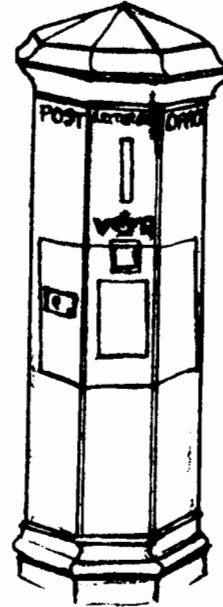


CHELTENHAM'S FIRST PILLAR BOXES

Although a description of Cheltenham's first pillar boxes exists.... they stood about four feet high "resembling, though larger in circumference, the pillars which, forty or fifty years ago, were to be seen at the corner of many of the London streets," (Locker-On) we do not really know what they looked like. The oldest boxes now in the town are the Penfold design which was not introduced until 1866. The first Cheltenham boxes are said to have been cast by Butt of Gloucester, and were put up in 1855. In "Cheltenham's Ornamental Ironwork" I have reproduced an early indistinct print which I thought might show the original design. I now seem to be doing my best to outdate the work even before publication, by suggesting that the drawing here reproduced is a far more likely contender for the design of Cheltenham's first pillar boxes.



Recently I was interested to see a photograph, from which this drawing is taken, in "Country Life" for April 11 1974, with the following letter from Colonel J.S.Mennell: "My photograph shows the pillar box at Holwell in Dorset. As can be seen, this pillar box is Victorian and an inscription on the side tells that it was made in Gloucester. Local rumour has it that it was made in 1853 and that it is the oldest pillar box in use. " I wrote to Col. Mennell asking if the name Butt was to be found on the Dorset box. He kindly returned a close up photograph clearly showing the name 'John Butt & Co' above 'Gloucester'. Circumstantial evidence now points to a solution of the mystery, surely we see here the design of the first Cheltenham boxes. I should like sometime to check local Dorsetshire newspapers of 1853 to see if the supposed date could be verified.