

A Survey of Post Boxes in the Borough of Colchester.

“Royal Mail 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.

Post Boxes make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the areas in which they are located.” (Opening section of the Joint Policy Statement by Royal Mail and Historic England, July 2015)

For the purposes of Local Listing status, the survey results are restricted to those Post Boxes that are of particular interest through age and rarity.

As a consequence no record will be made here of those made and installed during the reigns of George V (1910 – 1936) , George VI (1936 – 1952) and Queen Elizabeth II (1952 -) due to the large surviving numbers nationally and locally. However those in the town have been recorded and a photo record retained for future use.

The beginnings of Post Box use and development began in 1852 in the Channel Isles and were rapidly extended to the mainland. After a gradual design evolution, in 1864 a hexagonal design by J.W.Penfold had been adopted as a national pillar box in cast iron. The paint colour of “Pillar Box Red “was adopted nationally a few years later.

In 1879 a new circular pillar box design was introduced as more easily cast and as well as cheaper and stronger. These were manufactured by Andrew Handyside & Co of Derby at their Britannia Iron Works foundry. These were the first of the

style now known as Type B, which has continued with minor alterations to this day.

As a consequence of a foundry oversight, the pattern failed to incorporate either the Royal cipher of Queen Victoria or the name "Post Office". As a result these boxes are now known as the "Anonymous" Boxes and surviving numbers nationally are in the region of 122, according to the figures of the Letter Box Study Group.

Currently, Colchester now has one only of this pattern.

After 1883, the design mistake was rectified by the foundry and subsequent Pillar Boxes incorporated the "V.R." cipher and the words "Post Office" in the casting with this model becoming known as the "Jubilee" pattern after 1887.

Colchester has five of this V.R cipher type still in the Borough.

Post Wall boxes had been introduced from the beginning in 1852 and due to the cost of producing the Pillar Box, production of these was greatly increased to meet the demand for a rural Postal collection service. The great majority of these nationally date from the 1880's when a large contract was placed with the London Company, W.T.Allan &Co. The castings were made for them by the James Maude Sherwood foundry of Mansfield who continued to cast these wall boxes and lamp boxes from 1881 -1965 with a total of 73 versions in all.

The Borough still retains seven of this pattern.

Edward VII acceded to the throne on the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 but his reign was to be a short one and he died in 1910. This modest period has resulted in low number of surviving Post boxes with his cipher and so has been included in those recorded as needing Local Listing status

From this reign, Colchester has six Pillar Boxes and three Wall Boxes.

Edward VIII Post Box

The reign of Edward VIII was even shorter. He acceded to the throne on the 20th January 1936 and abdicated in December of the same year before his Coronation.

Despite this, the Post Office had produced 271 Post Boxes bearing his cipher. Of these it is believed that possibly 130 survive. Only 6 wall boxes and 104 Ludlow wall boxes for Post Offices were made. One only in Suffolk survives due to an oversight when all the others had their doors replaced with the pattern for George VI.

Colchester is fortunate to have one of these Pillar Box patterns in the Town and this is our rarest surviving Pillar Box.

11 Glen Avenue East Facing Location Grid 597622 225347





The Post Boxes and Wall Boxes have been recorded by location, with a note of the compass direction the front of the box faces with a close up photo and a street scene photo each and a Grid Location reference.

“Anonymous” Type B pillar box 1879-1883 Low Aperture model to prevent post being caught under the rim of the cap

27 Creffield Road/Oxford Road. E Facing Grid 598857 224724



Victoria Regina Imperial V.R. cipher Type B Pillar Box 1883 – 1901

20 Lexden Road South Facing Grid 598600 224922



50 Wimpole Road South Facing
Grid 600645 224299



Military Road at the side of Bob Russell House East Facing Grid 600428 224351



Magdalen Street ,opposite 117/118. East Facing Grid 600531 224753



91 London Road, Marks Tey, Premier Stores & Post Office. North Facing Grid
591738 223770



V.R.Wall Boxes . – 1901. With block initial “ V & R” and Imperial State Crown.

These are all to be found outside the town and all were built into a brick wall. The very first models allowed water to enter the post storage area but this was rapidly resolved.

The box is made in a three part casting, which has much strength and with the brick surround, has helped secure the survival of high numbers nationally.

The Angel, Heckford Bridge, Maldon Road. South East Facing Grid 594629 221810



Black Buoy Hill, opposite "The Black Buoy" Pub, Wivenhoe. North East Facing

Grid 603937 221472



Church Villa, Church Street Boxted. West Facing Grid 599905 233201



Opposite 79 Colchester Road, West Bergholt. West Facing Grid 596514 227787



St Andrew's Church, Church Road .Wormingford. South East Facing

Grid 593317 232240



St Margaret's Cottage, School Road, Langham. West Facing Grid 602877 231812



Boxted Church Road/ the Causeway, Gt Horkesley North West Facing.

Grid 597706 231546



Maypole Cottage, Bounstead Road /Beerchurch Hall Road East Facing

Grid 598633 221942 Redundant box, blanked off.



Smithy Cottage, Smythe's Green nr Layer Marney. West Facing.
Grid 591985 218596



“ Dovedale “ Queens Road ,West Bergholt. West Facing. Grid 595941 227162



Edward VII Pillar 1901 -1910 Pillar Post Boxes.

These incorporated the ornate E.R VII cipher and numerals from the beginning but the pillar box was redesigned in 1905 with a new door which incorporated the post aperture rather than the body of the box. This was to prevent post being caught up in the top.

This basic design remains the same today, having served through the reigns of George V, George VI and Queen Elizabeth II.

129 Lexden Road, opp Fitzwalter Road. East Facing Grid 597810 225093



145 Maldon Road pre 1905 Model West Facing Grid 598636 224377



Middlemill, opp Ryegate. Pre 1905 model .South West Facing Grid 599709 225547



27 North Station Road. East Facing Grid 599365 225739



Mersea Road, opp Roberts Road. East Facing. Grid 599953 225211



61 King Stephen Road, East Facing. Grid 600792 224512



Edward VII wall Boxes.

From 1901 – 1905, the Post Office used the pre existing Victorian design with the “V” replaced by a block “E “. The earliest of these models also retained the Queen’s Imperial State Crown and this was only changed in 1905 to the Tudor Crown. Toward the end of Edward’s reign, his Royal cipher was incorporated into the door casting but there are none of these in Colchester.

By now these boxes have been built into brick posts.

All of the three examples in the Borough are of the W.T. Allen & Co models although of two different designs. Both these patterns were produced from Victoria until at least George VI.

I Cherry Road, Heath Road. North Facing Grid 596730 224418 "Tudor "Crown



77 Halstead Road, opp King Cole Road. South Facing . Grid 596001 225234

Early "Imperial State " Crown.



Abberton Road, close to Haye Lane, Fingringhoe. North Facing
Grid 601657 219403 "Tudor Crown"



Halstead Road, opposite Foxes Lane, nr Aldham. South Facing.
Grid 592744 226297





1837-1901



Victoria

1901-1910



Edward VII

1910-1936



George V

1936



Edward VIII

1936-1952



George VI

1952-



Elizabeth II

ROYAL CYPHERS

Letter boxes prior to 1879 bore the VR cypher of Queen Victoria, but this was accidentally omitted from then until 1887. Every successive reign has brought a new cypher, the rarest being that of the short reign of Edward VIII in 1936. However, since 1953 boxes made for use in Scotland bear the Scottish crown instead of the usual EIIIR cypher, which is unacceptable to Scots.