

# An Iconic Telephone Kiosk Saved by the Community

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Post Office before kiosk



Kiosk before 1954



Local residents were concerned when early in September 2016, BT displayed a notice in the phone kiosk in Heswall Lower Village stating that the kiosk would be removed in 42 days. The notice stated that the reason for the removal was lack of use and invited comments to be made to the local Authority Planning Department. In these days when nearly everyone has a mobile phone, the concern was more to do with the loss of a very characteristic and attractive structure which has become an important part of the street scene.

The phone kiosk in the Lower Village is referred to as a type K6. There were eight types of phone kiosk produced by the Post Office (the telecommunications part of which became BT in 1981) between 1926 and 1983. The K6 was by far the most common and has become one of the most well-known, globally recognised design icons representing Britain. By 1980, 73,000 had been installed and it is estimated about 10,700 are left. However, this number is rapidly decreasing due to neglect, vandalism and removal from service. The K6 resulted from a design competition to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of George V in 1935, which was won by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960). He is also famous for designing the

Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, Battersea Power Station, and Bank Power Station (now Tate Modern). Eight thousand of these kiosks were installed across Britain by 1930 in nearly every town or village with a post office. The K6 resembled the earlier K2 design (also designed by Scott), installation of which had hardly extended beyond London, but the K6 was smaller and more cost-effective to encourage national use. Numbers of K6 installed increased dramatically after the initial Jubilee campaign, encouraged by several concessions by the post office and local governments to make them accessible to as much of the population as possible. K6s survived the introduction of K7 and K8 designs, but during the 1980s and early 1990s were frequently replaced with modern payphone booths. We are indeed fortunate that we have retained a K6 in the Lower Village which is fully in keeping with its designation as a Conservation Area.

The K6 frame is made of cast iron, and weighs a ton (almost literally) with its cast concrete base. The door is made of teak. Five different foundries were used to fabricate the kiosks. The example in the Lower Village was manufactured in Glasgow in the Saracen Foundry of Macfarlane and Co. Ltd, which ceased operation in 1967. It stands with the adjacent pillar box outside the former site of the Lower Village Post office, whose loss is still felt by many residents.

The age of the Lower Village example is still a matter of research. It was not present during the war, as it does not appear in the pictures of Village Road damaged by the Blitz. The authors have not found any photos of Village Road showing Elder Cottage in the background, which was demolished in 1954, but only the demolished site. A photograph of Village Road shows the kiosk in place before the Tithe Barn was shortened, which occurred in the late 1970s. The detailed design of the kiosk gives some further clues. It appears to be a Mark 1 K6. Post Office records from 1955 indicate that Mark 1s were no longer issued in that year, having been replaced by the Mark 2 K6 which had some subtle design improvements, mainly relating to security.