

# Fridays Lock Down Ride

## Street Furniture

*Route starts at Hyde Park Corner*

### **Policeman bollard**

*Gerald Road (junction with Gerald Mews)*

Situated outside an old police station. The police lamp on the building was originally blue. Blue lamps first appeared outside London police stations in 1861. They would spread throughout not only Britain but also the empire: Bahamian police stations, for example, still have blue lamps today.

There seems to be some uncertainty as to why the light is blue. Probably it was chosen to match the colour of police uniforms, themselves selected because blue was a fairly neutral colour and clearly distinct from the red of the military. However, it wasn't popular with everyone: apparently, Queen Victoria objected to the lamp outside Bow Street Police Station. Every time she went to the nearby opera house in Covent Garden, it reminded her of the blue room in which Prince Albert had died. Bow Street was therefore unusual in having a white lamp.

Gerald Road has a rather flamboyant history. In 1846 it became home to the Belgravia Police Station. It closed in 1993.

One of the legends surrounding this station was that it was here that the 1918-19 police strike took hold, mainly because many of the establishment were ex Welsh miners and were particularly militant.

In the 19th century Gerald Road was noted for its male voice choir. One evening in 1871 a 'gentleman in a top hat' came into the front office and asked the Station Sergeant if any of the fine Welsh officers were in the station. When asked why, he replied that he had a piece of music which he had just completed and wanted to hear a performance.

Since he knew that many of the Constables could sight read music, he wondered if they would be kind enough to oblige him. The Station Sergeant knew the man very well, by reputation, and immediately sent up to the canteen. In no time a group of lads was assembled and they were singing in perfect harmony from the manuscript copies given to them.

The gentleman was Sir Arthur Sullivan and the Welsh Constables of Gerald Road gave the first performance of 'Onward Christian Soldiers'.

### **Oldest post box**

*Cornwall Gardens, Belgravia, opposite number 45*

Introduced in 1853, the ruling monarch's cypher is the best guide to the age of post boxes. London's very first was at the corner of Fleet Street and Farringdon Street. Early boxes were painted green to blend in but people kept walking into them, so they were all painted red in 1874.

The oldest surviving box is on Eton High Street. It is Victorian with a vertical slot dating from 1856 (only 15 years after the first postage stamps) and is one of only ten survivors with this notable vertical slot. Sadly, there are none in London itself.

But the most famous early design is this hexagonal Penfold, named after the architect who designed it in 1866. There are 150 originals still in use and 100 replicas.

Later boxes were round and named "Pillar" after the fluted Doric style (with the cap on top). The pillar was created by Anthony Trollope (the author) who was a Post Office employee at the time.

Swedenborg Gardens (Shadwell) has an extremely rare box, and it is believed that there may only be a handful still standing in the UK. It displays the royal cipher of King Edward VIII who was only on the throne for 11 months before he abdicated his position to marry Mrs. Wallace Simpson.

## **Milestone**

*Kensington Gore/Exhibition Road junction*

This mile-post shows London is a mile away. It is measured to Hyde Park Corner, where Wellington famously lived at No1 London (Apsley House). It was given the address No 1 because it was the first (proper) house you reached when you arrived in London from the west along the Bath Road.

Milestone is a generic term, and includes, for example, mileposts made of cast iron. Such waymarkers are fast disappearing - only around 9,000 are thought to survive in the UK. Most were removed or defaced in World War II to baffle potential German invaders and not all were replaced afterwards. Many have been demolished as roads have been widened, have been victims of collision damage, or have been smashed by hedge-cutters or flails.

This is the first surviving mile post along the Bath Road. This surprisingly big, solid, cast-metal mark is one of the largest and is perhaps unique. It is dated 1911 making it implausibly recent. Its design would suggest it is much older, and maps indicate much older markers on this site. It is probably a replica put here in 1911.

The Romans laid good metalled roads to move soldiers and supplies quickly across their Empire: they measured distance to aid timing and efficiency, possibly marking every thousandth double-step with a large cylindrical stone. 117 of these Roman markers still survive in the UK.

The Latin for thousand was 'mille' and the distance was 1618 yards; the eventual British standard mile was 1760 yards, although 'long' miles also existed into the 19th century.

After Roman times, roads developed to meet local community needs: in 1555, an Act of Parliament made local parishes responsible for their upkeep and boundary markers became important.

At this time, travel by road was slow and difficult. It took 16 days to cover the 400 miles from London to Edinburgh. So Turnpike Trusts were set up between 1706 and the 1840s. Groups of local worthies raised money to build stretches of road and then charged the users tolls to use them. The name 'turnpike' comes from the spiked barrier at the Toll Gate. The poor bitterly resented having to pay to use the roads and there were several anti-turnpike riots.

From 1767, mileposts were compulsory on all turnpikes, not only to inform travellers of direction and distances, but to help coaches keep to schedule and for charging for changes of horses at the coaching inns. At the height of the turnpike era, there were 20,000 miles of roads with milestones.

## **TOILET STOP HYDE PARK**

### **KGB lamp post**

*South Audley Street/Audley Square junction (outside No 3)*

This ornate Victorian lamp post has a trapdoor that during the Cold War (1950s) was used by the Soviets as a dead letter drop. A chalk mark on the lamppost base would indicate a delivery. Intriguingly, whilst KGB spies were lurking outside, next-door at No 3 Cubby Broccoli was busy

casting unknown actor Sean Connery to play the part of a spy called James Bond in his new film 'Dr No'.

The existence of this dead letter box was only revealed to British Intelligence after the 1985 extraction of their secret agent Colonel Oleg Gordievsky from under the watchful eyes of the KGB in Moscow.

The Brompton Oratory and the Holy Trinity Church next door to it were also both dead letter drop sites.

## **Torch snuffer**

*Berkeley Square, outside No 50 (on the railings)*

Back in the 18th century a law was passed demanding that householders and businesses burn lamps outside their premises from 6pm to 11pm. This was a form of social control to curb undesirable behaviour such as prostitution, theft or violence. And to make the street safe for the upper classes. The strategy had only limited success and those who could afford it still paid 'link-boys' to walk ahead of them with lighted torches. The torch snuffers outside premises made it easy for these mobile lights to be extinguished so as not to waste the wax or tallow.

Many of the link-boys seem to have been run by criminal gangs who would lead clients into dark corners where waiting cronies would rob them.

Link-boys make brief appearances in the novels of William Thackeray and Charles Dickens, and are mentioned by Samuel Pepys.

The expression "cannot hold a candle to" may derive from a comparison to an inadequate link-boy. If you could not hold a candle to somebody, that means you were not even good enough to be their link-boy.

## **Pineapples**

*Old Queen Street, outside No 36 (on the railings)*

First brought to Europe from the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe by Christopher Columbus in 1493, pineapples remained a rare delicacy for centuries and hence became a symbol of wealth and hospitality. In the 18th century, a pineapple cost the equivalent of £5,000 today.

John Rose, gardener to the Earl of Essex, presented the first pineapple raised in England to King Charles II in 1661. They were grown in greenhouses – rare due to the expense of making glass. The Royals had a taste for them.

They're everywhere in London. Once you start noticing them, you won't stop seeing them. Christopher Wren even picked pineapples to be the crowning feature of each of the towers of St Paul's Cathedral.

In the 18th century, people could rent pineapples out for the night if they were having a dinner party, using them as a centrepiece to demonstrate their wealth.

In the same way the wealthy used lions as a symbol of strength, pineapples were incorporated into art, decor and architecture to display (or at least hint at) wealth. Hence, to this day pineapples can be seen on rooftops, railings, entrances and doors of private houses and public buildings. Sir John Soane even added a pineapple to his own family's tomb, which can be seen in St Pancras Gardens (and is the inspiration for the original telephone box).

## **Wooden block paving**

*Belvedere Road, outside the rear entrance to County Hall*

The more obvious and famous use of stone cobbles to line London's busier streets has been a practice since the 18th century — replacing crushed stone pebbles or large flat stones. Following its invention in the 1820s, some streets had been covered with Macadam, which offered a quieter, and smoother ride, but it wore out quickly under the weight of cargo carts.

It was in 1839 that the first serious experiment was made with wooden blocks to replace their granite predecessors on the road outside the Old Bailey. However, as with Macadam, the wooden blocks wore out quickly. The first blocks were not just rectangular lumps, but complex interlocking designs, often hexagonal in basic shape.

By the 1850's practically all of the carriageways had been paved with granite setts from Scotland. However, the streets were often muddy in wet weather and full of dust in the summer, making them slippery. So, in the mid-19th century, wooden blocks started to make a come-back. An improved wood pavement would be laid on a thick bed of concrete; a layer of planks placed upon the concrete, and on these the blocks were set upright in parallel rows across the street. Initially, pine was used for the blocks, and a mixture of asphalt and pitch poured into expansion gaps between the rows of wooden blocks.

In 1873, the City of London Police tested the performance of wood vs asphalt, and found over a 6-month trial that horses stumbled less frequently in the wet on wooden blocks, and that the stumbles caused fewer injuries to the horses.

However, one problem was that, while wooden blocks were quieter than granite, they smelt worse! Some of the wooden blocks had a tendency to absorb what fell upon them, mostly horse urine, and on hot days, the stench was noxious.

It was that tendency which would later lead to roads being paved with different sorts of wooden blocks, with harder denser wood being used in posher areas, and the poor getting, well, poorer quality wood more inclined to soak up horsey fluids.

Wooden blocks could be found throughout London until just 50 years ago. In 1930, Regent Street was completely re-laid with wood blocks. Production of wood blocks for use on roads continued right up to the 1950s.

However they were a dying material. Most of the old blocks in London were lifted in the post-war rebuilding of the city, and the blocks used to heat homes — the smoke from the burning tar and creosote supporting London's reputation as The Smoke.

## **Gas lamp**

### *Carting Lane*

There are about 1,500 gas lamps still operational in London.

This is a Webb Patent Sewer Gas Lamp - invented in the late 19th century in Birmingham by Joseph Webb - and is the last of its kind.

It is built to look like an ordinary lamp but is not designed to illuminate, rather to burn off gas from the new modern sewer system to avoid explosions. This problem was particularly prevalent on hills, such as Carting Lane.

One solution was high vent pipes, but this proved to be smelly, so the sewer gas lamps were installed to burn off the sewage gases.

Methane is mixed with town gas to keep the lamp burning. Each lamp could vent up to 3/4 miles of sewer.

These lamps became obsolete as plumbing practices changed to favour venting the gas out above the roof tops via a building's plumbing system.

Carting Lane is known affectionately amongst those who work hereabouts as "Farting Lane."

## **TOILET STOP LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS (north east corner)**

### **Phone boxes (K2 & K6)**

*Carey Street*

The red telephone box was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. He was inspired by Sir John Soane's tomb in St Pancras Old Churchyard.

Scott's design of the K2 cast iron telephone kiosk won a Post Office sponsored competition in 1924. His updated K6 design followed in 1935. Although classic in design, the materials used were modern - cast iron and concrete, with a teak door.

A leading architect, Scott is famous not only for his telephone boxes. His other work includes Liverpool Cathedral and the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament after the Second World War.

The red K2 telephone box first appeared in London in 1926. It was used solely in the capital and only a few were erected elsewhere under special circumstances. Only about 1,500 K2 kiosks were produced and only a few remain today. The K2 telephone box was too big and expensive to be used nationally. It weighs over an imperial tonne. On top of the kiosk, on all four sides is the Royal crest of King George V formed from a series of ventilation holes.

In 1929 Scott was asked to simplify the design and make it cheaper - this was the K3, which was made of concrete and was painted cream. 12,000 were made, but only two remain - one is outside Penguin Beach at London Zoo.

The K4 was known as the 'giant' as it incorporated a post box and stamp machine. But it wasn't successful - the stamps got wet and the machines disturbed people on the phone.

K5 never went into production.

In 1935, the Post Office commissioned a new kiosk from Scott to celebrate the Jubilee of King George V. The K6 Jubilee Kiosk was similar to the K2, being made of cast iron and painted red but was 25% lighter at around three quarters of a tonne. By the end of the 1930s there were 20,000 K6 telephone boxes in use all over the UK.

In 1985 a newly privatised BT announced sweeping changes to improve the condition of kiosks. There was a lot of experimentation with new designs to prevent vandalism, which resulted in many K6 telephone boxes being removed from the streets and sold off. Fortunately, however, about 2,000 red telephone boxes were declared listed buildings and remain in place.

### **Drinking Fountain**

*Corner of Giltspur Street and Holborn Viaduct*

There are several fresh water springs across London and you can still see the Clerks Well (in Clerkenwell) and the well at St Clements by Dr Johnson's statue outside St Clement Dane. But clean drinking water is a surprisingly recent phenomenon for Londoners. Up until the 19th century we relied on the increasingly filthy Thames and several competing water companies who operated public pumps in districts around the city. Most of these companies pumped their water directly out of the Thames.

The Broad Street cholera outbreak in 1854 in Soho was particularly severe. This outbreak, which killed 616 people, is best known for the physician John Snow's study of its causes and his hypothesis that germ-contaminated water was the source of cholera, rather than particles in the air (referred to as miasmata).

London had suffered a series of debilitating cholera outbreaks before the 1854 outbreak, including the worst outbreak which killed over 14,000 residents in 1849. That year Snow published his first paper outlining his theory of water-borne disease. And in 1854 he got the chance to test his theory.

After studying the patterns of deaths and plotting their locations on a map overlaid with the various water districts, he identified one water pump on Broad Street as a potential cause. This particular pump was supplied by a company that drew water from an uncontaminated part of the Thames, which led him to the conclusion that it must be a problem with the pump itself, not the overall water supply. Upon closer inspection, it was revealed that the Broad Street pump was only a few feet from an open cesspool, and residents reported that the water has smelled foul a few days earlier. After appealing to community leaders, he took matters into his own hands and removed the pump handle.

According to popular legend that sprang up in the years following the epidemic, the outbreak immediately ended once the handle was removed. In reality, the outbreak was already in decline, and the specific contamination that had triggered the outbreak had probably come and gone.

There's a replica pump at the site now. Every year members of the John Snow Society hold "Pumphandle Lectures" on subjects of public health, accompanied by a ceremony of removing and then re-attaching the pump handle.

In 1859, in an effort to improve the water and stem the consumption of beer and gin, the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain Association was founded. Its mission was to provide clean water via drinking fountains. This fountain was the first.

By 1865 the association had become equally concerned with the welfare of animals and became the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle trough Association. From then on, most new fountains were equipped with low-level drinking bowls for dogs.

Within two years the association had installed 85 fountains and wealthy patrons were gushing to commission ever more sumptuous examples. You can find these eccentric Victorian fountains all over London.

Many of the older pumps are no longer operational, but the association still exists and still installs water fountains in schools and parks throughout the UK and funds projects to provide clean water in developing countries.

## **Green Post Box**

*Corner of Angel Street and St Martin's Le Grand*

This is a replica of the early Penfold post box.

## **Police box**

*Guildhall Yard (off Gresham Street)*

Between 1929 and 1937 around 700 police boxes were installed to serve as mini police stations for bobbies on the beat. Inside was a desk and stool, dustpan and brush, fire extinguisher, first aid kit and a small electric heater. That so much was packed in would have been part of the inspiration for the TARDIS.

None still exist on the streets, although there is a replica outside Earls' Court Underground and there is an original box at the Peel Centre for police training in Hendon which can be seen from the Northern Line.

This is a police post. It had a telephone that could be used by the public as well as the police, a light, and a locked box containing a first aid kit. These were introduced in 1907 when police

stations first became equipped with telephone exchanges. Most surviving examples are from the 1930s.

They were little used - it was easier and quicker to shout. This is one of eight examples left in the city.

## Urine deflector

*Rear of Bank of England, almost opposite 41 Lothbury*

The average (male) Londoner of the early 1800s, out and about, was quite happy to relieve himself in the nearest alley. Urinals were becoming more common - usually outside pubs - but typically one found a quiet corner and had a pee.

Those who lived in these alleys, or who owned commercial property adjoining, were not entirely happy with this practice and erected these 'barricades and shelves' so that the pee would flow down onto the gentleman's boots. There are examples all over the City. Some are stone like this one, others are retro fitted cast iron.

## Canon Bollard

*Next to the Crocodylius Philodendrus sculpture on Undershaft at the rear of St Helen's Bishopsgate*

After the defeat of the French at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the British started to strip the French boats and reuse anything of value. When it came to the cannons however, it was found that they were too large to be retrofitted onto British ships. Determined to find a way to flaunt their victory over the French, the British decided instead to use them as street bollards throughout the East End of London.

This idea proved so popular that after the original cannons had all been used, replicas were made and these started to adorn more and more London streets. They continue to be made today, with their distinctive shape being an iconic feature of London's streets.

Although most of the original cannon-bollards have been replaced over the years, a few still remain. There is an original French cannon from the Battle of Trafalgar by the Globe Theatre. And another around the back of Spitalfields.

This one is very unusual, because not only is it very old, but it's also upside down.

## Maypole

*Corner of St Mary Axe and Leadenhall Street*

The church is called St Andrew Undershaft and gets its name from a huge maypole that once stood here. So tall that it rose above the church tower.

A maypole was the centre of many May Day celebrations – a carry-over from ancient festivities of nature worship. People would dance around the maypoles, elect May Queens, and carry on other activities that were generally fun and harmless – until 1517.

By that time, there had been a growing resentment among London apprentices at the number of foreigners in the city. On May Day 1517 – Evil May Day – this resentment erupted in rioting at the St Andrew Undershaft maypole.

The rioting spread and the pole was pulled down. It was stored along the houses in nearby Shaft Alley and remained there for over 30 years. A local clergyman then decided to preach a sermon denouncing the maypole as a heathen object, following which the residents took it off its storage hooks and burned it. The maypole's place was soon taken by a quintain - this was a pole with a crossbar on the top and a bag of sand hanging from one end. It was used for jousting practice.

But that's not a practical thing to have in the middle of a busy street, and it had gone by the end of the 16th century.

The fun had more or less gone out of May Day celebrations after 1517, and then the Puritans banned them completely anyway. But they were reinstated after the Restoration of Charles II (1660) to “amuse the people’s thoughts and keep them in harmless actions which will free your majesty from faction and rebellion”.

Look closely at the tall security light/camera pole and you will see marking resembling those of a may-pole. There is a replica may-pole further along Leadenhall Street, outside the Leadenhall Building.

## **LHP stop valve cover**

*Hooper Street, outside No 19 - The Old Pump House (in the pavement)*

The London Hydraulic Power Company was established by engineer Edward Ellington (age 26) in 1883 to install a hydraulic power network in London. This expanded to cover most of central London at its peak, before being replaced by electricity, with the final pump house closing in 1977.

The system was used as a cleaner and more compact alternative to steam engines, to power workshop machinery, lifts, cranes, theatre machinery (including revolving stages at the London Palladium and the London Coliseum, safety curtains at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, the lifting mechanism for the cinema organ at the Leicester Square theatre and the complete Palm Court orchestra platform), and the backup mechanism of Tower Bridge. It was also used to supply fire hydrants, mostly those inside buildings. The water, pumped straight from the Thames, was heated in winter to prevent freezing. Indeed it was hydraulic powered lifts that enabled buildings to be become taller.

The pressure was maintained at a nominal 800 pounds per square inch (55 BAR) by five hydraulic power stations, originally driven by coal-fired steam engines. Such high pressure did mean that burst pipes could cause major street damage however.

Short-term storage was provided by hydraulic accumulators, which were large vertical pistons loaded with heavy weights. This building was one of them, primarily to power the Tilbury docks which were right here. They powered capstans which hauled goods trucks across Hooper Street. Trucks were lowered from the first-floor rail lines to ground-floor sidings.

The system pumped 6.5 million gallons of water each week in 1893; this grew to 32 million gallons in 1933.

From about 1904, business began to decline as electric power became more popular. The company began to replace its steam engines with electric motors from 1923. At its peak, the network consisted of 180 miles of pipes.

The system finally closed in June 1977. The company was bought by Mercury Communications who used its pipes as cable ducts.

One of the pumping stations is now a restaurant and art gallery (The Wapping Project) and has kept some of the machinery intact. Near the Tower of London you can find a round building marked London Hydraulic Power Company, this is the entrance to the Tower Subway, which was originally an old pedestrian tunnel the LHP bought to carry power under the Thames

## **Fire Insurance Sign**

*Fournier Street, on the first floor level of No 7*



The Great Fire (1666) devastated London. There were few recorded deaths, but estimates put the destroyed property value at £10,000,000 (£1.5 billion in today's money). From the ashes rose the world's first property insurance.

After the fire, much of London needed to be rebuilt. But in 1666 the contracts of tenants made them liable for repairs to their houses, not the landlords who owned the property. Tenants were also supposed to pay rent while their burned houses were being rebuilt. This was clearly untenable and so an emergency 'Fire Court' was set up to sort out disputes that arose out of the rebuilding, such as who should pay to rebuild. The judges had the power to decide who should rebuild, based on ability to pay, and could cancel contracts. This stopped disputes from dragging on and enabled Londoners to rebuild as soon as possible.

There's nothing like a giant, city-destroying event to get people thinking about better fire safety and measures to pay for repairs. And so, in 1680 the first insurance company, the 'Fire Office', was set up by Nicholas Barbon. Other insurance companies were soon set up and by 1690 one in ten houses in London was insured.

By 1700 companies had realised that it would probably be cheaper to put out the fires more effectively than pay for rebuilds. And so they began to employ their own fire brigades. The insurers created 'fire mark' plates, such as this one, in order to identify which houses were insured by each company when the fire brigades arrived. This identification was particularly important in London before the introduction of street numbering in the 1760s. Insurance companies often had reciprocal arrangements with each other, so that if a fire brigade put out a fire at a house insured by another company then the brigade's company would be reimbursed.

Before long the major insurers realised it would be more efficient to have single, unified force to watch over London, and so in 1833 the London Fire Engine Establishment was created.

Reacting to demand, more and more insurers set up shop in London. This fire mark was issued by the Sun Fire Office, which would later become Royal Sun Alliance, which still exists today as RSA Insurance Group.

Note, the church behind you is a fine example of one of the Queen Anne Churches designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor.

## **Early street sign**

*High on the wall of No 16 Great James Street*

Today, we take it for granted that wherever we may be in London we can promptly identify our location by referring to clearly displayed street names.

However, historically, London streets did not always have street name signs. The formal introduction of street signs came in the aftermath of the Great Fire of London in 1666 when it became quite evident that for there to be any kind of future prompt 'emergency' assistance, London's streets would need to be noticeable and promptly identified. So laws were passed which decreed that all streets should have 'name boards' displayed along them.

But even before all that came into force, it was often customary for some of the more prestigious streets to have signs made of plaster attached at the entrances to them, bearing the name of the street and the year that the sign was introduced.

Some of these early London street signs still exist. There are examples in Smith's Square, Cowley Street, Tavistock Street, and a really old one (1708) on Brick Lane. This one on Great James Street dates to 1727.

The oldest known one is in Shadwell – on the corner of The Highway and Chigwell Hill. It's above the entrance to an old long time derelict pub "The Old Rose" - it dates to 1678.

## **Coal Hole covers**

*Outside Nos 21 - 23, Russell Square (in the pavement)*

Coalhole covers are easy to pass by but they are one of the most common pieces of decorative street furniture still surviving from Victorian times, with most dating to the mid-1700 to mid-1800s.

A coalhole was where coal was poured down into a cellar. Coal was used to heat every house in London before the introduction of the Clean Air Acts – and central heating. That's one of the reasons Victorian households had so many maids: cleaning coal dust was a full time job.

The covers are the only such 'manhole' cover that can't fall inside the hole they cover. They sit in an iron rim and are locked from inside with a chain attached to an eye underneath. They are quite small so that burglars can't use them – although there are stories of small children being sent down them to unlock doors from the inside.

Almost all are circular and the moulded patterns are raised to stop pedestrians slipping on them in the rain or icy weather. The way in which the iron designs has worn down in a century or so shows the amount of foot traffic that has gone over them. In days gone by, falling down an open coalhole must have been a real danger, especially in the thick smogs that the coal itself did so much to create.

Each foundry has its own unique designs, a trademark if you like, and sometimes also the name of the firm. Keep an eye out and you will start to recognise familiar ones: 'Hayward's Patent Self-Locking' is a common one that seems to have stood up to wear very well.

Hayward's was based in Borough. The designs were cast by pouring molten iron into a sand mould made by stamping with a wooden or metal master.

However, Hayward's really made their fortune by inventing a way of allowing light into gloomy cellars. In the mid 1800s, they began manufacturing glazed pavement lights and in 1871 were granted a patent for a system that used two prisms of glass to bend the incoming light 90 degrees and so throw it deep into the space below. The pavement lights that you see around the West End were a very profitable development for the company – combining the family glass and iron working skills.

The 'holy grail' of coalhole spotting is one bearing the traditional sign of an ironworker: a dog with its head in a pot.

Noel Road in Islington - known mainly for the murder of playwright Joe Orton by his lover Kenneth Halliwell in 1967 - has one of the best selections. This small stretch of street contains the names of about a dozen local ironmongers. Notice how some of the coal hole covers in Russell Square service buildings long since demolished.

## **Ends at Russell Square cafe in the park**