

EARLY POST BOXES IN SRI LANKA: AN INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Kusumsiri Kodithuwakku¹, Thilini Ayesha Thenuwara²

¹ Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka. *kusumsiriko@gmail.com*

² Department of History and Archaeology, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Postal Services are one of various services established as infrastructure in the import-export economy during British colonial times in Sri Lanka. Many objects and monuments can be seen even at present in various areas, belonging to the early days of the postal service in Sri Lanka, but very few can be considered 'industrial' products. Postboxes can be identified as one of the few prominent groups of artifacts that are a part of "Industrial Heritage" in Sri Lanka. The earliest post boxes were imported from England but very soon they were manufactured in Sri Lanka. The primary objective of this paper is to identify the various types of postboxes that have survived and to catalogue them according date, manufacturer, and additional or ornamental features of the post boxes as a contribution to the history and spread of modern postal services and related utilities in Sri Lanka and to mark them for conservation.

Methodology

The research methods used were field surveys carried out in the Colombo,

Kandy, Galle, Matara, and Anuradhapura Districts and a few other provincial areas, internet searches in subject related websites and the usual literature surveys about Some attention was paid to for obtaining data about similar artifacts and manufacturers and surviving in other countries.

Discussion

The first post boxes established in Sri Lanka were in the Late 19th century in Colombo, Galle, Kandy and Nuwaraeliya Two of these are exhibited in the Postal museum in Colombo. The oldest post boxes used at present in Sri Lanka belong to the period 1901- 1952. They can be categorized in to three types:

- I. Pillar boxes
- II. Wall boxes
- III. Lamp boxes:

I. Pillar boxes: The boxes have been in use since 1852 in UK ("Pillar Box" 2014). They can be divided into two sub types: cylindrical and hexagonal Penfolds (Kodithuwakku 2013:102, 2005:33-34). The cylindrical boxes are made with cast iron.in three distinct parts,the cap, the door (containing the

aperture or posting slot) and the carcass. The oldest post box in Sri Lanka is belonging to this type. The cap of the box is roughly bell shaped with a globe-shaped knob [indeed *acanthus bud* on the Victorian boxes in Britain] surmounting the cap. The common size of the cylindrical boxes is 49 cm in diameter and 183cm in height (from the ground level). But in main cities (especially in Colombo and Kandy), there is also a larger oval-shaped type with a double aperture and an oval shaped pillar. The two Parts of the oval boxes are marked separately for "Air Mail" and "Outstation" or "In the city and Outstation"

There are three companies that can be identified as the manufacturers of the cast iron pillar boxes: I.D, McDowall Steven and Company in London and

Glasgow, Carron Company. in Stirlingshire and A. Handyside and Company. in Derby. They were the pioneering cast iron pillar box manufacturing Companies, in 19th C in Europe ("Carron Company" 2014," Grace's guide- McDowall Steven and Co," 2014, Andrew Handyside and Co.2014). Cast Iron Pillar boxes are still used in the main cities in Sri Lanka. Out of these, oldest boxes are belonging to the period of King Edward 1,, (1901-1910). These boxes can be seen in the Maradana area in Colombo and Matara. Postboxes are belonging to the Period of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) are very rare and not in use in Sri Lanka at present only one can be seen at the Postal Museum in Colombo. They can be categorized according to the chronology below:

Period	Cypher	Manufacturing Company
Queen Victoria (1837-1901)	VR (as a monogram)	A.Handyside Co.- Durby & London
Edward VII (1901- 1910)	ER VII (as a monogram)	McDowall Steven & Co.- London & Glasgow, A.Handyside Co.- Durby
George V (1910- 1936)	GR V (in block letters)	Carron Co.- Sterlingshire A.Handyside Co.- Durby
George VI (1936- 1952)	GR VI (as a monogram)	Carron Co.- Sterlingshire
1952- 1972	Old national emblem of Ceylon	Carron Co.- Sterlingshire A.Handyside Co.- Durby
Anonymous Sobriquet	No cypher (only "post office" in English and Sinhala	Carron Co.- Sterlingshire

Hexagonal Penfolds are made with cement. This type of pillar boxes are introduced to Britain by John Penfold in 1866 ("Pen fold" 2014).

Height from the ground level of a box is 155cm and 90cm for underground

base. Length of one side of the hexagon is 25cm. All of the penfolds (in Sri Lanka) are production of Sri Lanka. Manufacturing companies are as follows:

Period	Cypher	Manufacture
Before 1930	GR V	Colombo Telegraph Workshop
1930-1951	GR VI	Government Factory
1952-1972	Old national emblem of Ceylon	Cement Factory at Kankasanthurei

II. Wall boxes: Wall boxes are very rare in Sri Lanka. One can be seen in Colombo on the wall of Barny Raymond Company at Borella (Colombo). It is made with cast iron and represents the royal cypher of King George V as block GR.

III. Lamp boxes: They are small rectangular cast iron boxes with rounded top fixed to a pole. Lamp boxes are also very rare at present in Sri Lanka. Many of Lamp boxes have been removed from the cities due to the fact that capacity is small of the boxes. Several boxes can be seen at Polgahawela and matale area respectively with old national emblem and without any cypher. Several old lamp boxes removed from usage are exhibited in the Postal Museum in Colombo. Those are production of W.T. Allen & Company, London.

Conclusion

Very little attention has been paid by Sri Lankan archaeologists and archaeological institutes in the country to industrial archaeology. As a part of our "Industrial Heritage", post boxes are standing testimony to a bygone period of our history. Therefore, Postal Department or any other organization is incapable of preservation of these post boxes. If appropriate steps are not taken, it would be a sad state for our future generations that will be deprived of the knowledge and insight to the

earliest stage of the evolution of our "Industrial Heritage"

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