

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; 'Apart from the colour what else distinguishes Hull's phone boxes from the standard BT red ones in the rest of the country?'



Here are a couple of Hull's cream boxes outside the Three John Scotts pub (formerly the Hull's Main Post Office).

Here is the answer to the other difference apart from the colour but keep it to yourself: the Hull Cream Phone Boxes do not carry the Crown on the door or the tree sides like BT boxes do. 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 Hull Corporation Telephones as it was called, was not national and not therefore Crown property.

This is about Hull and its (mainly) cream phone boxes. There are other colours but none is 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 Hull 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 in Hull can occasionally be in other colours. Here are some examples:



This one, with stripes the colour of a bee with a normal cream coloured box alongside, was in honour of one of Hull's more recent heroines; the late **Jean Bishop**, otherwise known as **the Bee Lady** and here she is on her collecting duties. You can read more of Jean's story at the end of this section.



This one is painted Gold in honour of Luke Campbell Hull's 2012 Olympic Gold Medal winner



Here's one painted in Pink in support of Breast Cancer Awareness

The colours are a matter for KCOM, (it's an independent 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 in the larger towns and cities, successfully argued for telephone licences for themselves. Of the original 13 granted all eventually 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 KCOM a public quoted company, but then it was a branch of the Hull's Municipal Corporation. They took on the telephone service locally in 1903 until 2007 when the shares were sold and Kingston Communications operated fully as a public quoted company.

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.

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.

Hull's cream phone boxes follow the design of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, he of Albert Memorial and Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras Station fame. As said they are not red but generally cream to match the colours adopted by the Council and Kingston Communications. Even KCOM vans were painted cream.

Many of the public phone boxes have succumbed to the advance of the mobile phone, as elsewhere in the country. However, here in HULL, there are still some left, including those mentioned early in this talk. And Hull's survival as the only independent Municipal Telephone Company is perhaps reflective of independent thinking. Even today in this age of privatisation KCOM is independent and not part of the BT Empire.

THE BEE LADY

Jean Bishop - aka 'The Bee Lady' is a fundraising legend in Hull:

Jean became involved with Age UK in Hull after the death of her husband. She quickly realised what a difference the charity made to so many people and between then and 2021 she raised over £120,000 for Age UK.

Dressed in her stripy bee costume, complete with antennas, Jean spent many hours out in all weathers with her collecting tin in and around Hull. Even a spell in hospital after a fall didn't stop her for long.

Her accolades, mementos and awards are many:

In 2012 at the age of 90, she carried the Olympic Flame as part of the relay through Yorkshire.

She was voted the Fundraiser of the Year at the Pride of Britain Awards in 2013. (This was also the year she was honoured with that special striped phone box).

The judges had this to say about her: 'When most people retire it's time to put their feet up. But Jean is out whatever the weather to put a smile on people's faces, and raise money for an excellent cause. She's a wonderful example to the rest of us'

In 2017, the Hull City Year of Culture, she received the MBE, and dined with the queen. Taking it all in her stride, as you might imagine! That same year she was given the Honorary Freedom of the City of Hull.

In 2018 a statuette of her was unveiled in the Lord Mayor's Parlour in the Hull Guildhall, one of 25 new sculptures recognising inspirational women across England.

Also in 2018, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to fundraising for older people, Jean was given the honour of officially opening an innovative new health centre in Hull – The Jean Bishop Integrated Care Centre.

Little wonder the citizens of Hull are very proud of Jean Bishop and took 'The Bee Lady' to their hearts. I think you will agree, few could be more deserving of that "special phone box". Although Jean sadly passed away in October 2021, her legacy of service to the people of Hull will live on.