

NEWS RELEASE
from The Letter Box Study Group

the acknowledged authority on the British roadside letter box

www.lbsg.org

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Liverpool celebrates its Special letter box birthday



Crowning glory: detail from the only remaining fully functional Liverpool Special pillar box, Albert Dock.

Picture credit: Peter Willis/LBSG

by Robert Cole

Liverpool's very own letter box celebrates its 150th birthday in January 2013. As distinctive as it is unique, the only remaining still-working 'Liverpool Special' letter box stands in the city's Albert Dock.

The Liverpool Special stands out even beside other relatively rare Victorian pillar boxes. Only seven were made. A couple are preserved in museums. But the Albert Dock specimen is the single so-called Liverpool Special to survive the turmoil of the last one and a half centuries in full working order.

To mark the 150th birthday – and in pursuit of its mission to map and measure Britain’s red breasted beauties – The Letter Box Study Group wants to gather stats and stories about the Liverpool Specials: the wheres, whens, whys and whos.

Andrew Young, LBSG chairman, said: “We know a fair amount about the Liverpool Specials but I am sure there is much more to record. For instance, though we know that the first Liverpool Special was erected in January 1863, we do not know the precise date. I do hope we can find that out.”

LBSG “Special” appeal

Historically significant material – pictures, letters, voice recordings, videos – from any and all ages will be considered for addition to the LBSG archive. Other contributions – civic, romantic, artistic or wacky-tastic – will be eligible for inclusion in a mini-exhibition which, if enough material is forthcoming – will take place in the autumn.

In Jean Farrugia’s 1969 survey of letter boxes – a book with foreword written by Labour firebrand Tony Benn – Liverpool Specials were listed as gracing the junctions of Sheil Road and Huntley Road; Breck Road and Everton Road; and Church Road and Edge Lane. Farrugia also says that the first of seven Liverpool Specials was erected at St George’s Hall.

But there are gaps in the records. Today’s sole surviving Albert Dock box is – probably – the one relocated from Sheil Road in 1987 when the riverside area was redeveloped. Can you identify the locations of the other three Liverpool Specials? Do you have photographs or stories?

Are there other bits of information about North West post boxes that should be preserved for “post-erity” by the Letter Box Study Group? Email media@lbsg.org

The origins of the Liverpool Special design can be traced back to the actions of an un-named Postmaster. Farrugia writes that the city’s mid-Victorian Postmaster was: “dissatisfied.” He argued that boxes designed for the nation as a whole were “not adequate to cope with the heavy postings experienced in Liverpool where (unlike London) the posting of newspapers as well as letters was permitted.”

But again, the picture is incomplete. Do you know the name of the Liverpool Postmaster who insisted on getting a Special design for the city? Do his relatives still live locally?

Farrugia quotes the Liverpool Postmaster complaining that when the doors of letter boxes were opened “it invariably attracts a large crowd to the Pillar to the great inconvenience of the collector.” She writes: “Numerous reports were also received from the public, and the Liverpool Constabulary, about boxes being filled to overflowing.”

“Eventually,” Farrugia reports, “early in 1862, after a long battle with London, he was allowed to prepare his own design for a box which would meet all local requirements.”

Mr Young from the LBSG says: “I am intrigued by the fact that Liverpool allowed newspapers to be posted in the boxes, when that was not permitted in London. Why was that? I do hope this review leads us to this, and many other answers to hanging questions regarding letter box heritage in the north west of England.”

Why so Special?

To the untrained eye, the Liverpool Special (pictures attached) is similar to many of Britain’s other 116,000 letter boxes. On closer inspection, it can be seen that it wears a chunkily cast crown on top of its ‘head’ that sets it apart from the 350 other relatively easily recognisable styles of UK letter box.

Arthur Reeder, owner-curator of the Isle Of Wight Postal Museum. said: “These boxes were based on the large first standard pillar boxes with a couple of notable additions. The most notable being the large crown on the top. They also sported the legend Post Office within some finely decorated bands. There were differences in that the original – I think – had slightly different bands.”

Mr Reeder, a LSBG committee member and one of the country’s leading letter box experts, said: “Three survive as far as I know, and one is still in use. The crown was not cast with the cap but was bolted on.”

Box 1049678, a PB1005/2, (to give the Albert Dock Liverpool Special its official LSBG classification numbers) was cast by the Cochrane & Co foundry of Dudley.

Picture gallery: www.lbsg.org/mediagallery

For further information, photography, and interview requests please phone or text **Robert Cole**, LBSG Media Officer, on **07974 357 237**; or contact robert.cole@lbsg.org

cont. to Notes to Editors....

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The Letter Box Study Group is the acknowledged authority on the British roadside letter box, and is recognised as such by Royal Mail, English Heritage and the British Postal Museum & Archive. The LBSG is an independent, self funding, volunteer-led research group dedicated to keeping accurate and detailed records of the UK's 116,000 letter boxes. It has about 500 members.

The LBSG Register and Directory lists boxes from the six monarchs to reign since Anthony Trollope, who worked for the post office in Jersey before finding fame as a novelist, introduced standalone boxes to the UK in 1852. About half the nation's boxes carry the cipher – or signature initials – of the present Queen. About 20 percent were erected in the reign of George V. A very small number mark the short reign of Edward VIII with the rest more or less evenly divided between George VI, Edward VII and, in the oldest vintage, Queen Victoria.

There are three broad categories of letter box: free-standing pillar boxes; wall-mounted boxes, and smaller lamp boxes that were, as the name implies, originally attached to lamp posts.

Website: www.lbsg.org

If you would like to join The Letter Box Study Group

(£23 a year, plus a one-off £10 joining fee for a 'Starter Pack') please contact

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