

The last post

Danes put pen to paper for UK artist as letter deliveries end

Steven Morris

Some describe the joy of receiving dispatches from far afield, others speak of the discipline of sitting down to carefully order their thoughts in a letter. One writer tells of finding a poignant cache of letters after a parent's death, while another has shared a map of where the postboxes used to be in her town.

A British artist has collected some of the last missives sent through the 400-year-old Danish postal system, which delivered its final letters on 30 December.

PostNord has cited the "increasing digitalisation" of society and has said it will continue to deliver packages, but its decision to stop delivering letters has made headlines across the world.

Gillian Taylor, who specialises in paper art, asked people to post a letter from Denmark to a PO box in Exeter, Devon, just before the closure of the service, and in the next few months will put together a piece of art celebrating them.

Taylor said: "PostNord ending their delivery of letters and removing postboxes felt like such a significant moment that I wanted to mark it by creating some art."

She invited people to send a long letter, a short greeting, a card, even just an addressed envelope without a message. She was surprised and

► Gillian Taylor has received drawings, old cut-out pictures and messages from Danes sad at the changes

PHOTOGRAPH:
JIM WILEMAN/
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thrilled at the great care many had clearly taken.

Taylor said: "Some have included old cut-out pictures which people used to collect and send in letters. Some have drawn pictures or made collages. Many expressed their sadness at the ending of the postal service and the removal of the postboxes."

One writer included a map marking the last three postboxes in her town. "She talks about being a child on holiday - the process of finding the right postcard to send, thinking about what to write and finding the post office to buy

a stamp and send the card," said Taylor.

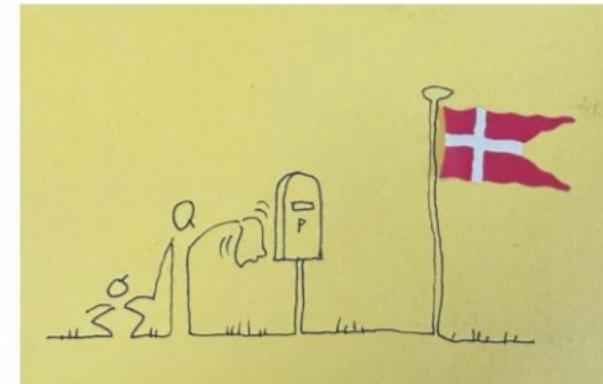
The sender of the letter told Taylor: "Receiving mail was even more exciting, especially post from abroad with different stamps and postmarks. I feel it's a shame that the generations to come will never be able to send or receive a handwritten card or letter."

Another writer described the excitement of receiving letters from her mother's sister in Norway. Taylor said: "Before she could read, she recognised her aunt's handwriting when a letter arrived. "The family gathered round the

kitchen table (she uses the now well-known Danish word 'hygge') with the smell of the coffee while her mother read the letter to the family. The mother's voice was warm and her Norwegian accent clear. Now, the writer reflects how much her mother must have missed her sister and her homeland."

The same writer recalls emptying her childhood home where the family had lived for 60 years, and finding carefully saved letters from her mother to her father. She has not read them because she feels they should remain private.

A 67-year-old woman described



'PostNord ending delivery of letters felt like such a significant moment, I wanted to mark it with art'

Gillian Taylor
British artist

receiving thousands of letters throughout her life. Taylor said: "She talks about looking out longingly for the postman as a teenager. She had pen pals across the world and has stayed in touch with some of them throughout her life. She writes to a prisoner in America with a life sentence."

Another writer talked about the Danish writer and philosopher Villy Sørensen, who created a short story called The Missing Letters in which people had stopped writing letters.

Taylor said: "Now, it's become a reality. The last handwritten letter the writer received was several years ago from an old school friend. The post office and all the postboxes near her have all gone."

Taylor's previous work has included sets of tiny envelopes made with second world war love letters and large installations of paper poppies.

The Danish letters and their envelopes are to be used in a new artwork called Med Venlig Hilsen (With Kind Regards), which Taylor hopes to display in the UK and Denmark.