

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

MAYNOOTH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



THE POSTAL WALL BOX AT JOHNSTOWNBRIDGE, NEAR ENFIELD, CO. KILDARE

The Novelist Anthony Trollope is credited with putting the first pillar box into use in the Channel Islands in 1854. Pillar Boxes gave people the freedom of private correspondence. Young women, particularly, were able for the first time to send letters freely, without being subject to a trip to a Post Office.

It was soon realised that, while successful, pillar boxes were expensive to manufacture and sometimes difficult to site, and a box which could be recessed into a wall was preferred in rural areas, where no pavement or street lighting existed. The First National Standard design was made by the Birmingham, UK firm of Smith & Hawkes, and the first boxes were installed in 1857, with, about 10 surviving today in the UK. In Ireland, the Cork City firm of H and C Smith (the King Street Iron Works, 1810) was commissioned to manufacture these boxes for Ireland.

The design was seen to have several flaws, principally in allowing rainwater to enter through the aperture, and in 1859, a pedimented top and large rain hood were added to try to prevent this problem.

The Johnstownbridge Wall Box is an exceeding rare example of the original 1857 design, and which still continues in daily use after 156 years. It was originally painted sage green until 1874 when it was repainted red until the establishment of Saorstát Éireann in 1922 when it reverted to a brighter green.

From 1923 onwards the doors on some Wall Boxes were replaced with doors showing the Saorstát Éireann motif. Pre-1923 every Wall Box that was installed bore the Royal Cypher of the current monarch (Queen Victoria/V.R. (1837-1901), Edward VII- E.R.(1901-10) and George V.-G.R.(1910-36)). A very close examination of some Irish Wall Boxes will show that, post 1922, "surgery" had been carried out to remove the Royal Cyphers.