



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Street Furniture Selection Guide

Heritage Protection Department

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Selection Guide

Street Furniture

I INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Our street scenes are greatly enriched by historic street furniture, which ranges from milestones to lamp posts, boundary walls to horse troughs, bollards to drinking fountains. But while roads are among the oldest features of the historic environment, they undergo constant change, leaving street furniture vulnerable to replacement or removal. Its sheer utility makes it sometimes overlooked. Some features, such as drinking troughs, relics of horse-based transportation, or early gas lighting and overhead tram poles, which illustrate technology that transformed everyday existence, can be quite modest. Others, such as the many drinking fountains erected from the 1860s onward, possess considerable intrinsic design quality. Humble as some structures might seem, their contribution to the public realm is often considerable, and ever greater respect is now accorded to the component parts of the street scene. Once common items are now getting rare. The best examples will warrant statutory designation, and discoveries remain to be made.

Items of street furniture performed a range of functions, and there is inevitably cross-over with other selection guides in this area in particular. Telephone boxes, letter boxes and lavatories are covered in the **Utilities and Communications** selection guide; bandstands are discussed under **Gardens and Parks**.

2 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SELECTING STREET FURNITURE FOR DESIGNATION

As a class of objects, street furniture is particularly prone to two factors: renewal, especially for items made from timber such as stocks or signposts; and relocation, e.g., the many resited boundary markers and milestones, or transplanted lamp stands. Questions of authenticity are sometimes difficult to resolve. Cast-iron objects, for instance, can be deceptive since foundries continued to supply castings from old stock up to about 1950, and modern castings may have been taken from old designs as part of street improvement programmes. The general presumption is to give consideration for protection to all surviving pre-1840 examples. Thereafter, greater selectivity is required based upon rarity, intactness and design quality. Post-1840 structures that were mass produced and survive in very large numbers are unlikely to warrant designation.

3 HISTORY

Prone to considerable wear and tear, it is not surprising that little pre-nineteenth-century street furniture survives: most historic examples date from the Victorian period onwards. But each type has a different date range and some, such as Belisha Beacons or RAC boxes, only appeared in the twentieth century. Because of the diversity of building types within this category, it is not practical to summarise their history in this section: reference should be made to the specific entries that follow.

4 SPECIAL INTEREST OF STREET FURNITURE

There are three broad categories of street furniture. The first comprises objects connected with the *highways*; the second relates to the provision of *public utilities*; the third to *law, order and public security*. Some items may have been built to serve several functions, for example the c.1820 milestone pump and water trough at Belton (Lincs.) or will have been adapted to new uses, such as the eighteenth-century well house converted in 1953 to a bus shelter at Bramfield (Herts.). The main types of street furniture are grouped according to these categories but the list is not exhaustive.

Structures Relating to the Highway

Street surfaces - raised pavements and steps - bollards - traffic signals - railings - gates and stiles - street lighting - milestones and signs - shelters

Historic street surfaces such as paving are an under-researched aspect of the historic environment. Their contribution to the historic environment can be surprisingly large, as in St Ives (Corn.), where over a dozen stretches of such surfaces have been listed. Some surfaces, such as the rough masonry of the Vicars' Close in Wells (Som.), may date back to medieval times, albeit with campaigns of repair. Surviving examples of eighteenth-century paving consisting of squared stone can be found in London (principally in the Inns of Court) and Bath, where Pennant slabs offset the Royal Crescent and other grand set-pieces of architecture. Other areas were covered with cobbles: the cobbled road surface of Merton Street, Oxford, is listed, for instance. The eighteenth century also saw the widespread introduction of granite, initially in the form of cobbles and then squared setts. Hard to work yet extremely durable, granite became much more widespread from the 1830s when steam power and transport facilitated its working and distribution. Wooden blocks, introduced from the 1830s onwards, are more typical of nineteenth-century London, where there was a major mid-century campaign of resurfacing, but very few examples remain visible today. The extent of the survival of historic surfaces overall remains unquantified, hidden as they are beneath later asphalt covering.

It is only in exceptional cases, where they can be proved to be early and relatively undisturbed, where they can be regarded as structures, or where they lie within the curtilage of a listed building (such as a college quadrangle), that will they be eligible for listing. Fairly standard survivals of nineteenth-century paving are unlikely to be of sufficient special interest, atmospheric as they undoubtedly are; nor are coal hole covers designated, enjoyable as their cast iron forms can be. Nonetheless, examples of rare materials will warrant serious consideration, such as the Victorian patterned bricks that form the listed paving to West Street, Henley-on-Thames (Oxon.). Other mechanisms may exist for their protection such as conservation area appraisals and regeneration schemes.

Raised pavements and steps, such as the well-known examples at Whitby (N. Yorks.) and Shaftesbury (Dorset), are sometimes structures of clear note and can warrant designation in their own right; age and intactness will be key considerations. Like street surfaces, these can sometimes possess geological interest as well as engineering or

design interest, and rare or locally distinctive materials may strengthen a case. Stepcote Hill, in Exeter, is one such listed example, with a central passage of cobbles flanked on either side by steps, which has changed very little over the centuries.

One of the commonest forms of street furniture designed to help control traffic were *bollards*, in use from the eighteenth century to prevent the encroachment of vehicles onto the pavement, to protect the sides of entrances, and to bar traffic or deter parking. Early examples were of wood, in due course replaced by iron, including redundant cannon (e.g. Cannon Row, Hampstead, London Borough of Camden), although most were made specifically for the job and may vary considerably in form. Age, rarity and manufacturer (whose names are sometimes cast on the bollard, as, for example, the Carron Company of Falkirk, which manufactured many of the reused cannons) can be significant when making an assessment; inscriptions and dates will add to the interest. Granite became more common in the nineteenth century: and in their unadorned form unadorned bollards are unlikely to warrant individual designation. At the other end of the chronological range were *traffic signals*: traffic lights were introduced in 1927 and first installed at Piccadilly Circus. Belisha beacons came into use in 1935. Pre-war examples of both types are now rare and potentially listable.

Containing traffic involved *railings*. These were mainly of iron, and became common from the early eighteenth century onwards. Those surrounding St Paul's Cathedral are among the earliest documented examples still in situ. They may be worthy of listing in their own right or for group value with other listed buildings, depending on the age and quality of the ironwork, and will often be included within the listing of the buildings they front. Earlier railings can incorporate other elements of street furniture such as light holders and snuffers - relics of older forms of street lighting - or foot scrapers; Alfred Street, Bath, retains fine examples. Similar criteria apply to *gates* where age and the quality of ironwork and gate piers are likely to be the significant factors. Authentic tollgates are rare and of considerable interest (see also the **Transport** selection guide for coverage of toll houses). Good specimens of regional types of *stile* may be listable; they are likely to date from the eighteenth century or later, but they do need to be intact and not modern replacements.

Various modes of assistance for traffic appear quite early. Modern *street lighting*, in the form of gas lamps, arrived in 1816 at Pall Mall in London. There followed a proliferation of cast-iron gas lamp posts in a prodigious range of designs, some highly ornamental. Like so much else, modern electric street lighting was the product of the Victorian period. In 1879 forty electric lights were put up between Westminster and Waterloo and, outside London, Chesterfield (Derby.) and Taunton (Som.) were lit by electricity from the 1880s. Only minor modifications to gas lamps were required for electric use, although the posts tended to be taller and thinner. Sometimes lamp posts were combined with sewer vents, functioning as extractors for the foul air. Even such utilitarian objects could benefit from an aesthetic approach, such as the rare example in New Cross (London Borough of Lewisham), designed by the renowned Victorian Scottish architect Alexander 'Greek' Thompson for the Macfarlane foundry in Glasgow. In recent decades there has been a fashion for historicist lamp posts, sometimes using modern castings of old designs and care needs to be taken when establishing genuine nineteenth-century examples; lanterns should be in place as well. Other factors to note include earliness of date and quality of design; group value may also be relevant. Ornamental street lights from the inter-war years of the twentieth century may also be

worthy of consideration: the 'candle' design by Sir Albert Richardson, found, for example, in central Cambridge, constitutes one such example.

Milestones and mileposts are one of the most widespread forms of street furniture and hundreds have been listed. Roads undergo such considerable alteration that they can be of particular note as testaments to the development of our transport network, and as reminders of the different perceptions of distance in a pre-motorised age. They are often difficult to date - until the General Turnpike Act of 1773 it was not obligatory to put mileage on them, but this is not a reliable guide to dating as some early examples do carry this information. Before the late eighteenth century there was great individuality in form but obelisks and columns were popular thereafter. Milestones became prevalent in the mid eighteenth century, when turnpike trusts were encouraged to provide such markers. Initially of stone, cast-iron came more widely into use in the nineteenth century, either in the form of plates attached to existing stones or as complete objects. Lettered milestones in original positions are of interest, but defaced stone posts and those lacking their cast-iron plates are not usually listable. Surviving examples of *boundary markers* date from the eighteenth century onwards and may be architecturally important, such as The Four Shire Stone at Evenlode, Gloucestershire (an eighteenth-century ashlar limestone pillar marking the junction of four counties).

Signposts have survived from the late seventeenth century onwards, but many have been subject to renewal. Examples that predate the County Councils Act of 1888 are eligible for listing. Post-1888 signposts, which followed a more standardised forms, will only be listable if they contribute significantly to a conservation area or the setting of a listed building, and have intrinsic interest. The same applies to other types of *directional road sign*: warning signs for floods were first advocated in the 1770s but signs proliferated with the increase in road traffic after the 1860s and changed character with the onset of motor traffic. At first provision was left to the private motoring organisations like the RAC, but with the passing of the Motor Car Act of 1903 responsibility passed to the local authority which ushered in a period of standardisation. Many signs were removed in the Second World War. Diminishing numbers of 'finger' posts remain, but only those examples with a particularly high number of fingers, or rare and interesting survivals of municipal design within the relevant local context, will warrant designation. Designation is not always possible, but current best practice issued by the Highways Agency urges the retention or reinstatement of good examples in order to uphold the diversity and interest of the street scene. Rare early survivors will be listable, otherwise the criteria for signposts applies.

Historically, **street names** have been displayed in a number of ways – carved into or painted onto the side of a building, as an attached metal plaque or tile panel or a freestanding sign. Early examples of plaques, dating from the eighteenth century, could be quite elaborate: perhaps the earliest to survive is the plain stone tablet inscribed 'Yorke Street 1636' in Tavistock Street, Covent Garden, London. Such signs must be outstanding if they are attached to an otherwise unlisted (or unlistable) building, such as the 1734 example in Sclater Street, Spitalfields (London Borough of Tower Hamlets), which consists of a masonry cartouche set within a brick surround. Otherwise, they can be listed along with the building on which they are positioned. Freestanding boards in their original positions that predate the twentieth century may be eligible for designation.

Miscellaneous features, such as *mounting blocks* and *porters' rests* (a shelf of wood, sometimes carried on iron supports, for resting burdens), may be listable if they survive reasonably intact; group value with stables will assist the case of the former structure, as will an established early date. *Public seats or benches* date in the main from the nineteenth century, when local authorities and private individuals started to pay for their installation on streets and in other communal areas. During the Victorian and Edwardian period, seats (either of wood, cast-iron or stone) reached a high degree of elaboration and eclectic styling, and are serious candidates for listing: perhaps the finest ensemble anywhere is that along the Victoria Embankment in London, one of the set-pieces of Victorian city improvement, and embellished with a variety of bench designs that shows Victorian eclecticism at its most vibrant. London specialities include the *duty posts* that functioned as boundary markers for the payment of tax or duty. These were erected in a 20 to 25 mile radius of the City of London from the seventeenth century until 1891, when the Corporation of London relinquished its rights to collect tolls on wine or coal. Initially made of wood, later iron or stone, the surviving examples date from the nineteenth century and are normally listed. Like *parish boundary markers*, they may appear unremarkable but they mark administrative boundaries of considerable antiquity and thus can claim historical importance.

Structures relating to public road transport include *bus shelters*, which date from the establishment of regular services - horse buses were introduced in the 1830s. Early examples tend to be quite robustly built, made of cast-iron, timber and glass. Good examples can often be found in seaside locations, along esplanades. Design and group value are important factors when considering listing. Items such as *tram and trolley bus poles* that date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may be listable, especially if they survive as a series. *Electricity transformer stations* that encase the electrical apparatus used by the electric tramways, usually take the form of round cast-iron boxes, rather like large pillar boxes, and date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They are rare and will normally be listable. There are many other miscellaneous items of street furniture that cannot be summarised here, e.g., *cabmen's shelters* are one of the few relics of the horse age to remain in use, albeit now for taxi cab drivers. The distinctive green-painted cottage-style wooden shelters in London date mainly from late nineteenth or early twentieth century and provide a useful benchmark against which non-metropolitan examples can be judged.

Utilities

Drinking fountains - troughs - pumps - hydrants

The category of utilities, covering water supply and power, is accorded a separate selection guide (**Utilities and Communications**): structures touched on here are mainly those smaller associated objects in the public realm, such as fountains and troughs.

Moves to supply drinking water in the street began in earnest in the nineteenth century, prompted by the closure of town and village pumps (on sanitary grounds as it was realised that cholera was a water-borne disease) and an increasing acceptance of the need for public water supply, and were vigorously supported by the temperance movement. While there are earlier examples elsewhere, the first *public drinking fountain* in London was opened in 1859, set into the railings in front of St Sepulchre's Church, Snow Hill, City of London. This was to prove highly influential; an 1861 fountain

in Walcot Street, Bath, emulated its Romanesque style and function. Many were erected by The Metropolitan Drinking Fountain Association (founded in 1859). Drinking fountains come in a variety of forms, ranging from freestanding to smaller affairs attached to walls. Materials varied too, from polychromatic stone designs to cast-iron ones such as the elaborate Coronation Fountain of 1911 at March, Cambridgeshire, produced by the Saracen Foundry of Glasgow. Granite and marble became perhaps the most common materials for later Victorian examples. Decoration and ornament add to their special interest: Victorian standards of applied design could be extremely high, so aesthetic values can be key determinants. Some of these structures were erected as utilitarian forms of memorial: they can sometimes sport biblical or moralising texts and images, which add greatly to their interest. An association with a noted philanthropist may add significance, as may a proximity to other listed structures.

In the nineteenth century, special provision also began to be made for *drinking troughs for cattle, horses and dogs*. These were often provided by charitable associations. Best known of these was the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association (the name was altered in 1867 to include troughs), which was responsible for over a thousand troughs in Britain and overseas, about half of which were located in London. Early troughs of iron or wood are particularly rare, and were usually replaced from the 1860s by the more familiar and more enduring granite examples, mainly dating from the late nineteenth century. The better examples are generally listed, with design, inscriptions, earliness and intactness being key considerations. It helps if they retain their original position, which early Ordnance Survey maps will indicate. Troughs are the most numerous reminders of the now-vanished presence of animals in city life, and in this motorised age they possess a poignancy as a result. Sometimes they are explicitly sentimental tokens of regard for animals, such as the 1930s example in Chesterton Road, Cambridge, erected by a Siamese prince.

Early examples of *pumps* tend to be of rudimentary construction, comprising lead pipes with wooden boxes, but with the increasing use of cast iron they became more elaborate. Complete examples from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may be eligible for designation, when they survive in reasonable condition; otherwise, they may be included in the designation of the building to which they are attached. *Hydrants* may be listable for rarity and quality of casting. *Public lavatories* are considered in the **Utilities and Communications** selection guide.

Communications

Some of the best-known examples of street furniture relate to communication, and fuller consideration of them is given in that selection guide (**Utilities and Communications**). These include two classic objects: the letter box and the telephone kiosk, which form two of the most numerous categories of designated street furniture.

The *Royal Mail letter box* was introduced following the 1840 postal reform that led to the building of post offices in all towns and many villages. The first letter boxes were hexagonal in form, but a wide variety of other designs quickly followed. Pillar-type letter boxes dating from the period 1852-79, such as the attractive hexagonal 'Penfold' type, dating from 1866, are scarce and will almost always be listable. In 1859 an improved cylindrical design was created for standard use nationwide. From 1857 wall-type letter boxes came into use for fixing into existing walls. Only exceptionally early examples will

be eligible (although they may form part of a wall that is listable in its own right). Small lamp-post boxes were first introduced in 1896 for use in London squares and later in other areas, particularly rural locations. By the end of the century there were over 33,500 roadside letter boxes in the United Kingdom and currently there are over 85,000 in England alone. Since 1852 the main changes have been variations on a common theme and radically new designs appear only in the 1960s and '80s. Letter boxes contribute to the character and appearance of their locality and, in recognition of this, English Heritage and the Royal Mail, with the approval of the DCMS, have agreed a joint policy for the retention and conservation of all Royal Mail letter boxes in operational service at their existing locations, unless exceptional circumstances necessitate their relocation (2002). In the light of this and while this policy remains in place, as a general rule further letter boxes will not be added to the statutory lists unless exceptional circumstances apply.

The earliest *telephone kiosks* appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. The earliest standardised design, known as the K1, was designed in 1921 and constructed in concrete with a red wooden door. Dissatisfaction with the result led to a competition being held by the Postmaster General in 1924. The selected design, the K2, was by the eminent architect Giles Gilbert Scott, and consisted of a Neo-classical cast iron cubicle with a segmentally vaulted roof and reeded strips to the corners; the crown, symbol of the GPO, was perforated and set within the upper faces of the canopy. It is regarded as a masterpiece of modern industrial design and has acquired iconic (and international) status. A concrete version, the K3, was introduced in small numbers soon after.

The most common survivor is the archetypal K6, introduced in 1935 to celebrate the jubilee of King George V. Rather smaller than the K2 and without the reeded strips, the K6 is usually painted red overall, with the crowns situated in the top panels being applied in relief, not perforated; where the K2 had 6 x 3 panes per side, the K6 had eight strips of glass per side, with narrow margin lights to each. The earliest types of kiosk are scarce and normally eligible for listing. Due to the large number of K6-type kiosks that have survived, selection is determined on the basis of their group value with other listed buildings. Only in exceptional circumstances will a kiosk be listed that is not closely associated with other listed buildings: these might include playing a key part in notable townscape, or standing in an exceptional rural or coastal location. Later GPO kiosks possess lesser claims to special interest. Of the *private kiosks* erected by the motoring organisations, the original design of the AA box, dating from the 1930s, is eligible for designation. Similarly all early RAC boxes should be listed although it is thought that most have been replaced.

Order and Security

Police boxes - sentry boxes - gibbets, stocks, pillories and whipping posts

Police boxes, containing a telephone, a temporary cell and a lamp to attract attention, first appeared in the early twentieth century (along with the reduced version – the police telephone pillar). The boxes (and pillars) are now very rare and surviving examples, if not already listed, would be strong candidates. *Huts and boxes*, simple structures to provide cover and protection for individuals keeping watch, range in type from sentry boxes to parish or vestry watch houses (for which see the **Law and**

Government selection guide). Surviving Georgian examples, such as those at the end of Great Pulteney Street, Bath, may be listable if reasonably unaltered.

Examples of wooden *gibbets, stocks, pillories and whipping posts* dating from the late seventeenth century onwards have survived but are likely to have been much renewed. Sometimes they have been brought into the churchyard for safe-keeping too. They may still be listable for historical reasons.

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