



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about POST BOXES

We are in an age of texts and emails but most of us still use the local post box from time to time. What a lovely sight those bright red boxes are, so let's not take them for granted. There are hundreds of designs of postboxes, yet across the country only about 200 have listing status, whereas that protection has been given to 2,000 telephone kiosks. There appear to be no listed post boxes in the Hundred Parishes, but please contact us if you are aware of one. Please use the Feedback form on the website.

Britain's first roadside pillar boxes were installed in 1852 in St Helier in the Channel Islands following a recommendation by Anthony Trollope, then clerk to the surveyor of the South West District of the Post Office. Since then, there have been many different styles. Wall boxes were introduced in 1857 and boxes attached to lamps in 1896 to serve more rural communities.

A hundred years ago, postal services were far more regular with several deliveries and collections in a day. It was quite normal to post early to a local address and expect a reply later on the same day. "By return of post" really did mean that!

Queen Victoria was the first monarch to have her royal cipher, VR, displayed on post boxes, and each monarch since has had their own design. The VR wall box shown on the right stands outside The Farmhouse Inn, Monk Street in the parish of Thaxted.



At least fifteen postboxes displaying VR are still in service around the Hundred Parishes. All are wall boxes, built into a wall, including the tiny one at Roast Green, Clavering, shown on the left.

We have no round, standalone pillar boxes that display the VR cipher, although in Barley there is a pillar box that was manufactured by Andrew Handyside at some time between 1879 and 1887 when they failed to add the VR. Those pillar boxes are known as Anonymous boxes.

Even during the brief reign of Edward VIII in 1936, 161 pillar boxes were cast. Many are still in use but there appear to be no ER VIII boxes in the Hundred Parishes

Following the 2012 Olympics, pillar boxes in the home towns and villages of gold medal winners were repainted in gold, the first occasion in modern times when the colour of a “live” box changed from the traditional red.

In Elsenham, a golden EIR pillar box, dating from the monarchy of Queen Elizabeth II, celebrates the show jumping gold medal won by Ben Maher.



In recent years, there has been a growing enthusiasm for adding a knitted cap to pillar boxes, often to celebrate a particular occasion. The Barley Knitters seem to have started this fashion locally, adding a Christmas cake in 2019 to the village’s Anonymous pillar box, pictured on the left. Enthusiastic knitters in other parishes have now followed their example with great imagination.



When you are out and about, please see how many different types of postbox you can spot. Do leave feedback on our website if you find a VR or ER VIII.

And if you snap an interesting knitted cap, please submit a copy to The Hundred Parishes Facebook group.

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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What’s On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.