

# The Postman's Daily Round: English Journeys in 1930s Documentary Film

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Developments in transportation and communication challenged social and geographic boundaries in interwar Britain. Divisions between town and country, north and south were blurred by, among other developments, the construction of new roads, the extension of Underground lines, the increased use of the motorcar, and the spread of the wireless and home telephone.<sup>1</sup> Regional differences eroded as more people were able to communicate with others in person, over the 'phone or through the shared experience of cinema. Many projects of the 1930s attempted to document the effects of changes in transportation and communication on the interaction between individuals, communities, and landscapes. In this article I consider British documentary film's intervention through an analysis of a particular, and peculiar, 1930s film genre: the postman's daily round. I suggest that three films produced by the GPO Film Unit—*Daily Round* (1937), *Penny Journey* (1938), and *The Horsey Mail* (1938)—use the daily round of a village postman to visualize the disruptive and disorientating process of rural modernization. These films, I argue, force the viewer to negotiate the physical, social, and cultural landscapes of the countryside and use a tour of the village to map out the obstacles to integration of modern services within contemporary rural Britain. As my discussion of the films reveals, these obstacles came from different directions and from multiple agents, each interested in promoting a particular view of modern rural life. My goal is to help readers understand the ways in which this minor film genre mediated the responses and the resistance to modernity by these different agents, including the films' producers, subjects, and spectators. My analysis of the filmmakers' shared interest in mapping and mobility contributes to a growing body of work that explores the filmic constructions of both cities and countrysides.<sup>2</sup>

## Documenting the decade

Several attempts to document the state of interwar Britain relied on a mobile (and male) observer. H.V. Morton's *In Search of England* (1927,

reprinted 29 times throughout the 1930s) was followed by J.B. Priestley's *English Journey* (1933), S.P.B. Mais's *This Unknown Island* (1933), Philip Gibbs's *England Speaks* (1935), Bill Brandt's photographs of *The English at Home* (1936), Mass-Observation's *May the 12<sup>th</sup>* (1937) and George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). These projects were not entirely new, of course, as they followed in the tradition of other explorations of the British landscape, including William Camden's *Britannia* (1586) and William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1830). However, 1930s observers were particularly concerned not only with contemporary economic and social conditions, but also with the ways in which developments in transportation and communication contributed to those conditions and created new spaces for the formation of a modern British identity.

The GPO (General Post Office) Film Unit produced several films that document changes to the nation. The Film Unit was organized in 1933 to promote the products of the General Post Office; these films show how the post office can help people keep in touch with each other and, indirectly, with the modern world of advancing technology. GPO films stick to their remit and explain the post office's products and services. But they are also artistically and technically innovative and constitute an early British art cinema that influenced the kitchen sink realism of filmmakers such as Lindsay Anderson, Terence Davies, and Shane Meadows. Through sound, image, and montage, many GPO films move beyond the mundane topics of mailing a letter, sending a telegram, and dialling a phone and address issues of unemployment, education, and industrial and agricultural labor. These filmmakers saw cinema as a way to expose the contemporary viewer to conditions and communities that he or she might not otherwise encounter.

Many of the GPO films explore shifts in interpersonal and international relations that result from modernization. The film *We Live in Two Worlds* (1937) even suggests that new forms of communication and transportation have shifted the map of Europe (Figures 1-2). In the film J. B. Priestley uses these two maps to lecture the viewer about the changes brought to a Swiss village as a result of these new connections with the outside world. The village maintains its local customs, as Priestley shows through footage of folk music and dances, but it also looks outward to the other communities (both national and international) to which it is connected through rail lines, roads, and wires. Many GPO filmmakers saw documentary cinema as a way to make visible the complicated and often hidden processes of fashioning rural community within modernity. To do so, they relied on oppositions between rural and urban, traditional and modern, agricultural and industrial, image and spectator, even as some elements of the genre worked to tear down those very oppositions. To these documentarists, cinema created a space in which the interaction between the social, physical, and cultural landscapes could be analyzed and articu-



lated. The postman's daily round offered a readymade subject with which to explore these interactions.



Figure 1: J. B. Priestley points out national boundaries in a traditional map of Europe in *We Live in Two Worlds* (dir. Alberto Cavalcanti, 1937).



Figure 2: Priestley reveals another map of Europe that emphasizes transportation and communication links.

While the figure of the postman inevitably appears in films sponsored by the post office, the three that concern me here, *Daily Round*, *Penny Journey*, and *The Horsey Mail*, use the postman's round to structure the entire film. *Daily Round* is seventeen-minutes long and was directed by Richard Massingham (with assistant director Karl Urbahn), whose brother H. J. Massingham was a prolific writer on country land use and the cultural meaning of the English countryside throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The film features an unnamed postman (played by an actor) and the people of

the village of Musbury in Devon. The postman's round begins at the post office and takes in a number of rural sights along the way, including cows, sheep, chickens, and a disgruntled customer. *Daily Round* is the most playful and the most formally experimental of the three films and, as I discuss below, makes effective use of jump cuts and camera angles to disorientate the viewer. *Penny Journey*, six-minutes long, was directed by Humphrey Jennings, who, in the year before the film's release, worked for the social anthropology project Mass-Observation, which he founded with Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson. *Penny Journey* can be seen as a cinematic Day Report similar to those written by Mass-Ob's fleet of mobile observers, except Jennings allows the viewer to see the day's events but not hear the postman's observations of them. The film follows the itinerary of Mr. Money, the postman for the village of Graffham in Sussex, as he completes the last few legs of a postcard's journey from Manchester to the countryside. Jennings was particularly interested in the ways in which industrialization shaped our perception of different landscapes and populations. In 1937 he began collecting material for *Pandaemonium*, a history of the Industrial Revolution told through brief sketches by contemporary observers. In *The Horsey Mail* (nine minutes) director Pat Jackson (then age twenty-two) uses the daily round of Claude Simmonds, in part, to map out the damage caused to the village of Horsey by flooding along the coast of East Anglia. The emphasis on this natural disaster sets this film slightly apart from the others as the film shows the changes to this particular postman's usual route. However, all three films, I suggest, present disruptive, fragmented, incomplete journeys.

These short films are neither the most technically innovative nor the most politically engaged of the GPO film canon and, thus, have been ignored or dismissed by analyses of the British Documentary Film Movement and studies of interwar film. Looking at these films collectively can help us to analyze the choices Massingham, Jennings, and Jackson made in their constructions of rural modernity and contributes to our understanding of the ways in which interwar artists visualized both the process of modernization and the contemporary English countryside. While Priestley's film presents a neat and tidy version of modernization by replacing one simple map with another, these films acknowledge the disruptions that occur on a daily and local level with the redrawing of those maps.

Because it was the source of many forms of communication, the GPO was particularly interested in promoting a vision of the nation in which citizens from different landscapes could participate in its modernity. But the organization gave the film unit creative license to take different approaches in documenting the modernization process. Many of the GPO filmmakers, then, took these assignments as opportunities to explore formally the implications of modernization and the ways in which documentary cinema could

communicate them. The contemporary audience surely had some idea of what a postman does as part of his daily activities; thus, the genre of films that I term “the postman’s daily round” did not need to explain unknown processes such as telephone-wire installation and the delivery of mail by trains that move in the night as other GPO films document. Furthermore, the films’ express concern is not to show new technologies coming to the countryside. In *Daily Round*, *Penny Journey*, and *The Horsey Mail*, letter and package delivery and telephone and telegram service have seemingly been on offer to these villages for some time. Films of “the postman’s daily round,” I argue, reveal the dissonance and tension between the GPO and its potential customers and between rural residents and representations of the interwar English countryside.

Before moving into my analysis of the films I first want to address my use of the term landscape and explain what I mean by physical, social, and cultural landscapes. As David Matless contends in *Landscape and Englishness*, the term landscape is “both natural and cultural, deep and superficial” (12). In this article I share Matless’s conception of landscape as both spatial and temporal, and I refer to what I see as three particular landscapes at work in these films. The physical landscape is the actual topography of the village and its surrounding area as well as the built environment of shops, cottages, roads, and lanes. The social landscape includes the people of these villages and their interactions. The cultural landscape refers to the role of the English countryside in the cultural imagination: agricultural site and antidote to the crowded chaos of the modern city and suburbs. Massingham, Jennings, and Jackson draw on all three landscapes to document the changes in social organization and land use that the films link to the modernization of rural Britain.

### Mapping

The three films of the postman’s daily round use movement through the physical landscape to map out the shifts in social and economic networks that modernity brought to the countryside. Each filmmaker uses physical geography to highlight the obstacles to integration of GPO services to what the films frame as rather remote locations. The postman is the only figure in each film that circulates through the entire village. The films present Musbury, Graffham, and Horsey as empty, isolated places and promote the GPO as their only connection with the outside world.

*The Horsey Mail* uses a line of telephone poles to visualize the connection between what the film’s commentary calls the “island” of Horsey and the rest of the nation. *Penny Journey* uses the postcard’s rail journey from Manchester to London and the arrival in Graffham of the mail car from the regional sorting office to document the connection between this village and two of the metropolitan areas of England. Jennings depicts Graffham

as nearly empty of people except for Mr. Money, his colleague in the post office, and the one customer he encounters on his nine-mile route. The film maps out the local sites, but not the local activities. At the beginning of *Daily Round* two local post office workers sort letters and telegrams from as far away as Canada. Massingham includes a sound montage that highlights the telephone, telegraph, and postage services the GPO offers the village as ways to communicate beyond the hills and valleys. These filmmakers steer clear of precious images of rural community life and choose instead to construct films that emphasize the isolation of these villages and the eagerness villagers have for modern services to be brought to their local area. Indeed, the post office is framed as the hub of activity in Graffham and Musbury, and in flood-ravaged Horsey the postman Claude is seemingly the only person people see all day.

In *Daily Round* a colleague tells the postman a piece of local gossip that he repeats throughout his round. In one sequence the postman and the story draw a large crowd that encircles the postman and listens to the tale like a large family gathered in front of a wireless. Massingham presents these villagers as hungry for entertainment and keen to keep up to date with the latest information. *Daily Round* presents the postman and, thus, the GPO as the main transmitters and transporters of this information. The spread of local gossip from the post office to the villagers suggests the smooth integration of GPO services and local social networks.

*Daily Round*, *Penny Journey*, and *The Horsey Mail* promote a seemingly democratic network of communication within a historically rigid (though slowly changing) class structure. Mailing a letter, sending a telegram, making a telephone call were not limited to a certain class, though these activities did have economic costs that certain villagers might find prohibitive. In *Penny Journey* the voice-over commentary makes sure to tell us that the stately home Graffham Court is on the same route as the more modest properties, Haylofts and Tegleaze Farm. The journey through Horsey avoids commentary and images that distinguish the socioeconomic differences among the residents. Yet the dialogue between the regional accent of one of the postal workers and the Received Pronunciation of the film's narrator suggests the GPO's appeal to both working-class and middle-class subscribers.

*Daily Round* goes a step further and includes a dream sequence in which the postman imagines a re-ordering of society by the democratic exchanges offered by the GPO. The postman stands atop a hill, rings a bell to call the villagers and thus replaces the bell of the village church that sits in the center of the village and that we see in an earlier scene. In this sequence Massingham positions the GPO as the new town square. He frames the GPO's network of communication services as both inclusive and out in the open.

Those that ascend the hill are the villagers we have seen on the daily round presented in the rest of the film as well as a new character, the local toff who climbs the hill in a top hat and tails, a common trope for the foppish, and feeble, aristocrat. The young squire receives his daily mail and thanks the postman in a braying upper class accent that turns to shrieks as he tumbles down the hill to the laughter of the rest of the village. Massingham constructs this sequence to evoke the postman's frustrations with his daily round. His modern rural utopia envisions a system of communication that precludes the postman's physical journey through the village. Massingham links these images to the sleeping postman to create an entertaining interlude in which the postman vents his frustrations. Yet he also uses the dream sequence as a strategy to document the frustrations and challenges many encountered in the negotiation of modern and rural life.

As in *Penny Journey* and *The Horsey Mail*, *Daily Round* uses the physical geography of the village to emphasize the obstacles to widespread distribution of modern services such as those offered by the GPO. The hill that each resident of Musbury must climb to participate in this network suggests the obstacles to integration: the cost of the services and the physical geography that isolates villages such as these. *Penny Journey* visualizes these difficulties through Mr. Money's long ascent to the last delivery that the film shows us. Tegleaze Farm sits atop a hill and overlooks a valley. Jennings's shot of the valley provides the viewer with an indication of just how distant this particular house is from even the tiny village of Graffham. The floodwaters in Horsey (Figure 3) limit the number of houses to which Claude is allowed access. The camera lingers over a sign that we presume Claude encounters on his journey: "Road Flooded. Impassable. Diversion." These terms indicate that some villagers have no access to GPO services.



Figure 3: Flood waters ravage a farmhouse in *The Horsey Mail*.



The film *Daily Round* comments on the idea of access in one particular sequence in which the postman's right of way is challenged by an aggressive landowner. Massingham uses forbidden access to land to dramatize residents' resistance to the disruptions in traditional ways of life caused by modernization. This particular resident makes a distinction between service and social call; he treats the postman as a service provider not as a substitute for social interaction. While the postman in *Daily Round* incites the anger of one local resident, Mr. Money makes a lonely trek around Graftham and Claude's journey maps out Horsey's abandoned houses and fields. The closed doors they encounter emblemize some residents' resistance to modernity and its perceived disruptions. These villagers' responses to the postmen echo the fears of interwar commentators who saw modern forms of communication destroying traditional forms of community associated with village life. In 1932 John Betjeman suggested that, "Village communities except for somewhat arty collections of weavers and spinners in the Cotswolds, have practically ceased to exist" (Betjeman 92). Instead, Betjeman argued, rural residents listen to the wireless, go to the cinema, and hardly socialize with other villagers. I.A. Richards, Q.D. Leavis, F. R. Leavis, and Denys Thompson, among others, also warned that cinema and wireless frustrated, rather than fostered, the formation of community. Cinema was a substitute for direct experience and personal interaction and regular cinema-going created a population whose ability to interact personally suffered from its passive acceptance of screen images. Massingham, Jennings, and Jackson use cinema to visualize the links between these rural communities and the nation and to document the shift in rural land use from primarily site of labor to site of leisure.

While interwar English countryside were, overall, places of decline and rebirth,<sup>3</sup> the agricultural areas of southern England were certainly hit hard by the 1930s economic depression and by international networks of trade and transportation that made available cheaper agricultural products from abroad. The locations of the postman films, then, were sites of agricultural despair for many farmers, yet they were also leisure spots for motorists and ramblers keen to escape the crowded conditions of the city and suburb. The films of the postman's daily round gesture to the interwar countryside's crisis of identity as to its role in modern Britain. Mapping of the physical landscape recalls the agricultural history of the region and projects views of the English countryside as tourist site.

Chickens and sheep wander in and out of the frame in *Daily Round*. The film treats the animals as spectacle rather than show them as part of a working farm. The postman's interaction with them illustrates the type of rustic encounters many motorists and ramblers hoped for in their journeys through the heart of Britain. *Penny Journey's* images of the two farms, Haylofts and Tegleaze, show no agricultural labor. The shot of Haylofts

is tightly framed and presents only the house, not the land. At Tegleaze Farm the postman encounters the aunt of the Manchester boy who wrote the postcard at the beginning of the film. The film contrasts the young, masculine, mechanized northern city of Manchester with an isolated, feminized, aged image of the rural south. Given the contemporary conditions of many farms, the boy's message, "It must be nice to be in the country," seems almost cynical.

*The Horsey Mail* projects the most evocative images of a destroyed economy: ravaged farmland, abandoned tractors, unused ploughs and people packed up to leave the village (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Residents of Horsey are forced to flee their homes.

This particular sequence calls to mind the flight from depressed agricultural areas by young workers seeking jobs in factories and towns. As the narrator tells us, "I should say there won't be any villagers left in Horsey by the look of things here." Thus, this particular film evokes the rural exodus caused by changes in the region's economy. But as many were leaving, more were motoring in.

The postman's round broadcasts the shift in the identity of the countryside from a site of production to one of consumption. Each film presents shots of the village and the surrounding countryside. At different moments the camera luxuriates in stunning countryside images (Figures 5-9). Farmhouses and fields are portrayed as beauty spots, not as sites of agricultural labor. The films flatten the space of the village into a set of images like pages pulled from a guidebook or from one of the many illustrated celebrations of the English countryside published in the 1930s such as *The Beauty of England* (1933) and *The Beauty of Britain* (1935). Massingham, Jennings, and Jackson use vistas to attract the film viewer and to position him as a cinematic tourist (Bruno 62). The films present a slideshow of local attractions (and, in Horsey, local devastation) that allows even residents





Figure 5: *Penny Journey's* scenic village of Graffham.



Figure 6: Mr. Money visits Graffham Court in *Penny Journey*.



Figure 7: The postman's cozy cottage in *Penny Journey*.



Figure 8: The view from *Penny Journey's* Tegleaze Farm



Figure 9: Claude the postman on his round through Horsey.

of the villages themselves to consume carefully framed images of the rural landscape. By inviting the touristic practices of spectatorship and the consumption of views, these films contribute to the commodification of the countryside seen throughout the 1930s. The photographic images bring the beauty spots of the countryside to the audience. They demonstrate how second-hand images replace first-hand experience with the reproducibility offered by technological innovation (Benjamin 225). By projecting cinematic images of rural landscapes, films of the postman's round bring film viewers closer to these places, but do not advance their knowledge of contemporary conditions. While Jackson presents many more images of devastation, none of the filmmakers interrogate contemporary conditions; rather, as I discuss below, they move him along on a limited tour of interwar rural England.

### **Mobility**

The postman's daily round takes the viewer on a filmic tour that reconstructs the superficial exchanges of modern life. The films document the constant negotiation of public and private spaces in a world in which people and places were seemingly drawn closer together. In the previous section of this article, I discuss how the daily round maps out shifts in social organization and land use. Here I want to analyze the ways in which these films move the

viewer through different landscapes yet exclude him from the interactions that the camera documents. Michel de Certeau provides a useful distinction between maps and the type of tour that, I suggest, these filmmakers adopt as a strategy to communicate the disorientating effects of modernity on contemporary life, even life in the seemingly slower and simpler countryside. To Certeau, a map is "a plane projection totalizing observations"; the tour "a discursive series of operations" (119). The postman's tour of the English village simultaneously forces the viewer to negotiate a series of landscapes (social, physical, cultural) and to participate in different discourses of landscape: landscape as metaphor and landscape as a source of "power, authority and pleasure" (Matless 13).

*Daily Round*, *Penny Journey*, and *The Horsey Mail* include numerous forms of transportation: bicycles, cars, trucks, trains, and (in *Horsey*) boats. People and machines are in constant movement in these films to suggest the modes and tempos of mobility in modern society. In *The Horsey Mail*, apart from opening and closing sequences about the flood and the area's recovery program, the film proceeds through sequences of movement that both shorten and lengthen the postman's journey. Claude begins his itinerary on bicycle but he is unexpectedly given a ride by his colleague Bob O'Brian in his postal truck, an event that shortens the journey he had expected. Yet, the floodwaters add further complications to any plan as they rise and fall and constantly change the landscape of the postal route. The film's director Pat Jackson uses music to mark shifts in speed and style of transportation in Claude's journey. Peppy fiddling accompanies Claude's ride in Bob's truck and suggests the brisk but somewhat unsafe journey. "Bob's done some pretty queer things with his van in his time," the narrator tells us. The soundtrack shifts to a slower, more melancholic tune when Claude travels by boat.

Each film visualizes the "time-space compression" (Gilbert et al 2) that modern forms of transportation created. Film necessarily condenses periods of time in its presentation of daily life. Films of the postman's round neither cover the entire journey nor document the complete itinerary of each mail deliverer. Through shot selection and editing the viewer is presented with brief sequences that the filmmaker has chosen as representative of the day's activities. But these films also capture modernity's shrinking of time and space through images of what Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls "a condensed geography" (34).

*Daily Round* begins with a tightly framed image of a clock and its swinging pendulum. The sound of a ticking clock is paired with this image, and the ticking continues into the next few frames. In these frames Massingham presents a series of close-up shots of the postman's colleague in the Musbury post office. The camera captures her posting envelopes, weighing packages, and using her fingers to count the number of words in a telegram.



These intercut shots compress the post office's daily activities into a brief sequence that unfolds against the ongoing ticking of the clock.

In this short sequence the space of the post office and the possible distances with which it can communicate are compressed into tightly framed shots. The film also plays with the relationship between time and distances on the postman's round. In another sequence church bells ring to signal the marking of time. Massingham edits in sequence three shots so that the visual image changes in time with the sound of the bells. In the first shot the postman is pictured in the middle distance with an open field before him and a hedgerow beyond. At the sound of the next bell the scene cuts to a shot of the postman now a bit farther along in his crossing of the field, and at another chime the postman has crossed the field. In three quick shots marked by three bell rings the postman has traversed a distance that in actuality takes him more than the three seconds of this sequence.

*The Horsey Mail* opens with a series of aerial shots of the flood-damaged area. The sequence covers the postman's round in sixteen seconds and three panning shots. *Penny Journey* uses a map to mark the passage of time and the movement through space (Figure 10).



Figure 10: The postcard's *Penny Journey* from Manchester to Graffham

This diagram breaks with traditional mapping practices as it uses the largest font for the beginning and end points of a particular journey not to denote the population size of each city that appears. Thus, the village of Graffham is written in a typeface larger than that of London and of approximately the same size as Manchester, where the postcard's journey begins. Distance between the two is compressed into the space of the shot's frame, and the route between them is marked out by the GPO's different points of transfer and delivery. The film continues to use specific times to mark out the different stages of the postcard's journey. Space is divided into stops along the way: the stops presented in the map and the stops Mr. Money makes as he delivers letters to other spots in the village. The film's narrator gives

time updates, but through editing and shot selection, the film only suggests the activities that occur in those intervals between the times noted by the narrator.

The daily round in each film reveals how these constant and fragmented journeys increase our interactions with, but not our knowledge of, different populations and landscapes. Massingham, Jennings, and Jackson show how GPO services offer an inclusive network of communication that can bring us into contact with many people, but they also assert that the increased proximity and intimacy of modern life do not lead to increased knowledge of people and places. The filmmakers position the viewer as both a *voyageur* and a *voyeur* (Bruno 62). We are exposed to different people and travel to different places but we only get a partial view of them. The camera also brings us into private spaces to which we would not otherwise be allowed access. The camera pans over the bodies of the villagers of Musbury, Graffham, and Horsey, but we are not introduced to them nor are we acknowledged as a participant in the postman's journey. The opening sequence of *Daily Round* shares with us a bit of local gossip. Without any explanation as to the background of the story's central figures by a voice-over commentary or by the postman, the viewer is left to decipher the information him or herself. Viewers must negotiate this local knowledge with the limited details provided and with the reaction of the villagers who hear the story. The film forces the viewer to listen in to these conversations and to study the actions of the postman and the villagers voyeuristically. Massingham emphasizes the viewer's outsider status through camera angle and framing. When the postman speaks to villagers in *Daily Round*, the talking heads are often pushed out of the diegetic space of the film. The conversation is heard, but the camera captures only the torsos of the postman and his customers. The camera cuts the bodies and indicates that there are places to which the viewer is not allowed access.

In *Penny Journey*, Jennings positions the viewer as *voyeur* by bringing him into the private space of the postman's house. The story of Mr. Money's daily round begins before he leaves his cottage; thus, the film acknowledges the postman's dual status as both private resident and public figure. Yet, the camera blurs these identities by filming the postman in a private moment. From a low angle we crouch behind the postman's back and watch him shave (Figure 11). We are brought into his house to view the private ritual that precedes the public journey.

*The Horsey Mail* uses voice-over commentary to include the viewer in the postman's round. The narrators (neither of which is Claude the postman) interact with each other and with the viewer as they recall the events that unfold on screen. The commentary identifies specific people and places, yet reminds us that we do not know these people and places. Films



Figure 11: Mr. Money prepares for his daily round in *Penny Journey*.

of the postman's round continually remind viewers that they are intruding on these physical and social spaces. Massingham, Jennings, and Jackson offer the viewer access to certain areas, but they exclude viewers from the postmen's private thoughts.

The films suggest that constant movement and ongoing negotiations leave the modern individual with no time to think, even in the countryside. These films' compression of time and space push aside the emotions and interiority of the postmen themselves. *Daily Round* does offer a dream sequence that plays out the postman's fantasy of a re-ordered village social structure. And in a brief sequence the film hints at the postman's romantic feelings for a farmer's daughter. But we do not know any of the postman's motivations for these thoughts, just as we do not even know his name. The camera seemingly makes decisions for him and places him in specific situations for the viewer to observe. In *Penny Journey* the camera allows us access into Mr. Money's cottage, but not into his thought process. We are given the sites of Graffham through intercuts of local architecture that suggest each is of equal importance to the village's identity. The shots last the same length of time, and Jennings films each at eye-level; camera angles and editing suggest neither Mr. Money's nor Jennings's subjectivity once we leave the private space of the postman's cottage.

*The Horsey Mail* puts the postman Claude through a series of mini adventures, but he perseveres through each without any indication of the emotional journey he travels. The soundtrack presents a score of different tempos that suggest the paces of the journey not the moods of the postman. Jackson does not include sounds of the floodwaters or the silence of a desolated landscape to provide us with some sensory information that



might help us to understand what Claude must confront along his route. Furthermore, the narration of these events is given to an unnamed commentator and the postman Bob that we see on screen in certain scenes. Bob tells us that Claude is good at darts and that he used to be a fisherman. Bob also tells us where Claude is going and what he (and we) sees, but not what he (Claude or Bob) feels or thinks.

Of course, these postmen do think and feel; we are just not allowed access to their private thoughts. Each film brings us into contact with the postman, but excludes us from his interiority. We construct information about the postman based on his actions and reactions. We can only interpret information about the physical and social geographies of these villages from the camera's superficial observations of them. Many of those observations gesture to the nostalgia for a pre-industrialized Britain that modernity produced.

In response to the quick pace of modern life, many interwar writers and artists promoted an image of the English countryside as the slow-beating heart of Britain. In *Daily Round* more cows than cars occupy the narrow roadways. The frenetic opening montage of multiple tasks and multiple images contrasts with the open fields and empty hillsides the postman moves through. *Penny Journey* shows the process of mail delivery in Manchester through images of fast-moving machines before the bulk of the film is transferred to Graffham village where Mr. Money sorts the mail by hand and delivers it on foot and by bicycle. The images of the floodwaters in Horsey document the isolation of this bit of countryside, but the distances the postman must travel between deliveries suggests that this isolation is something regularly handled by the postman and residents.

The films acknowledge the ongoing challenges these particular villages face as they negotiate shifts in their regional economies and in their local networks of transportation and communication as a result of the modernization of the countryside. The journeys in *Daily Round*, *Penny Journey*, and *The Horsey Mail* end unresolved. The films presume that obstacles will accompany the continued modernization of these particular villages. *Daily Round* imagines a re-ordering of postal delivery that acknowledges the obstacles that the physical, social, and cultural landscapes create: class and economic hierarchies, geographic distances, and the image of the countryside as overrun by animals and eccentrics. *Penny Journey* ends with the delivery of the postcard from the boy to his aunt, but the journey reveals to us the multiple stops along the postcard's and the postman's route and, thus, the many stages in transportation and communication in which something could go wrong. *Horsey Mail* reminds us that all the advancements of modern society cannot control nature. The film ends with a discussion of preparations to prevent the next flood not with the declaration that this will never happen again.

### Conclusion

Films of the postman's daily round project a vision of rural modernity that emphasizes discontinuity and disconnection. The films highlight rural England's rupture with its agrarian past and gesture to the disintegrating fabric of the rural community as a result of population shifts and the integration of modern technology. These visions of the modern countryside are part of each film's narrative strategy to lure rural residents to the services of the GPO; only the post office, the films suggest, can connect people to each other and to those friends and family who have left the area because of economic or other considerations. But the films also suggest the fascination with village England as a physical place and metaphorical space for these modernist filmmakers. Massingham, Jennings, and Jackson went on to produce more noteworthy films; nevertheless, their use of space in films of the daily round contributes to our knowledge of the ways in which artists visualize the processes of modernization. Theories of the spatial dimensions of film can only take us so far, however. Film flattens as it records. It turns spaces into surfaces and thus limits the exploration of the different layers it brings together. We must then consider these filmic representations alongside other visual images and literary representations in order to thicken our understanding of the interwar English journeys of modernization.

### Notes

1. For a discussion of these changes, see for instance Gloversmith, Newby, and Wild.
2. This body of work includes Clarke, Bruno, Fowler and Helfield, Fish, and Webber and Wilson.
3. For an analysis of the interwar countryside see Brassley, Burchardt and Thompson.

### Image Credits

All images taken from the DVD collection *We Live in Two Worlds*, GPO Film Unit Collection Volume Two, BFI 2009.

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