



## TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides

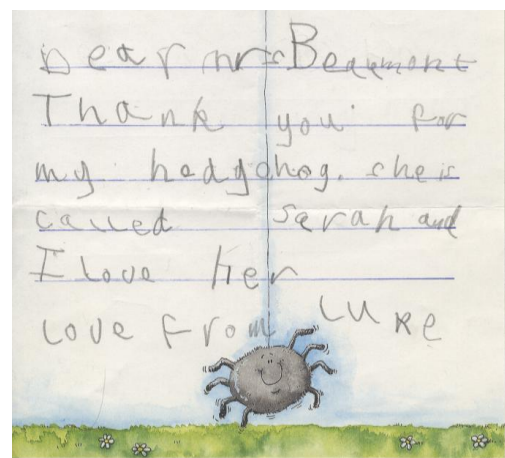
### Research Guide No 43: Lost Property Office

The London Transport Lost Property Office (LPO) at 200 Baker Street is well-known to millions of people, either through personal experience, or because of its appearances in films and books. Sherlock Holmes lived just down the road at 221b Baker Street and the LPO's property tracking system is called 'SHERLOCK'. The LPO occupies part of the ground floor of Chiltern Court, a handsome block of 180 private apartments, designed by Charles W. Clark, and built by the Metropolitan Railway for sale to those of its customers who needed to live in some style in central London. H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett were early residents of these apartments. A prospectus was issued in 1931 (LT002013/110) and correspondence with residents can be found in the Archives collections.

The LPO was centralised at its Baker Street site after the formation of the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) in 1933 (evidenced in LT000495/004). Prior to this, the subject of lost property in all of London's public transport (including taxis) was conducted under the supervision of the Metropolitan Police (evidenced in LT002013/153). The LPO has been the sole responsibility of Transport for London (TfL) since 2000, and is obliged to operate under Parliamentary rules and regulations.

The Corporate Archives is in custody of extensive records dealing with the bare facts and figures of lost property claimed by owners, and the money raised by sale of unclaimed items. Normally, property is held for 3 months, after which it is sold at auction.

Amongst the facts and figures there are human interest stories too. LT000014/082 has lots of correspondence between the LPO and customers dating between 1948 and 1965, and there is much interesting individual



LT002013/006

correspondence in LT000955/004 and LT000375/031. One trend evidenced in the correspondence was the practice of sending unclaimed teddy's to children who had lost a teddy that could not be found in the LPO.

One item of special interest is the Metropolitan Railway ledger (LT000449/055) dealing lost property at Chalfont Road Station (later Chalfont & Latimer) between 1890 and 1967. It is less detailed after the 1940s.

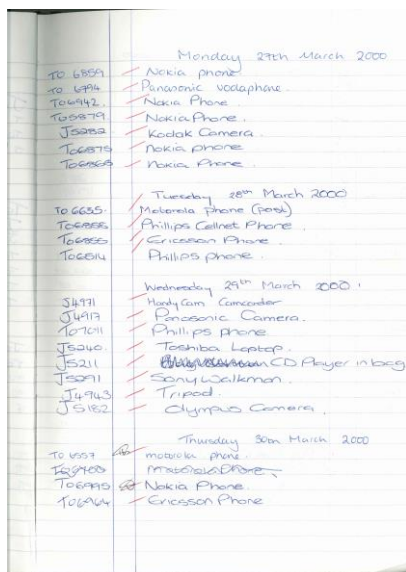
File LT000375/031 contains rules and regulations relating to lost property including not only the Road Traffic Acts of 1971 and 1978, dealing with the disposal of lost property and the companies' responsibility for it, but also a file of correspondence dealing with lost musical instruments in November and December 1992.

Prior to the formation of the LPTB in 1933, early records indicate that lost property was the responsibility of each individual railway company. Each company made its own arrangements for the handling of lost property and staff were issued with instructions for the handling of unaccompanied and lost items. The 1902 District Railway handbook of titled *Instructions to the Staff, respecting...Left Luggage, Lost Property etc.* (LT000612/036) is evidence of this.

This often meant one company handling the lost property of another, with the necessity of moving lost items across the network. Agreements had to be worked out by the companies themselves. An example is the case of the East London Railway (ELR), which continued as a separate concern through the 1930s necessitating an agreement that a flat rate of £30 per annum would be paid to the ELR in respect of property handled on the Board's behalf - this correspondence is in LT001500/142.

Wartime records of the LPO are located in LT000233/432 (Annual Reports and Accounts for the war years), and LT000493/009 (Annual Report and Accounts for 1941 only). Gas masks appear as a separate item of Lost Property during these years, and the number of lost umbrellas is down, possibly reflecting the greater care people took over a difficult-to-replace item.

LT002013/117



LT000371/021 contains LPO Annual reports for 1953–1954, containing details of amounts received for returned property, and unclaimed property which has been sold, with an analysis of articles received.

LT002013/021–153 contain a lot of detailed statistics on lost property up to the late 1990s. This includes details of proceeds from public auction sales. There are also staff suggestions, details of wages and conditions, and correspondence with clients, magazine articles, etc. These files document how the nature of lost property has changed; e.g. the emergence of the mobile phone as a category.

Departmental minutes, annual reports and other administrative matters are dealt with in a number of files: LT000415/002, LT000552/023, LT802/024, LT972/001, LT1027/24, LT1227/336, LT1268/001, LT1331/65, and LT1942/002.

If you would like to know more, or would like to book an appointment to view any of the above items, please contact the TfL Corporate Archives at [corporatearchives@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:corporatearchives@tfl.gov.uk)

TfL publishes information on lost property on our website. This can be used to gather an idea of the scale of their operations, as well as the various categories of items they handle - <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/lost-property-office-transparency-data.pdf>