

Royal Mail Post Boxes

A Joint Policy Statement by
Royal Mail and Historic England

In consultation with the Letter Box Study Group
and The Postal Museum



ROAD-SIDE LETTER BOXES.



Notice to the Public.

On and after the 23rd Nov., Road-side Letter Boxes will be opened for collecting the public correspondence in the following situations:—

DAVID PLACE,

Nearly opposite the Rectory.

NEW STREET,

In front of Mr. Fry's, Painter and Glazier.

CHEAPSIDE,

Top of the Parade.

ST. CLEMENT'S ROAD,

Corner of Plaisance.

The Letter Boxes will be cleared daily (Sundays excepted) at the following periods, until further notice:

SIX A. M. AND AT NOON,

Except on Mail-days, when, instead of at Noon, they will be cleared as soon as the Packet is signalled.

Letters deposited in these Boxes will be disposed of in all respects in the same manner as if posted at the Principal Office, previous to the above-named period.

Post-office, St. Helier, November, 1852.

PRINTED AT "THE JERSEY TIMES" OFFICE, LIBRARY-PLACE.

Notice to the public on the first use of pillar boxes by the British Post Office, Jersey Times, November 1852, POST 118/2021. Copyright The British Postal Museum & Archive, 2015.

Front cover: (Top left) Victorian 'fluted' pillar box, near Bournemouth, with a vertical posting aperture seen in some early boxes. Picture by Robert Cole.

(Top right) Joanna Cole give thumbs up to a classic EVIR wall box, remounted in a brick pillar, in Kent. Picture by Robert Cole.

Bottom: Royal Mail post boxes are as diverse as the UK itself.

“ A Royal Mail post box stands within half a mile of over 98% of the UK population. They are as familiar as they are practically useful. They also represent the living history of communication, which forms such an important aspect of our daily lives, as well as engineering, design and manufacturing. There are around 115,500 pillar, wall, and lamp boxes across the UK. Some post boxes are rarer than others and some have very special places in our heritage. Some boxes have deep connections to prominent people and places. Each has a story to tell and many have particular meaning for local communities. They are also an icon of the UK’s postal system recognised around the world.

In 2002, English Heritage and Royal Mail, with the approval of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, agreed a joint policy for the retention and conservation of Royal Mail post boxes. Since the joint policy was introduced, new challenges and developments have led us to review it. These include changes at both Royal Mail and Historic England (formerly English Heritage), and in legislation and regulation.

We have now formally renewed and updated the policy, after consultation with The Postal Museum and the Letter Box Study Group. The new policy confirms our commitment to the conservation of the historic character and diversity of post boxes.

Our renewed policy sets out how Royal Mail intends to continue to manage and conserve the post box estate. The agreement will be adapted to reflect the individualities of post boxes across the UK with equivalent joint policies with Historic Scotland, Historic Wales and Historic Northern Ireland.

We believe this policy will help ensure the preservation of post boxes for future generations. ”



Sue Whalley, Chief Operations Officer, Royal Mail Group
Duncan Wilson, Chief Executive, Historic England

July 2015

Introduction

Royal Mail post boxes are a cherished feature of the British street furniture scene. As well as being in daily operational use for an essential public service, they are national treasures. Currently there are over 85,000 in England and 115,500 across the UK as a whole. In England, a small number are listed buildings.

Post boxes make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the areas in which they are located. In 2002, English Heritage (now Historic England) and Royal Mail, with the approval of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), agreed a joint policy for the retention and conservation of all Royal Mail post boxes.

After consultation with The Postal Museum (formerly the British Postal Museum & Archive) and the Letter Box Study Group (LBSG), the parties have decided to renew and update the policy. Many post boxes are now regarded as 'undesigned heritage assets' and some of the oldest and rarest have been given 'designated heritage asset' status by listing.

The Government's planning policy, the National Planning Policy Guidance 2012, stresses the desirability of retaining undesigned heritage assets where appropriate. Good practice is moving towards managing heritage assets by agreement between owners and planning authority, as encouraged by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013. This document sets out how Royal Mail intends to do this.

Post Boxes – a brief history

The roadside post box was introduced in Britain following the 1840 postal reform which provided for universal affordable postage. New adhesive stamps made pre-payment of postage easy. However, letters usually had to be taken to the nearest letter receiving office which could be miles away. This, together with the growth in demand for postal services linked to industrialisation and urbanisation, led to the need for many more convenient places

where stamped letters could be deposited.

The novelist Anthony Trollope, a General Post Office (GPO) official sent to Jersey to make recommendations, provided a solution. He adopted a system used on the Continent of placing locked cast-iron pillar boxes at the roadside and the provision of regular collection times. His scheme began in the Channel Islands in 1852 and was extended to the mainland in 1853. Since these Victorian



1864 design (later adapted) by J.W. Penfold for a standard pillar box for the whole country. POST 30/173B. ©Royal Mail, 2015, courtesy of The British Postal Museum & Archive.

beginnings, boxes have usually carried the insignia, or cipher, of the monarch reigning at the time of placement.

More than 60% of current British post boxes carry the EIIR mark of Queen Elizabeth II or a Scottish crown. Boxes from the reign of George V account for about 15% of the total. There are smaller numbers, in descending order, of boxes from the reigns of George VI, Victoria, and Edward VII. The Letter Box Study Group has identified 171 boxes surviving from the short 1936 reign of Edward VIII.

Aside from the monarchical insignia, there have been various mostly evolutionary changes in the design and manufacture of post boxes. Some of the first post boxes were hexagonal in shape, but a wide variety of designs quickly appeared. From 1857 wall box-type post boxes came into use for fixing into existing walls. In 1859 an improved cylindrical design of pillar box was created for standard use nationwide. This design had its posting aperture positioned beneath a cap for greater



E2R 1990s pillar box and decommissioned GR wall box. Boxes should be painted black and sealed if they are taken out of service but remain in situ, as this one near Bury St Edmunds. Picture by Andrew Young.

protection from rainwater. This standardised design of 1859 was itself soon followed by a variety of new designs, notably the elegant hexagonal box, first seen in 1866, with a cap decorated with acanthus leaves designed by JW Penfold.

By the end of the century there were over 33,500 post boxes, with many more found throughout the British Empire.

In all, the Letter Box Study Group has identified, described and catalogued around 800 different types of post box. Among other variants are double aperture oval boxes and wood-bodied, metal faced wall boxes commonly placed in the walls and windows of sub Post Offices. Other designs have included rectangular specimens (1968 and 1974) and a distinctively modern cylindrical pillar box of 1980. About two dozen contractors have been engaged to make post boxes since 1852. The names – including Carron, WT Allen, Cochrane, Handyside and McDowall Steven – can be seen embossed or otherwise credited on boxes. New pillar-type post boxes presently being produced reflect the design and engineering patterns that have now served the posting public for upwards of 150 years.

Policy Guidance

Statutory Requirements

Royal Mail has a statutory right to place and retain post boxes in the street under paragraph 1, Schedule 6 of the Postal Services Act 2000. Ownership remains with Royal Mail. The consent of the Highway Authority is not required for the installation of a post box on the public highway, but in practice Royal Mail will always liaise with the Highway Authority and obtain its clearance for the proposed post box prior to installation.

- Planning permission is not normally required for the installation of a post box. Post boxes have deemed planning permission by virtue of the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, as amended.
- A Street Works Licence is not usually required for the installation of a post box as Royal Mail is a statutory undertaker.
- On private property, the consent of the site owner is always required for the installation of a post box. In

the absence of any agreement, post boxes installed on private property will remain in Royal Mail ownership under the terms of a deemed contractual licence. Royal Mail can be required, upon reasonable notice, to remove the post box and make good the site.

- Under the provisions of the Postal Services Act 2011, the postal services regulator Ofcom has decided to place specific requirements on Royal Mail in regards to its provision of post boxes. Under Designated Universal Service Provision 1.8, Royal Mail is required to provide a post box within half a mile of at least 98% of addresses in the UK. Royal Mail's post box network meets these requirements.

Listing

In 1972 the Department of the Environment – the government department then dealing with the national listing process – recognised that some rare early examples of pillar-type post boxes dating from the period 1852–79, such as hexagonal Penfold post boxes,



Michael Williamson, Chairman of the Trollope Society, in Fleet Street, London, to mark the bicentenary of novelist Anthony Trollope's birth and recognise Trollope's role in introducing pillar boxes to the UK.

were of special architectural or historic interest.

In addition some wall boxes have been included as a result of being part of the listed structure in which they are set or within the curtilage. About 200 boxes of various different types are listed at present in England. Many more post boxes are included in a conservation area or on a 'Local List'.

Royal Mail has renewed its policy, which Historic England supports, for the retention of all post boxes in operational service at their existing locations, unless certain exceptional circumstances or operational need necessitates their relocation or removal. While the current Royal Mail policy remains in place, as a general rule the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport sees no reason to revise the current criteria for listing post boxes and will not add further post boxes to the List unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Historic England has produced selection guidance for listing street furniture and the majority

of post boxes that are eligible for listing have been included on the statutory List, and can be found on the National Heritage List for England. Many local authorities compile lists of buildings of local interest and many more post boxes are included as part of local designation.

The Importance of Heritage

Royal Mail and Historic England are aware that some post boxes have greater historic importance than others. Three main factors determine the heritage credentials: age, rarity and historic or townscape value. The earliest boxes deserve special protection as do boxes which are either unique or are known to exist in small numbers. Some boxes are historically important because of the significant part played in the development of post box provision.

The Postal Museum and The Letter Box Study Group act as consultants to Royal Mail and Historic England on heritage matters. The Postal Museum holds the National Collection of post boxes which covers many types.

Relocation or Removal

Royal Mail policy is for the retention of all post boxes in operational service in their existing positions, unless circumstances or operational need necessitates their relocation, or removal. Listed post boxes will only be moved in exceptional circumstances, and this will require Listed Building Consent.

- The relocation of post boxes will normally only be agreed if reasonably required by a highway authority or other site owner, or if relocation is needed for an important operational reason. Operational grounds justifying the relocation of a post box may include cases where changes in the street make it no longer convenient or safe for the public to use the post box, or where servicing the box is not lawful or safe due to new traffic regulations or road safety considerations. The closure and relocation of a post office can also sometimes give rise to an operational need to relocate a post box.

- In the case of post boxes which are already listed, Listed Building Consent will be required for any works of alteration or relocation. However, where there are sound reasons for relocating a post box for its physical protection and an appropriate new site has been identified, listed building consent would normally be approved if a sound case has been made. Historic England Designation will need to be made aware as part of the process so they can amend the listing.

- Whether listed or not, if a post box of historic interest is removed from its original site it will, so far as is practicable, be reinstated within the same locality. If it is no longer fit for operational use, it will be offered to a local Registered/Accredited museum or other appropriate



Advertising leaflet by James Ludlow for the supply of post boxes for Town Sub-Offices, POST 33/1898A. Copyright Royal Mail, 2015, courtesy of The British Postal Museum & Archive.



VR 1870s wall box. This splendid edifice, looking like a wayside shrine, was built by a local parson. Picture by Martin Robinson.

local institution, exhibited at local Royal Mail premises, or offered to The Postal Museum; or offered as a source of spare parts to Royal Mail engineers. In all cases the keys should be retained with the box so wherever possible the lock, as fitted, is retained in operational use. In all cases Royal Mail should prepare appropriate paperwork which identifies the provenance of the box and verifies the legitimate nature of its decommissioning.

- Where relocation is proposed, prior written notification should always be made to the conservation officer in the planning department or the appropriate contact in the highways department of the relevant local authority. This should ensure that careful consideration is given to the need to relocate the box and assist in identifying an appropriate new site. The removal of all post boxes will be carried out by contractors appointed by Royal Mail, and not by any other contractor. Special care is to be used in removing cast-iron boxes, which can be brittle and prone to shatter, to avoid damage.

- Wherever practicable, a post box of any type that has been removed and not immediately relocated will be retained for future operational use, following any necessary refurbishment.
- A post box will not be disposed of if it can be repaired and refurbished so it is fit for future operational service. If the condition of the post box is such that repair is not practicable and it is not of historic interest, serviceable parts will be salvaged for the future repair of operational post boxes where possible.
- Sometimes requests are made to Royal Mail from the owners of private property for the removal of wall boxes installed at their premises. If the wall box concerned is not in a listed building nor of local historical interest (i.e. not on the local authority's local list and not in a conservation area or World Heritage Site), Royal Mail has a legal responsibility to carry out its removal within a reasonable period. If the wall box is attached to a listed building or structure, listed building consent is required for its removal. If the wall box is a local feature

or of local historical interest, it is Royal Mail policy to leave it in situ. Royal Mail will arrange for the aperture to be sealed, for the box to be painted in a colour other than red (normally black); and make local arrangements for ongoing maintenance. These conditions will usually require agreement by site owners. Royal Mail will ensure that the required consents are obtained, in writing, or retain the responsibility itself.

- Pouch boxes will no longer be attached to the exterior of post boxes; where this has occurred in the past, they will be removed as soon as practicable.
- If any problems arise in regard to individual examples, those concerned should contact postbox.appearance@royalmail.com, or write to The National Street Furniture Manager, Royal Mail Group Property, Bletchley Delivery Office, Dane Road, Bletchley, MK1 1AS.

Unlawful Removal and Damage

The unlawful removal or damage of a post box from a community can result in the interruption in an essential public service and the permanent and irreversible loss of an object that is





GR 1930s pillar box. A 'K4 Vermillion Giant': a telephone kiosk, a post box and two stamp vending machines combined. This one is in Whitley Bay. Picture by Howard Wilson.

intrinsically linked to the cultural heritage of the host community.

Heritage and Cultural Property Crime poses a significant threat both to the historic environment and to the security of cultural property, including post boxes. The majority of losses can be attributed to road traffic collisions and vandalism. The remainder can be attributed to unregulated removal and theft.

In this regard, post boxes can be particularly vulnerable to criminal activity where they are located within remote or isolated rural localities. Given the changing profile of this type of crime, we must be vigilant and find innovative ways together to respond to the challenges we face in seeking to play our part in conserving our cultural heritage for future generations.

Crime Prevention Measures and Enforcement

The prevention of crime will always be the primary objective and every opportunity should be taken to identify potential high-risk crime locations and to deploy appropriate preventative measures and technologies. These will include forensic tags, permanent metal marking systems and electronic tracking. In the event that a crime is

committed such measures will also assist investigators to identify and trace stolen property and potential offenders.

Those individuals and organisations involved in the trade of cultural property should be encouraged of the need to undertake all reasonable checks to establish provenance and rightful ownership of property that has come into their possession and control.

These activities should be complemented by highlighting high risk locations to local policing teams, crime investigators and the wider community, in particular local Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.

The delivery of intelligent and efficient law enforcement activity in financially challenging times must focus on 'collective efficacy' - law enforcement professionals working with local people and partner agencies to protect post boxes from the impact of theft and criminal damage.

Decoration and Maintenance

Royal Mail practice remains the same:

- All Royal Mail post boxes will be painted in standard red and black livery (see BS for colours

below). No variation is allowed, except in very exceptional circumstances where there are genuine historical reasons, such as the use of bronze-green livery for some early boxes, light blue for some airmail boxes, and the 110 boxes painted gold in celebration of the London 2012 British Olympic and Paralympic champions.

- Post boxes will be repainted on a rolling cycle. Each post box will be fully repainted to a high specification. This process will be audited to ensure quality compliance. Queries, comments and complaints may be addressed to the contact points listed on page 11.

- Local circumstances may require some post boxes to be painted more frequently (e.g. locations – such as coastal sites – where abnormal levels of deterioration occur). This provision also applies to boxes in particularly visible locations, such as outside major tourist attractions and Royal Mail premises.

- All paint must be lead-free and of the correct specification (Royal Mail red, colour ref no. 538BS381C and Black, colour ref no. 00E53, BS4800).



Gold Post Box in Restronguet, Cornwall, celebrating Sir Ben Ainslie's Gold Medal at the London 2012 Olympic Games.

- A number of local authorities have attempted to apply unsuitable anti-graffiti finishes to post boxes. These anti-graffiti coatings are wholly inappropriate for post boxes and are not permitted. Royal Mail has developed its own high-quality anti-graffiti finish, but this is only suitable for pouch boxes and new post boxes. All other post boxes will be painted using lead-free gloss paint unless the materials preclude the use of paint or renders it unnecessary.

- The highlighting of specific features on post boxes, such as the Royal cipher and crown in gold, is not normally allowed other than in exceptional circumstances on some pillar boxes where there is historical precedence. Where gold highlighting is used, it should be applied to the Royal cipher and crown only. No other graphic elements or wording on the box (e.g. Royal Mail or the manufacturer's name) should be treated in this way. Lettering enamel should be used and covered with a varnish to minimise weathering.

An exception is to be made in regard to post boxes officially painted gold during the Olympic

and Paralympic Games in 2012. Many of these have become tourist attractions in their own right. In recognition of the positive public reaction to the gold post box initiative, these will be kept gold permanently. Royal Mail has decided to give gold post boxes a plaque, noting the achievement of the athlete commemorated.

- In certain cases Royal Mail chooses to install plaques on or adjacent to post boxes of special interest. Examples include the first pillar boxes to be installed in London, to celebrate the bicentenary of Anthony Trollope; and the box at the former home of Charles Dickens near Higham, Kent. These plaques should be durable, corrosion resistant and well-maintained. On occasion Royal Mail also places temporary displays on post boxes.

- Surviving oval enamel Post Office directions signs and Airmail signs on the caps of some pillar boxes are increasingly rare and normally should be repaired and, where practically possible, restored rather than removed. If a specimen is no longer fit for operational use, it should be offered to a local museum



One of the newest design lamp boxes from Aberbechan. Photo Gerry Cork.

or other appropriate local institution, exhibited at local Royal Mail premises, or offered to The Postal Museum.

- Also of increasing rarity are enamel-plated Ludlow type boxes originally often sited at sub-post offices and Town Sub Offices. These boxes, and other similar examples including so-called carpenters' boxes, have a wooden carcass which are particularly vulnerable when disturbed. Special care should be taken of all Ludlow boxes if they have to be removed or taken out of service.

- Robust fault reporting systems must be put in place to ensure the speedy repair and maintenance of post boxes.

- In exceptional circumstances, special local arrangements may be necessary for post boxes that are sited on busy roads where dirt can accumulate quickly to be washed regularly to ensure a smart appearance. These post boxes have a high visibility and must be kept as clean as possible.

- Flyposting and graffiti should be removed as soon as possible. Royal Mail will prosecute any person apprehended defacing, vandalising or otherwise damaging post boxes.



VR 1855 pillar box. Box Number One, London's first pillar box, was erected three years after Trollope adopted the concept from France. Illustrated London News. POST 118/2114. © The British Postal Museum & Archive, 2015.

This joint policy statement will serve as a code and guide for Royal Mail staff responsible for the management and maintenance of the national stock of post boxes. It will serve as guidance for local authority planning, conservation and highways staff; for those involved in managing change for the local amenity societies; for interest groups; and for the general public.

Royal Mail will ensure that all those within its organisation who have responsibilities in connection with the post box estate are aware of this document and that it forms official Royal Mail policy. It will be given a permanent home on the Royal Mail website and drawn to the attention of any contractors or sub-contractors undertaking post box work as part of the contract.

Third parties – such as local authority planning departments and the National Trust – will also be apprised. Royal Mail also undertakes to ensure that the policy is brought to the attention of those who need to be aware of it on a regular basis.

Royal Mail post boxes add richness, colour and historical depth to the street scene and are so highly regarded that they have become part of the national image. This statement guarantees a secure long-term future for Royal Mail post boxes of all types.



VR pillar box c1863. The 'Liverpool Special' is unique to the city. The local Postmaster had them made to better accept larger volumes of mail, including newspapers, being posted. Picture by Martin Robinson.

FURTHER READING

The extensive records maintained within The Royal Mail Archive and by The Postal Museum, together with The Directory compiled by the Letter Box Study Group, mean that post boxes are well documented. Useful further reference works include:

History

The Letter Box: A History of Post Office Pillar and Wallboxes by Jean Farrugia (Centaur Press, 1969)

Old Letter Boxes by Martin Robinson (Shire, 2000)

The Directory by The Letter Box Study Group

The Guide to British Letter Boxes by The Letter Box Study Group

Pillar Boxes by Jonathan Glancey (Chatto&Windus, 1990)

Street Furniture by Henry Aaron (Shire, 1987)

Britain's Post Office: A History of Development from the Beginnings to the Present Day by H Robinson (Oxford University Press, 1953)

Policy

National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012& 2014

Manual For Streets 1 and 2 Department for Transport and Department for Communities and Local Government, 200? &

Streets for All: Regional Streetscape Manuals English Heritage, 2000& 2005

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on Royal Mail post boxes manufactured and installed from 1852 to the present can be obtained from:

The National Street Furniture Manager

Royal Mail Group Property
Bletchley Delivery Office
Dane Road
Bletchley MK1 1AS
Tel 07736 787181

British Postal Museum & Archive

Freeling House, Phoenix Place
Mount Pleasant
London WC1X 0DL
Tel: 020 7239 2570
Web: www.postalheritage.org.uk

Search room open Mon to Fri 9.00 am to 4.15 pm (except Bank Holidays and Christmas week)

The Postal Museum, due to open in Central London in 2016, is a new, national attraction revealing five centuries of Britain's social and communications history through an iconic service.

To find out more about this major project visit www.postalmuseum.org

The Letter Box Study Group

38 Leopold Avenue
Handsworth Wood
Birmingham B20 1ES
Email: enquiry0501@lbsg.org
Web: www.lbsg.org

Other relevant information can be obtained from:

USEFUL CONTACTS

Historic England

1 Waterhouse Square
138-142 Holborn
London EC1N 2ST
Tel: 020 7973 3000
Email: london@HistoricEngland.org.uk
Web: www.historicengland.org.uk

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

4th Floor, 100 Parliament Street
London, SW1A 2BQ
Tel: 020 7211 6000
Fax: 020 7211 6210
Email: enquiries@culture.gov.uk
Web: www.culture.gov.uk



EviiR 1900s Type A pillar box opposite Brighton's Royal Pavilion.
Picture by Mike Smith.



EiiR 1970s pillar boxes. A pair of Type G pillar boxes; a development of an earlier 1968 design of square pillar box by David Mellor. Picture by Simon Vaughan Winter.