

## Telephone Box

Jervois Quay, Post Office Square



Photograph: Fritz Schone. January 18 2009. Accessed 9 December 2013,  
<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/17945027>

---

### Summary of heritage significance

- Although the Post Office Square Telephone Box is a utilitarian object it has been influenced by elements of traditional architectural design. It has been designed in a simplified Classical style and is an excellent example of British industrial design.
- This Telephone Box is associated with well known British architect Sir Giles Scott, and with the General Post Office in the United Kingdom and The Post and Telegraph Department in New Zealand. Dating from a time when private ownership of telephones was not high, the Telephone Box situated in Post Office Square Wellington is a rare surviving example of the public telephone that was once a widespread and well-used amenity.
- The Telephone Box has a high nostalgia value associated with it. The removal of this one to the busy Post Office Square from Karori demonstrates that there is an awareness of the popularity of these objects.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 24
Legal Description:	Legal Road (Post Office Square) Wellington Land District
Heritage Area:	Post Office Square Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Category II, reference 1436
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270, Reclaimed Land
Other Names:	-
Key physical dates:	Construction: c.1926, relocation: 1991
Architect / Builder:	Architect/designer: Sir Giles Gilbert
Former uses:	Communication – Telephone box
Current uses:	Communication – Telephone box
Earthquake Prone Status:	Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## **1.0 Outline History**

### **1.1 History**

Designed by British architect Sir Giles Gilbert in 1924, and manufactured between 1926 and 1936, these cast iron structures date from a time when private ownership of telephones was not high, and the Telephone Box situated in Post Office Square Wellington is a rare surviving example of the public telephone that was once a widespread and well-used amenity.

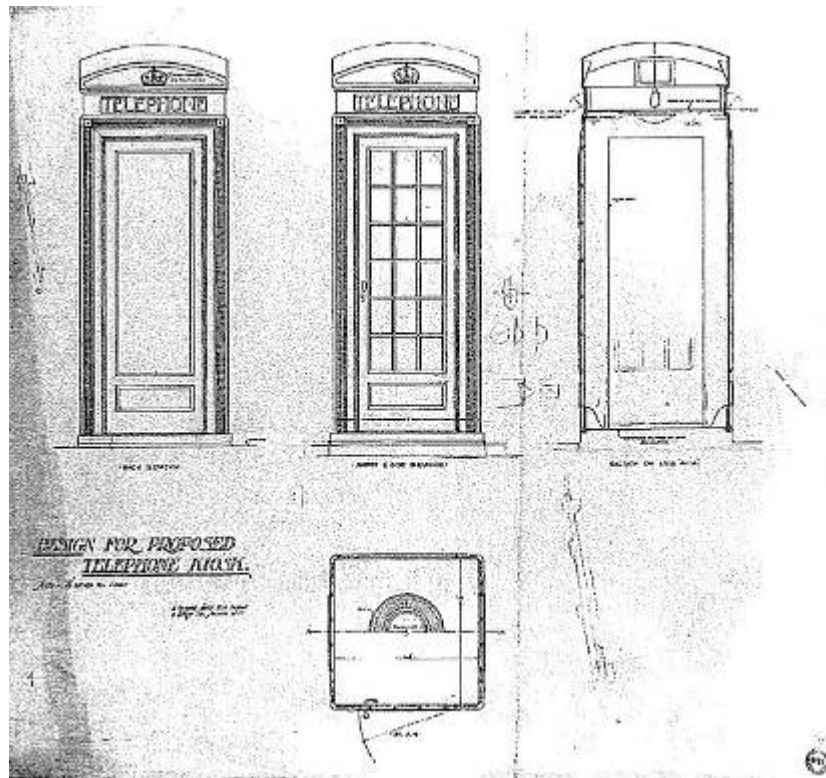
Public call box history begins in the 1880s in the United Kingdom. Initially these were of a wooden sentry box type but there was little uniformity. In 1912 the General Post Office took over control of almost the entire National telephone network and a year later began looking into standardising the telephone boxes. This was not to occur until after WWI, when in 1921 the K1 (Kiosk 1) was designed. These were essentially a reinforced concrete version of the preceding wooden boxes. In 1924 a competition was held to design a new phone box that was to be judged by the Royal Fine Art Commission. Architect Sir Giles Scott won the competition with the design of what would become the K2 design. The first of these were produced in 1926 and most were erected in London, however, some were imported into New Zealand. The K2 was extremely expensive to manufacture, and by 1934 only 1700 had been produced.

The Post Office Square telephone box is of the K2 variety, although it was originally installed on Karori Road, and relocated to its present location in 1991. Telephone boxes only became commonplace in New Zealand around 1914, and compared to United Kingdom, New Zealand had a relatively high rate of private telephone ownership by the 1920s. The Post and Telegraph department had decided to adopt permanent telephone boxes in the late 1920s and by 1930 679 permanent 'Public Call Offices' were in operation. These were a mixture of types, some of concrete construction, and others the K2 steel framed design. The steel call boxes were imported from England and were viewed with more favour than the concrete boxes and the wooden ones that they had replaced.

The Post Office Square Telephone Box is a K2 design, although the wooden door is not of a K2 design. It is of cast iron construction and was shipped to New Zealand in pieces, and originally located near the corner of Chaytor Street and Karori Road (near the Karori Cemetery). The Telephone Box was relocated to Post Office Square and renovated in June 1991. The Box is 2.74 metres in height and sits on a base that is just under a metre square. It is constructed entirely of cast iron sections, with the exception of the door which is timber. One side, which contained the telephone, was solid iron, while the other three had 18 panes of glass. The pierced crown in the pediment was intended for ventilation as well as decoration. The panel below the glass panes was also pierced in the form of four diamonds for ventilation. The Box is currently painted red with a green dome. It has all the characteristics of the standard K2 design, although the glass 'public telephone' signs above the walls and the current door are probably not original.

This Telephone Box is an excellent example of industrial design that was conceived of by a well known British architect. It has rarity value as a functioning telephone booth and is one of few authentic red telephone boxes still fulfilling their original purposes.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications



Original design for the K2 (British Architectural Library, reproduced in Gavin Stamp, *Telephone Boxes*, Chatto and Windus, London 1989, 42.

- 1926-1936    Manufacture of K2 Telephone Boxes in England
- c.1930        Telephone Box located in Karori
- 1991         Telephone Box relocated from Karori to Post Office Square and restored

## 1.3 Ownership history

- c.1930        The Post and Telegraph Department
- c.1980        Telecom

## 1.4 Occupation history

Not Assessed

## 1.5 Architect/Designer

### Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960)

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott was known mainly as a designer of churches in the Neo-Gothic style, and his main work was the Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool. He was also known for industrial designs such as the Battersea and Bankside Power Stations in London.

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

The Post Office Square Telephone Box is a K2 design, although the wooden door is not of a K2 design. It is of cast iron construction and was shipped to New Zealand in pieces, and originally located near the corner of Chaytor Street and Karori Road (near the Karori Cemetery). The Telephone Box was relocated to Post Office Square and renovated in June 1991. The Box is 2.74 metres in height and sits on a base that is just under a metre square. It is constructed entirely of cast iron sections, with the exception of the door which is timber. One side, which contained the telephone, was solid iron, while the other three had 18 panes of glass. The pierced crown in the pediment was intended for ventilation as well as decoration. The panel below the glass panes was also pierced in the form of four diamonds for ventilation. The Box is currently painted red with a green dome. It has all the characteristics of the standard K2 design, although the glass 'public telephone' signs above the walls and the current door are probably not original.

### **2.2 Materials**

- Cast iron
- Timber
- Glass

### **2.3 Setting**

The Telephone Box is situated in the Post Office Square Heritage Area. Post Office Square heritage area is a significant and popular urban open space of over 100 years standing surrounded by a group of important former harbour board and commercial buildings. The area is named for the former General Post Office (GPO), which occupied the site of the present-day Hotel Intercontinental and IBM Tower on Customhouse Quay from 1863 to 1974. The Post Office Square heritage area is principally an open space defined by a number of significant heritage buildings. The area includes all the buildings bounding the square – on Grey Street and Customhouse and Jervois Quays, as well as Sheds 11 and 13 to the immediate north and the nearby Wharf Offices and Bond Store buildings. The boundary follows the property lines of the key buildings surrounding the square and extends across Jervois Quay to pick up the four former WHB buildings. With one exception, all the buildings within the area boundary contribute to the formation and qualities of the square.

## Sources

Morrell, Vivienne. '*Telephone Box – Post Office Square, Customhouse Quay and Jervois Quay*'. Historic Places Trust unpublished registration report. 8 October 2012. Accessed 9 December 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1436>

Stamp, Gavin. *Telephone Boxes*. Chatto and Windus. London; 1989.

## Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

### *Cultural heritage values*

#### **Aesthetic Value:**

**Architectural:** *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

Although the Post Office Square Telephone Box is a utilitarian object it has been influenced by elements of traditional architectural design. It has been designed in a simplified Classical style and is an excellent example of British industrial design.

**Townscape:** *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

This Telephone Box has considerable townscape value, particularly in relation to the other heritage objects in Post Office Square. It has a solid, well proportioned, and practical appearance, and is a rather imposing piece of street furniture, and painted red, it is extremely visible in its setting.

**Group:** *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

#### **Historic Value:**

**Association:** *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

This Telephone Box is associated with well known British architect Sir Giles Scott, and with the General Post Office in the United Kingdom and The Post and Telegraph Department in New Zealand.

**Association:** *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

Dating from a time when private ownership of telephones was not high, the Telephone Box situated in Post Office Square Wellington is a rare surviving example of the public telephone that was once a widespread and well-used amenity.

#### **Scientific Value:**

**Archaeological:** *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

The archaeological value of this Telephone Box is low as it has been relocated. There may be some value in its construction from a buildings archaeology perspective. It is situated in the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270.

**Educational:** *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

The Telephone Box has educational value as it is a rare representative of what was once a commonplace object in New Zealand towns and cities.

**Technological:** *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or*

*important construction methods or use of materials?*

The Post Office Square Telephone Box is an excellent example of industrial design that combines practicality, solidity, and aesthetic charm. Its construction in cast iron is an interesting feature.

**Social Value:**

**Public esteem:** *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The Telephone Box has a high nostalgia value associated with it. The removal of this one to the busy Post Office Square from Karori demonstrates that there is an awareness of the popularity of these objects.

**Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual:** *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

**Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:**

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?  
Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

**Sentiment/Connection:** *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

**Level of cultural heritage significance**

**Rare:** *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

This object has rarity both as a functioning original telephone box and as one of few remaining authentic telephone boxes that are still being used for their original purpose.

**Representative:** *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

**Authentic:** *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

This Telephone Box retains a high level of authenticity, although it has been relocated and appears to have had its door replaced. It retains authenticity of design, craftsmanship, and materials.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

*Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?*

The Telephone Box was once a widespread object, popular in a time when private ownership of telephones was not high. This object is locally, and depending upon other examples, possibly nationally significant due to its aesthetic, historic, educational, technical, and social values, as well as its high rarity value and its authenticity.



### 3.0 Appendix

#### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

#### Background research

*Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:*

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*