

How Britain's red phone boxes are being given new life

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Match the names of these famous British designs with their descriptions.

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. K2 | a. British flag |
| 2. Routemaster | b. supersonic passenger plane |
| 3. Spitfire | c. traditional red phone box |
| 4. Union Jack | d. red London bus |
| 5. Concorde | e. World War II plane |

2 Key words

Write the key words next to their definitions and then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

production cast iron melted down value remain voted

- If something is _____ the best, people officially say they like it the best. (para 2)
- the process of making something, especially in a factory _____ (para 3)
- a very hard heavy metal that can be made into shapes and is used for making buildings _____ (para 3)
- continue to be somewhere _____ (para 4)
- (of a metal) heated until it becomes liquid, especially in order to make something new from it _____ (para 4)
- the amount of money that something is worth; the fact that people think it is important _____ (para 4)

adopt remove poor condition swap defibrillator refurbished

- take something away from a place _____ (para 5)
- take care of something as though it were your own _____ (para 5)
- a piece of equipment for giving the heart an electric shock to make it start to beat normally again _____ (para 6)
- replace one thing with another _____ (para 6)
- in a bad state _____ (para 13)
- made like new by cleaning and painting _____ (para 13)

How Britain's red phone boxes are being given new life

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

Ringling the changes: how Britain's red phone boxes are being given new life

Stephen Moss

27 August, 2019

- 1 Britain's red phone boxes used to be on every high street in the country, but now there are only about 10,000. And you can only make phone calls from about half of them.
- 2 In 2015, the K2 traditional red phone box was voted the greatest British design of all time, ahead of the Routemaster bus, the Spitfire, the Union Jack and Concorde. The K2 phone box was designed in 1924 by the architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.
- 3 Production of these cast-iron phone boxes stopped in 1968, but there are still many K2 boxes in central London.
- 4 There used to be more than 70,000 red telephone boxes, but now only 10,000 remain on the streets. A lot of boxes have disappeared. In the 1970s and 80s, many were melted down, but slowly people started to recognize the boxes' beauty and value.
- 5 Since 2008, rather than remove ones that no longer work, local councils and charities can use them as part of BT's (British Telecom) adopt-a-box scheme. More than 5,000 have been adopted.
- 6 There are many uses for the old boxes. Many now contain defibrillators. Some are book-swap points that work like a mini-library.
- 7 Art galleries in old phone boxes are also popular – the Gallery on the Green in Settle, North Yorkshire, is celebrating its 10th anniversary soon.
- 8 The Red Kiosk Company has bought 124 boxes from BT and charges people about £300 a month to use the boxes.
- 9 Mustafa Mehmet runs a coffee stall in a phone box in Hampstead, north London. He says it's not easy selling coffee with both customer and seller inside the box.
- 10 Phone repair company Lovefone repairs cracked iPhone screens from a phone box in Holborn, central London. The Lovefone technician who works there, Fouad Choabi, loves it. "This is my office," he says. He has been working in the box for two and a half years.
- 11 Abo Fall sells hats, sunglasses and beachwear out of two phone boxes next to the pier in Brighton. He has been there for two years, but he says it can be difficult if the weather's bad. "People like the boxes, and it's different from an ordinary shop," he says. Wherever you see a red box, you will see someone taking a picture of it, but that doesn't mean they will buy a coffee or a sunhat.
- 12 There are lots of other unusual ideas, too. A box in the village of Meols, Merseyside, is a miniature museum about the band Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, who used to make phone calls from the box. And in 2018, a box in Kingsbridge, Devon, became "the world's smallest nightclub".
- 13 People can also buy boxes that are being removed. A box in poor condition will cost you almost £2,000 on eBay, or you can buy a refurbished later K6 box for £3,300 through X2Connect.
- 14 "We send boxes all round the world", says Martin White of X2Connect. "We've sent them to shopping malls in Florida and Dubai. They're very popular in Australia and America, and in Europe, too. People put them in their gardens, and companies have them in their offices. They buy them as birthday presents or just for themselves."
- 15 The boxes have been on a million postcards and in many films, and they have been a big part of British life for most of the 20th century.
- 16 I wonder how Scott's phone boxes will look 50 years from now, when everyone has forgotten why they were there and thinks they were always mini-libraries, art galleries and shops.

© Guardian News and Media 2019

First published in *The Guardian*, 27/08/19

How Britain's red phone boxes are being given new life

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's classic red phone box is called the Routemaster.
2. His original phone boxes, designed in 1924, were made of wood and painted red.
3. Some of these original phone boxes can still be seen on the streets of London.
4. The last of Scott's famous phone boxes was made in 1968.
5. It's no longer possible to make phone calls from red phone boxes in Britain.
6. Many of the old red phone boxes are now used as mini-shops and libraries – and not for making phone calls.
7. There are now refurbished red phone boxes all around the world.
8. People can only take a photo of the phone-box shops if they buy something from them, too.

4 Using the key words

Use eight of the key words from task 2 to complete these sentences.

1. Don't buy that second-hand car. It's in a really _____.
2. Many beautiful old bridges are made of _____.
3. Zoe and Anke are going to _____ jobs next week.
4. Half the people in Britain want their country to _____ in the European Union.
5. The other half _____ to leave the European Union.
6. Tamara _____ her grandmother's rings to make a pair of earrings.
7. Please _____ your car. It's in my way.
8. No one knows the real _____ of the painting.

5 Discussion

- When did you last use a telephone box?
- Was there a time when you used phone boxes regularly?
- What are your country's five most well-known designs?

6 Our phone box idea

There is one red phone box in your town that you can adopt or rent. Many groups want it, but only one group can get the phone box. What are you going to do with it – make a shop, a museum, a book swap? Or something different?

Work in small groups. Think of an interesting and unusual idea of how to use the phone box. Who is it going to help and how? Who is going to work there or look after it? etc.

Make a poster or short presentation to explain your idea to the other students. Then vote for your favourite idea.

7 Webquest

Look at images of other famous British designs at the link below. How many do you know?

www.wired.co.uk/gallery/top-25-british-designs-gallery

How Britain's red phone boxes are being given new life

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

KEY

1 Warmer

1. c
2. d
3. e
4. a
5. b

2 Key words

1. voted
2. production
3. cast iron
4. remain
5. melted down
6. value
7. remove
8. adopt
9. defibrillator
10. swap
11. poor condition
12. refurbished

3 Comprehension check

1. F – His classic red phone box is called the K2. The Routemaster is the red double-decker bus.
2. F – They were made of cast iron.
3. T
4. T
5. F – About 5,000 are still used as phones.
6. T
7. T
8. F – Many people take a photo of the phone box shops but do not buy anything from them.

4 Using the key words

1. poor condition
2. cast iron
3. swap
4. remain
5. voted
6. melted down
7. remove
8. value