

PH 644

TELEPHONE KIOSK NO. 6

THE accompanying illustration, reproduced from an actual colour-photograph, represents the "jubilee design" of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, R.A., which has been adopted by the Postmaster General as the standard kiosk.

The design, which has been approved by the Royal Fine Art Commission after inspection of a full-size model, is essentially a development of a previous design by the same eminent architect, which was universally admired but was used only in the most important sites, on account partly of its cost and partly of its size, which rendered it less suitable for narrow pavements.

In the present design Sir Giles has reduced the size, and has introduced a change of fenestration which has been generally acclaimed as giving to the kiosk a grace and character of its own.

Since kiosks (especially in rural areas) are provided for the benefit not only of residents, but of visitors and travellers who may need in accident or other emergency to seek a kiosk without knowing its location, it is essential that they should be readily recognisable at a distance; and for this purpose it is desirable to adopt not only a standard design, but a standard colour, which must be sufficiently conspicuous to be readily distinguished from its surroundings.

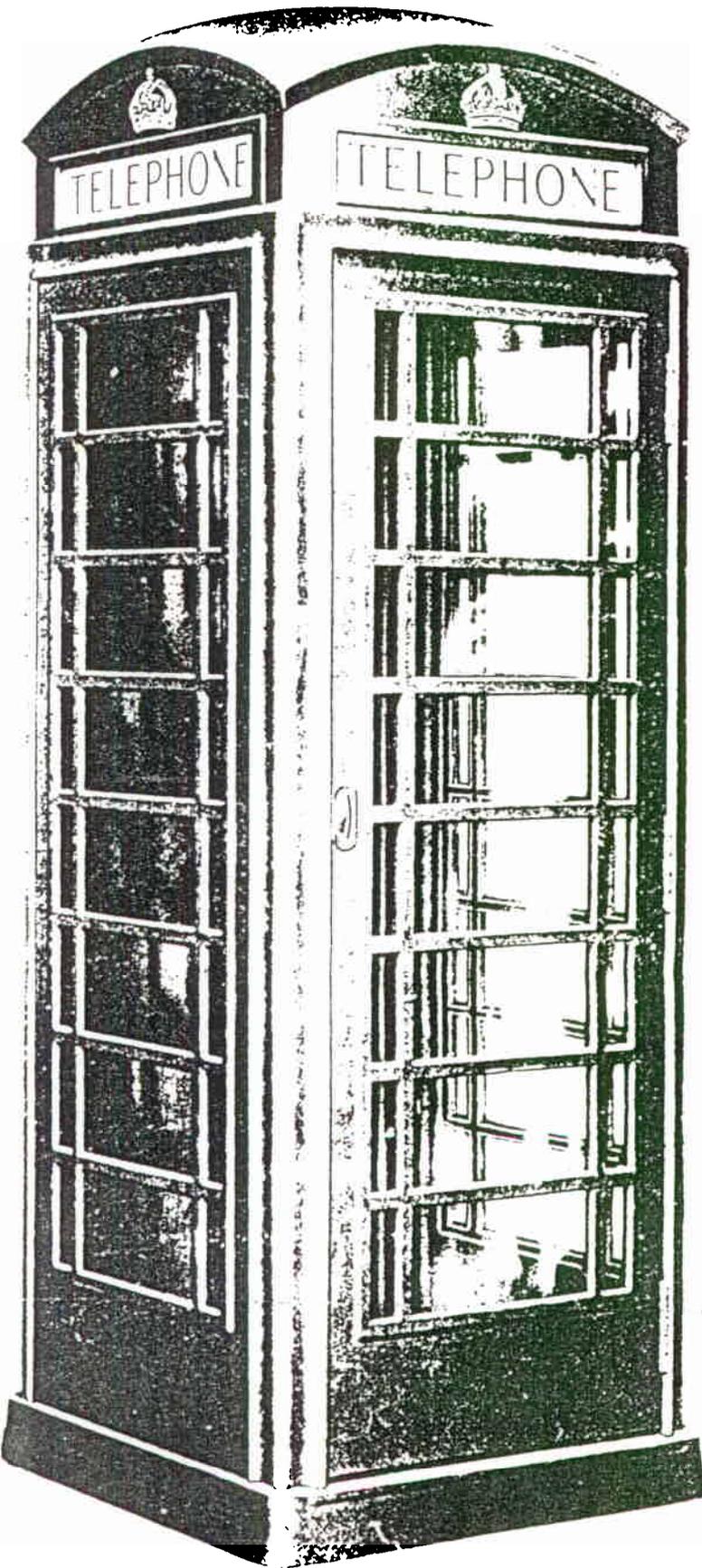
After consideration of all the factors, including the aesthetic aspect, the Royal Fine Art Commission has fully endorsed the conclusion of the Postmaster General that in town and country alike the most suitable colour is the familiar Post Office red; and full concurrence in this view has been expressed by the Councils for the Preservation of Rural England and Rural Wales, and the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland.

In view of this consensus of opinion, and of the serious harm which may result from failure to recognise a kiosk at a distance in cases of accident, the Postmaster General trusts that Highway Authorities and others will accept the standard colour for the benefit of the community in general, even if they may have, in some cases, a preference on aesthetic grounds for some other colour.

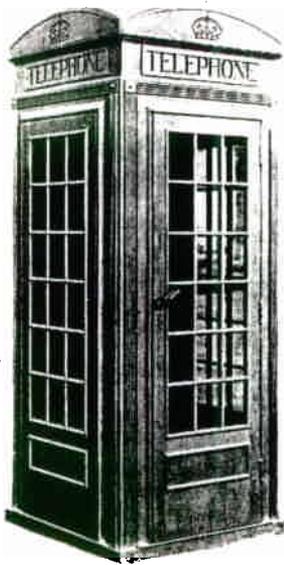
KIOSK No. 6

The Kiosk has been prepared to the design
of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, R.A.

DIAGRAM NO EC 1838
OFFICE OF ENGINEER IN CHIEF GPO
NOV 1935



The Sections are of cast iron prepared for erection on the site.
The two sides and door are glazed and the TELEPHONE signs
are opal for illumination at night.
Overall dimensions, 8 ft. 4 ins. by 3 ft. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. by 3 ft. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins.



Although more convenient for the handicapped, the new open booths (left) won't do much to keep the rain out. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's 1924 design (above) contrasts with its bland 1985 equivalent (right)



Telephones BT abandons its thin red line

Jennifer Benjamin reports on British Telecom's decision to replace the old telephone kiosks with an uninspiring range of US designed booths

The man from British Telecom was following the party line on the new public telephone boxes: convenience, ease of maintenance, resistance to vandals - when suddenly, his voice changed register. 'You know,' he said softly, 'my favourite was always the old K2, the one with the squarish panes all the same size...' Company man had become enthusiast.

It is hard to imagine anyone having the same kind of enthusiasm for the new boxes, despite their many worthy qualities. The designs were chosen off-the-peg from Phillips & Brooks, a US firm which makes telephone equipment for AT&T. No individual's name is coupled with the designs, an anonymity reflected in their complete lack of character.

There are several

different types of booth including a triangular version, a pedestal kiosk and an enclosed box with a broad yellow stripe on the door. All are made mainly from dark brown anodised aluminium, stainless steel and toughened plate glass. The concrete base, which helped the old boxes to weigh three quarters of a ton, has been done away with. All the new kiosks are open at the bottom, so that, in the rather coy words of BT, they 'cannot accumulate litter or retain unpleasant smells'. The elimination of the base also allows wheelchair users to enter the booths, a benefit which, it must be admitted, more than balances the disadvantage of cold draughts round the ankles.

As far as handicapped people are concerned, the new booths are a definite improvement on the old. The door width is the right width for wheelchairs and the telephone equipment is at the right level. There has been a suggestion that partially sighted people will find the new boxes harder to locate in an emergency that the old red ones. BT counters this by saying that its researches have proved that the bright yellow of the door stripe and the Telecom logo is the easiest colour for partially sighted

people to see.

Other advantages, we are told, are a lighter and more obvious door for the enclosed boxes, better lighting and better acoustics (though the open booths favoured by BT are unlikely to shut out the noise of traffic.)

Vandals are to be deterred in a number of ways: the absence of paint will stop them scratching, and the nubby surface of the interior panels will, with a bit of luck, keep felt tips and biro's at bay. BT also believes that vandals are less likely to attack open installations, where they would be exposed to public gaze.

The main motive for violence against telephone boxes is, however, money, so the cash box in the new kiosks has been strengthened and separated from the actual telephone equipment. This type of vandalism will also be reduced by the introduction of cashless installations. BT plans to increase the number of Phonecard phones from the current 1000 to 8000 by the summer, as well as introducing two new services, CreditCall, which operates on the user's own credit card, and AccountCall, which enables the customer to have the charge for a call added to his private telephone bill. (This

strategy won't help much in the areas where public telephones are used the most. People in such areas use the box precisely because they have no phone of their own, and if they don't have a private phone, they are unlikely to have an American Express card.)

The new booths may offer certain practical benefits, but aesthetically they are poor successors to the K2 and K6, the familiar red kiosks which are as much an emblem of Britain as the pillar boxes they echo in colour and form. Designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool Cathedral, the old boxes are, as their champion The Thirties Society puts it, 'solid and dignified'. Clive Aslet of The Thirties Society believes that the temporary look of the new kiosks will make them even more of a target for vandals.

Predictably, the Society opposes BT's intention to replace all but a very few of the old booths. It wants BT to spend some of the £160 million earmarked for the modernisation of the public telephone service on better equipment and maintenance for the existing kiosks. Support for this view is likely to be widespread, given the nation's staunch

attachment to its past history.

But even Clive Aslet admits that a new design was needed, at least for places where telephones are being installed for the first time. Why, though, was it necessary to follow the unfortunate example of British Airways and go to the USA for the new designs? BT's press officer, Eric Barr, says that the company looked at many British and European booths before deciding that the Phillips & Brooks range was the best. By this he means that BT considered models already in production. The reason for not commissioning a designer or holding a competition was, apparently, the high cost of developing and testing an untried design.

One can't help wondering how much BT's concern about its image influenced its decision to root out the old red boxes and replace them with this unexciting US design. Stately form and Royal Mail red are hardly appropriate for a newly disestablished company, bent on promoting itself as an independent and powerful force in today's market place. A design favoured by that communications giant, AT&T, on the other hand, must surely ring all the right bells.

Hi Andy

Just to let you know the restoration is going well. I now have the kiosk to an acceptable looking state, albeit uncompleted. I thought you would like to see a couple of "before and after" shots.

Interestingly I have found out that my K6 is a very early model, as it has 36/1 on the inside obviously indicating 1st quarter of 1936. It is also a C type, with the telephone mounted on the left as you walk into the kiosk, and the door opening from the right.

Best wishes

James Martin, 23rd July 2002.





Alex Telford's Kiosk in Normandy, 2007 to 2011



