



Neville Conder's K7 kiosk – while this design was never put into production it did spark the GPO's interest in developing a modern kiosk, 1962 (TCB 417/E27173a)

## The Development of the K8 Kiosk

In the mid 1960s the General Post Office decided that the time was right to update the current incarnation of the telephone kiosk. Giles Gilbert Scott's K6 kiosk had been in service since 1936, and over those thirty years there had been significant changes in both the manner that the public used kiosks and, more importantly, advances in the manufacturing techniques used to build them.

In the 1950s the GPO had experimented with a prototype aluminium kiosk designed by Neville Conder which became known as the K7. While the GPO was largely pleased with the design, the prototypes were never put into production as the aluminium finish required regular and intensive maintenance to endure the British weather.

However the GPO learned a great deal from the process and was able to use the experience to create what they saw as a foolproof design brief for a new kiosk. This kiosk was expected to replace the majority of existing kiosks by the end of the twentieth century, and in 1965 the GPO asked three designers (Neville Conder, Bruce Martin and Douglas Scott) to submit designs according to this new brief.

### The Design Brief

The brief called for the new design to be informed by completing a thorough analysis of Scott's previous K6 design. Through this method the GPO hoped to not only create an extremely successful product but also demonstrate a continuous lineage through the previous kiosks.

The GPO made many stipulations for the design [BT Archive Ref: 10/274, TH/AZ/987]:

- The modern house-style for post office frontages, which incorporated a standard unit consisting of two recessed booths, should be considered.
- The kiosk should be structured around a cast-iron framework.
- The kiosks should be able to withstand wilful damage; crevices into which levers and jemmyes may be inserted



should be avoided; fixing screws should be concealed wherever possible; internal furniture should be robustly secured.

- The cost and lifespan of the new kiosk should be comparable to the K6 kiosk.
- A new kiosk should be more in keeping with contemporary surroundings and also utilise new materials and construction techniques.
- The efficiency of installation and construction should be improved wherever possible.

On 23 March 1965, plans for the new kiosk were announced in parliament and by May the designers had been handed the brief. Progress was remarkably quick and within six months after starting work Martin and Scott (with Conder having withdrawn his own designs from the competition) both submitted working full-size models to the GPO. After a few minor changes, such as a changing some components from aluminium to cast-iron and stainless steel, the Postmaster General, Tony Benn, selected Martin's design as the eventual winner.

## The Design Process

In the same vein that Gilbert Scott analysed his designs for the K2 when producing the K6, Martin brought all his knowledge of producing buildings to bear on a smaller scale project. As an architect trained in Modernist methodology the GPO's brief was well suited to Martin's professional practices and he analysed the K6 design with remarkable rigour. Martin

actually spent more time rationalising previous kiosk designs according to the design brief than he did designing his own. In an article with the RIBA Journal in 1969, Martin commented that:

*"Once you're sure what you're designing, the designing doesn't take proportionately so long. My view is that if you're not clear about what you're designing you're wasting your time at the drawing board...I deliberately never think about the design until I've got my final programme clear."*

While Gilbert Scott's iconic design was the starting point for the K8 development the finished product developed into something very individual. Martin believed that one of the vital things about a kiosk is that it provided a source of safety and was very keen to continue the tradition of painting the kiosk in the same red BS539 paint, while the roof was painted in white enamel and the sill and roof rings were painted black. As Martin remarked:

*"It's the place where you call the police or the fireman or the ambulance. So it's really a beacon."*

He took this beacon analogy further by also designing an alternative illuminated dome out of fibreglass. However while the GPO preferred the look of the illuminated square dome they

found it almost impossible to achieve any even degree of translucency in the red fibreglass.



Martin's original design for the K8 kiosk showing the proposed illuminated 'beacon' dome, 1966 (TCB 417/E32456)

## The Finished Product

Structurally the K8 is extremely different to the K6. While Scott's previous design had a more traditional corner post and transom structure, Bruce's design utilised a system of base and head rings which acted as both a jig for the assembly process and held the



walls securely in place.

Gilbert Scott's kiosk has around 450 individual pieces that Martin was able to rationalise to less than 183 pieces. Although in reality it would consist of only 7 principal elements – 2 side panels, a rear panel, a door, a base sill ring, and top sill ring and the roof – and the entire structural assembly is achieved by securing just 8 bolts.

The process of simplification had other benefits and Martin's K8 was designed so that every component could be interchangeable and swapped out easily. Previously the K6 had to be assembled at the manufacturers to ensure a good fit and then dismantled for transportation. If the parts ever became separated or muddled it would become a lengthy process to install the kiosk on site.

The issue of purposeful damage also had to be addressed. Problems in the first half of the century were restricted to what was colloquially referred to as 'scribbling', however as the number of kiosks increased the problem became more serious and often spilled over into full blown vandalism. The older kiosks were particularly susceptible and there is even anecdotal evidence of children in London's East End knocking out the panels in the old K6 as a way of playing noughts and crosses.

The GPO was of the opinion that better visibility of people on the inside of a kiosk from the outside would produce a psychological effect that would

reduce vandalism. To achieve this one of Martin's first tasks was to replace Scott's classically ordered window panes with large full height panes of reinforced glass on three sides.

Similarly wherever possible all fixings were hidden from view to protect them from both vandalism, the elements and to provide the desired clean modern aesthetic.

## K8 Launch

The first finished K8 was installed at 6-7 Old Palace Yard, Westminster, London on 12 July 1968. The GPO went on to manufacture 11,000 units before the introduction of the 'Oakham' booth and KX series kiosk in the 1980s.

While less celebrated than its illustrious ancestors the K8 was designed to an exceptionally high standard and remains both a vital part in the evolution of the public telephone kiosk and an elegant piece of design in its own right.



The final version of the K8 in situ , c1970 (TCB 417/E60834c)



Interior of a typical K8 kiosk, 1972 (TCB 417/E58378c)



## References and further reading

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<b>Publication</b>	A New Telephone – Kiosk No. 8, The Post Office Electrical Engineers' Journal, vol 62, April 1969 – January 1970, pp 54-56.
<b>Publication</b>	The Smallest Building: The genesis of the Mark 8 telephone box. RIBA Journal, ed 76, August 1969, pp 320-325.
<b>Papers</b>	GPO Design brief for the 1965 competition for a new telephone kiosk
<b>Papers</b>	K8 folder in the curatorial office.
<b>Papers</b>	GPO Press and Broadcast Notice, PB 180, 11th July 1968.
<b>Papers</b>	K8 kiosk design study; first and second report, 1965 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/900 AZ/1]
<b>Papers</b>	Modifications to K8 kiosk proposed By TD7, 1997 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/1607 AZ/2]
<b>Papers</b>	K8 kiosk; Contract; Cost guidance market research; roof design, 1965-1968 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/981 10/273]
<b>Papers</b>	K8 kiosk, historical brief, 1968-1969 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/987 10/274]
<b>Papers</b>	K8 kiosk, meetings and liaison between departments and designer, 1964-1966 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/988 10/274]
<b>Papers</b>	K8 kiosk, stages of feasibility studies and development, 1965-1966 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/1038 10/274]
<b>Papers</b>	Attitudes of local authorities to K8 kiosk design, 1975 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/1443 10/275]
<b>Papers</b>	Miscellaneous papers regarding introduction of the K8 kiosk, 1964-1977 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/1553 10/275]
<b>Papers</b>	K8 kiosk correspondence with various interested organisations, 1958-1966 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/1202 10/275]
<b>Papers</b>	History of kiosk design, 1976 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/1374 10/280]
<b>Papers</b>	Proposed modification to K8 kiosk dome casting, 1971-1976 [BT Archives Ref: TH/AZ/1413 10/280]