

Hull and its Cream (and other colours) Telephone Boxes



Welcome to Hull and an explanation for the Cream Telephone Boxes which you may have spotted on the tour. The tour guide asks you a question – colour apart what else distinguishes Hulls phone boxes from the standard Post Office Red ones like this?



Above are a couple of Hull's cream boxes outside the three John Scotts pub (formerly the main Post Office) and of course a Standard (former General Post Office) telephone box.

Here is the answer to the question of another difference but keep it to yourself

– the Hull Cream Phone Boxes do not carry the Crown on the door, like BT boxes did. It was either ground off, in which case there was a rough grinding oval, or they had no mark or Crown at all. This is because the Post Office Telecommunications Service then was part of a National (Crown) Service. It is of course now privatised, but of course Hull Corporation Telephones, as it was called, was not national and not therefore Crown property.

If you found this answer before reading this, well done, but I fear that congratulation is the only prize on offer!

This is about Hull and its (mainly) cream phone boxes. There are other colours but none are Post Office Red. By design they are, with one exception, a particular pattern (a development of the original design created by a well-known Architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.). The exception is a rare early edition which you will find in the indoor market – go right in and into a bar on the South side. There it is – the box minus the telephone. It is much more angular in shape than the standard ones you will see around town.

Phone boxes can, and are, in other colours. For example this one in the Black and Amber Colours of Jean Bishop, a remarkable tirelessly to raise many usually seen on Hull Costume, a standard



this one in the Black and Amber Colours of 91 year old Hull lady who has worked hundreds of thousands of pounds for charity, Streets dressed in a Black and Amber Bee cream box behind it,

This one is painted Gold in
Olympic Gold Medal winner



in honour of Hull's
Luke Campbell,

This one is painted Pink in support of Breast Cancer Awareness.



The colours are a matter for Kingston Communications (because it is a private company)

What is the reasoning behind this? Well Telecommunications and Telegraph Services were regarded as one and the same in the 1880s and were a National Organisation. But municipal authorities, mainly the larger towns and cities, successfully argued for telephone licences for themselves but of the original 13 granted, all, in due course, sold out to the National Telephone Service. The one exception was Hull which kept its licence and although it had to sell in due course, it sold to Kingston Communications, now a private company but then a branch of the Municipal Corporation, that took on the telephone service locally in 1903 until 2007 when the shares were sold and Kingston Communications operated fully as a private sector organisation.

At the time of the Government's takeover of private companies Hull's telecommunications licence was under review. The Post Office offered a renewal conditional upon the Council buying all the ex-NTC plant in the area for a sum of £192,423. The Council voted in favour of the offer and so Hull Corporation became the sole controlling telephone authority in the district. The other 12 authorities gave in and did not buy the licence. What it got for the last figure of £3 I don't know but if you know I fear there is again no prize. And so the telephone service passed into the ownership of the Hull Corporation which ran the service as a Council Department and extended this service beyond Hull City Council boundaries and included the villages and the nearby town of Beverley.

Hulls Cream phone boxes follow the design of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott of Albert Memorial and the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras fame. As has been said they are not red but generally cream to match the colours adopted by the Council and Kingston Communications. Even Kingston Communication vans were painted cream. The original design was much more angular and the one remaining box of this design is to be found at the back of the indoor market. The present ones are mainly mark6 – that is 6 developments on from this box



Original Phone Box design.

The Post Office Red Colour of BT in the rest of the Country were not universally popular, particularly where the red was considered too strident for surrounding countryside. (Note: - “red and green such never be seen without a colour in between”, is well-known saying and may account for the unpopularity of red boxes in the countryside)

Many of the public phone boxes have succumbed to the advance of the mobile phone as elsewhere in the country but there are some still left including those mentioned early in this talk. And Hulls survival as the only independent Municipal Telephone Company is perhaps reflective of independent thinking. Even today in this age of privatisation Kingston Communications is a local company, not part of the BT Empire.