Street was built around a central courtyard, which was open to the public and accessed through an imposing gateway. Directly opposite the entrance stood the sorting office, with the letter carriers' office located in the basement below. To the left was the foreign letter office, while to the right was the Board Room, which was connected to the official residence of the Postmasters General”.¹

Given her role, it seems likely that Mary would have lived in.

Mary was the only woman in a list of employees at the General Post Office for 1742 and she was earning a salary of £20 a year. By 1747, her salary had risen to £60, twice that of the sorters and more than the clerks. We continue to follow Mary through these salary lists until one dated 1763.

She also appears in occasional expense accounts. In 1760, Mary Braund “housekeeper to this office” received £15 8 shillings for “employing two chairwomen (sic) to clean out the Board Room and other apartments belonging thereto.” This seems to be a regular arrangement, as a similar payment were made in other years. The amount paid suggests that this might refer to an annual payment for cleaning throughout the year.

The appointments book records, on 24 July 1765, “that Lady Resham be appointed housekeeper to this Office in place of Mrs Mary Braund, deceased.” In the eighteenth century, the General Post Office, also known as the Inland Office, was in Lombard Street in London.

The fact that Mary is noted with the title ‘Mrs’ and that she is replaced by a titled women, as well as her salary, suggests that housekeeper to the General Post Office was a prestigious position.

In 1635, Charles I began to allow others to use his ‘royal mail’. During the Interregnum, there was, of course no royal mail but the General Post Office was created by Oliver Cromwell. After he came to the throne, Charles II put the newly re-established ‘royal mail’ in the hands of the General Post Office. Money raised from the postal service, went into government coffers. The cost of sending a letter varied with the distance and how many pages were to be sent. Envelopes were rarely used as that was an additional cost, so writing would be as small as possible, ideally on a single sheet, often with the writing being ‘crossed’. In other words, the letter was written conventionally, then the sheet turned through ninety degrees and filled with writing again. The sheet was then folded and fixed with a wax seal.

You did not pay to send a letter, instead, it was the recipient who paid. This caused a problem for the post office as some were reluctant, or unable, to pay, which meant that letters never reached their destination.

¹¹ Quoted on Wikipedia from Joyce, Herbert, *The History of the Post Office from Its Establishment Down to 1836*. Richard Bentley & Son. (1893) pp. 46–48.

Initially, letters sent within London were not handled by the General Post Office but instead, were delivered by a businesses' private messenger or a household's servants. In 1680, William Dockwra instituted a postal service for addresses that were within London. All letters cost just one penny and this was paid by the sender. For an additional penny, letters could be sent up to ten miles outside the city. Three years later, Dockwra was taken to court by the Duke of York who claimed that Dockwra's penny post infringed the monopoly for the royal mail that was held by the Duke. As a result, Dockwra was forced to hand over the penny post, which became part of the General Post Office.

So what do we know about Mary? There are very few Braunds in London in the eighteenth century. We know from the post office records that Mary died in 1765. No burial record has been found but Mary left a detailed will. In it, Mary Braund, widow of Quality Court, Chancery Lane, widow, mentions the following:

My sister Barbara, wife of Robert Watts of Woodstock Street, St George's Hanover Square

My daughter-in-law Alice Braund, widow of Henley on Thames

My son William Braund now in the service of the East India Company.

Amongst the bequests are a number of Indian items.

This clearly identifies Mary as Mary née Carter, who married Benjamin Braund on 16 October 1721. Although the marriage took place at St. Nicholas', Tooting Graveney, both Benjamin and Mary were described as being of St. Pancras Soper Lane, which is seven miles away on the other side of the river. Carter is just too common a surname to identify Mary's baptism and parents, even with the addition of Barbara as a sister to help.

Benjamin and Mary had seven children, four sons, followed by three daughters, in nine years, including what appears to be a set of twin daughters. The two eldest sons were baptised at St. Pancras, Soper Lane but the younger children were baptised in Romford, Essex; it is possible that this is where the Carters came from. At least one son and one daughter died in infancy, and there is no trace of two of the daughters, who may also have died; neither is mentioned in their mother's will.

Benjamin Braund was a the commander of the *Duke of Cumberland*, an East India Company vessel. The *Duke of Cumberland* is recorded as having made four voyages between 1726 and 1739. In 1738, at the age of forty four,



St. Nicholas', Tooting Graveney

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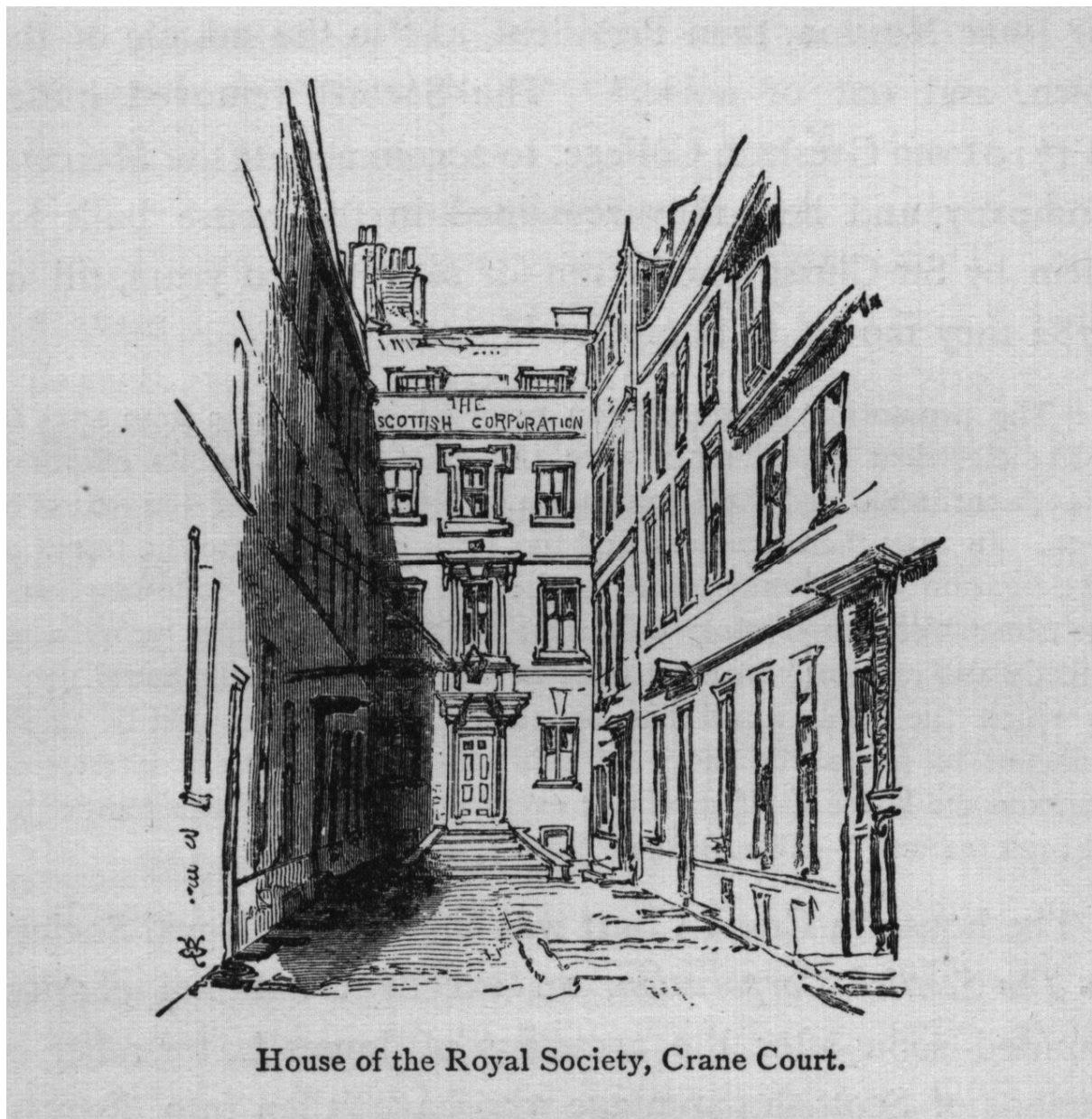
Benjamin died at Fort St. George, the East India Company depot in Madras, India, leaving Mary with a young family



Fort St. George

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Presumably, Benjamin's death is what prompted Mary to seek employment in the Post Office. Land Tax record for the 1750 place Mary at an address in Crane Court, off Fleet Street. Even then this was an area inhabited by journalists and printers and was also home to the prestigious Royal Society, who occupied a building, designed by Christopher Wren, at the end of the court.



From Walks in London by Augustus Hare 1878

Image from Wikimedia Commons, In the public domain

All three of Benjamin and Mary's sons who reached adulthood followed their father in to the East India Company. All three, like their father, died young overseas. The eldest, Benjamin, died in 1763 in Calcutta. Samuel died in St. Helena in 1767 and William in Calcutta in 1769. Although two of the sons were married, it does not seem that they had any children, so Mary has no known living descendants.

Sources

Post Office Establishment Books, which are held at London's Post Office Museum www.postalmuseum.org and are available on Ancestry for the period 1691-1979. The cover the whole of the United Kingdom, as well as Ireland up until 1920. Other records on Ancestry that will be useful are the Appointment books

www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1933

And the Royal Mail Pension and Gratuity Records 1860-1970

www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62452

The will of Mary Braund, proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1765

Marriage registers of St. Nicholas', Tooting Graveney

Baptism registers of St, Mary's Soper Lane

Baptism registers of Romford, Essex

1750 Land Tax return for Crane's Court

Research carried out by The Braund Society www.braundsociety.org

Records of The East India Company.