



A brief history of the K6  
telephone box, and its creator  
Giles Gilbert Scott

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott OM RA FRIBA was a British architect known for his work on the New Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, Battersea Power Station, Liverpool Cathedral, and designing the iconic red telephone box.

Born in Hampstead, London, Scott was one of six children and grandson son of Sir George Gilbert Scott. In January 1899 Scott became an articled pupil in the office of Temple Moore, who had studied with Scott's father.

In 1901, while Scott was still a pupil in Moore's practice, the diocese of Liverpool announced a competition to select the architect of a new cathedral. Two well-known architects were appointed as assessors for an open competition. G. F. Bodley was a leading exponent of the Gothic revival style, and a former pupil and relative by marriage of Scott's grandfather. Architects were invited by public advertisement to submit portfolios of their work for consideration. From these, the assessors selected a shortlist of architects to be invited to prepare drawings for the new building.

The competition attracted 103 entries, from architects including Charles Rennie Mackintosh. With Moore's approval, Scott submitted his own entry, on which he worked in his spare time.

In 1903, the assessors recommended that Scott should be appointed. There was widespread comment at the nomination of a 22-year-old with no existing buildings to his credit. Scott admitted that so far his only design to be constructed had been a pipe-rack.

Because of Scott's age and inexperience, the cathedral committee appointed Bodley as joint architect to work in tandem with him, but the collaboration was fractious, especially after Bodley accepted commissions to design two cathedrals in the US necessitating frequent absences from Liverpool. Scott was close to resigning when Bodley died suddenly in 1907, and cathedral committee appointed Scott sole architect.



Giles Gilbert Scott 1880-1960



George Gilbert Scott 1811-1878

Sir Gilbert Scott, was a prolific English Gothic revival architect, chiefly associated with the design, building and renovation of churches and cathedrals. Scott was the architect of many iconic buildings, including the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras Station, the Albert Memorial, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the main building of the University of Glasgow, St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh and King's College Chapel, London.

In 1910 Scott realised that he was not happy with the main design, which looked like a traditional Gothic cathedral in the style of the previous century. He persuaded the cathedral committee to let him start all over again and redesigned it as a simpler and more symmetrical building with a single massive central tower and more interior space. At the same time Scott modified the decorative style, losing much of the Gothic detailing and introducing a more modern, monumental style. Work slowed because of WWII and was not completed until after Scott's death.

Scott's most ubiquitous design was for the General Post Office. He was one of three architects invited by the Royal Fine Arts Commission to submit designs for new telephone kiosks. The invitation came at the time Scott was made a trustee of Sir John Soane's Museum. His design was in the classical style, topped with a dome reminiscent of the mausoleum Soane designed for himself in St Pancras Old Church yard in London. It was the chosen design and was put into production in cast iron as the GPO's "K2". Several other models followed.

The Jubilee kiosk, introduced for King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935 and known as the "K6", eventually became a fixture in almost every town and village.

In 1930 the London Power Company engaged Scott as consulting architect for its new electricity generating station at Battersea. The building was designed by the company's chief engineer, Leonard Pearce, and Scott's role was to enhance the external appearance of the massive architecture. He opted for external brickwork, put some detailing on the sheer walls, and remodelled the four corner chimneys so that they resembled classical columns.

Decommissioned in 1975 and given Grade II listed status, Battersea Power Station was finally set to be remodelled, and has opened in 2021 offering housing, retail and offices. The famous chimneys were remodelled and retained.



Liverpool Cathedral 1978



K6 phone boxes



Battersea Power Station 1933

The rescue and renovation of the K6 on Euston Road was undertaken by the Building Centre with the intention of returning the telephone box to the way it would have been when it was launched for King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935 and went in to production in 1936.

Fittingly the creator of the K6, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, was very involved with the Building Centre from its foundation in 1931, becoming Chairman from 1940 to 1947, and President from then until his death in 1960.

Our adopted telephone box is situated in the Euston Road, opposite the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel, which occupies much of the site that was the former Midland Hotel, designed by Giles Gilbert Scott's grandfather, George Gilbert Scott.

The K6 telephone box is a true British icon, and we are proud that we have been able to ensure that, despite modern technology removing the need for public telephone boxes, it retains its place in the affections of people throughout our towns and villages, a symbol of the lasting qualities of good design.



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