

Historic  
England

# The Street Spotter's Guide

What clues can you spot to  
become a heritage detective?



# Name of Trainee Heritage Detective

---

What clues  
can you spot?



Page 5, K2: © Mr Paul Howard. Page 7, Pillar: © Mrs Chris Dawson.

Type A: © Mr John Turner. Source: Historic England Archive. Page 11, Brick:

© Mrs Hilary Crisp, Source Historic England Archive. Page 15, Carlton Club, 100 Pall Mall, Source: Historic England Archive.

All other photos: © Historic England Archive.

# The Street Spotter's Guide

There are hidden mysteries to solve all around us – you just have to know what you're looking for. Take a walk around your local area to see what heritage you can find!

<b>Architecture through the ages</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Telephone boxes</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Royal cyphers</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Post boxes</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Road signs</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Shop signs</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Ghost signs</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Street surfaces</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Crossings and beacons</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Bollards and railings</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Fountains and water pumps</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Street lamps and lamp posts</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Weather vanes</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Statues and sculptures</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>What have you found?</b>	<b>18</b>

# Architecture through the ages

While the style and design of buildings is always changing, they can give clues to when they were built or what changes have been made to them over time.

What is the **oldest** building in your local area?

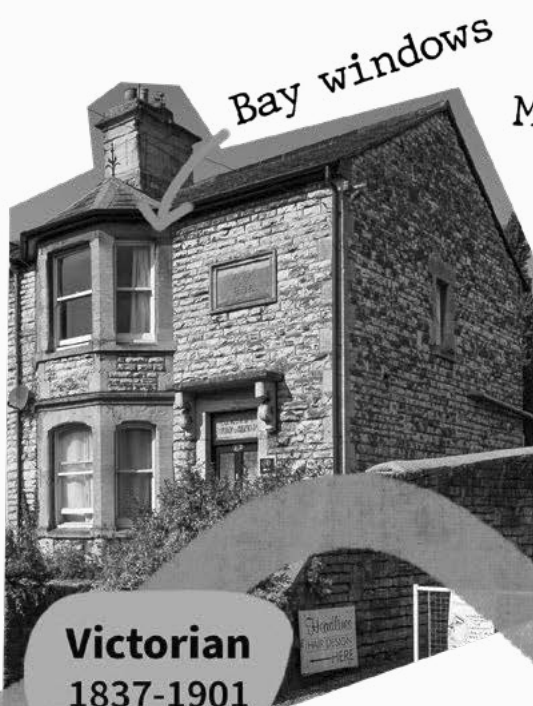
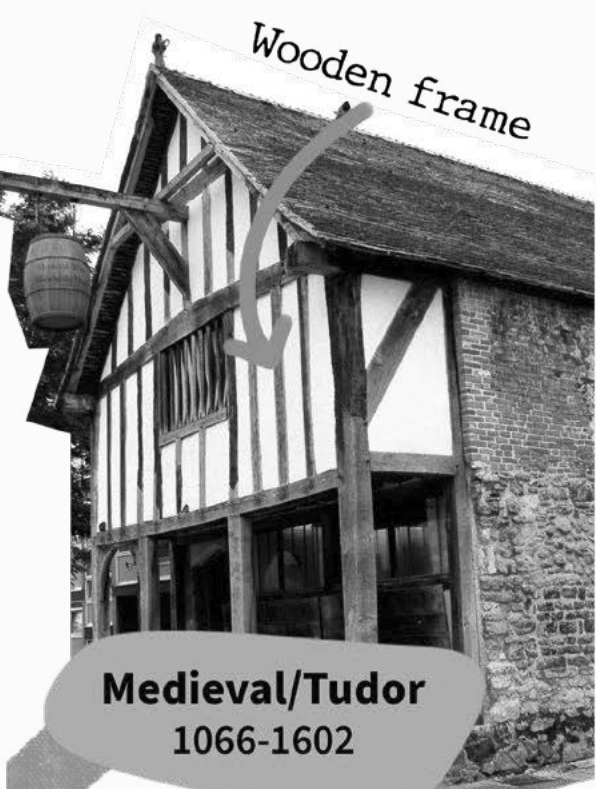
Remember, a building may have been changed many times and have 'bits' from several different time periods!



What did you see?

When did you see it?

Where was it?





# Telephone boxes

Although many telephone boxes now have other uses (including libraries, first aid stations, and even a little theatre!) they are still an important part of many streets.

One of the earliest examples, known as the K1, was designed in 1921 and was made from concrete with a red wooden door. There have been many developments in the design since then, although the red K2 and K6 are the most well-known.

What did you see?

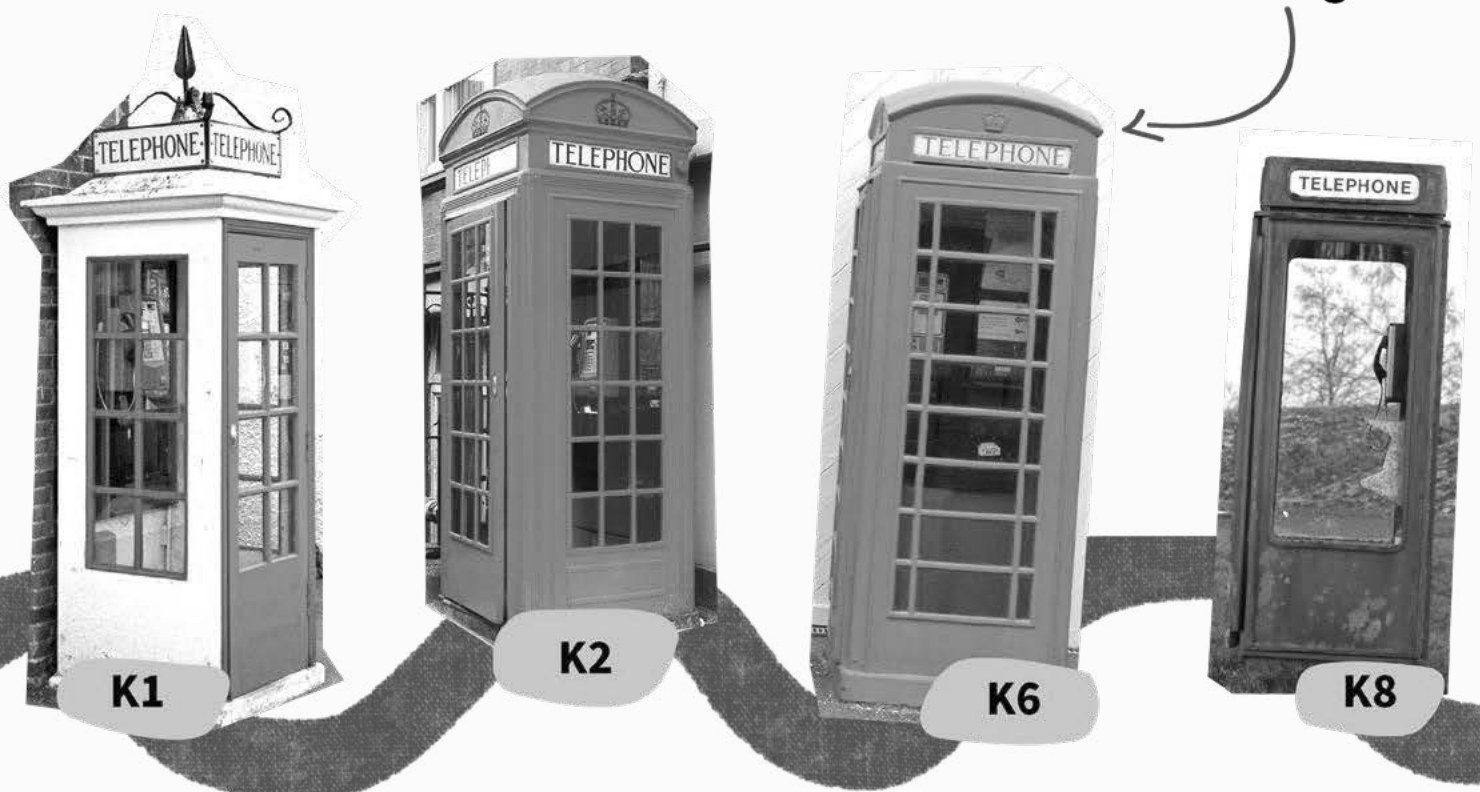
---

When did you see it?

---

Where was it?

---



# Royal cyphers

Spot a cypher and tick it off the list

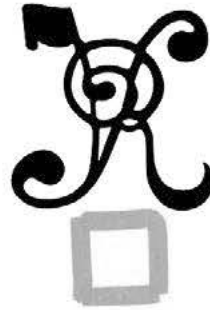


Many of the most familiar objects we find on the street were first introduced by national organisations, such as Royal Mail, or British Telecom. As a result, the 'Royal cypher' was included in many designs.

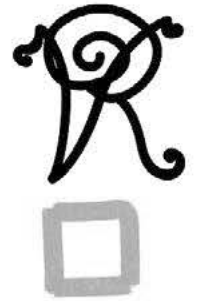
The Royal cypher (a cypher is a type of symbol) is formed from the King or Queen's first name initial and the letter R, which stands for either Regina (queen) or Rex (king) in Latin. Post boxes are a good place to spot these cyphers.

Most recent cyphers also include a Roman numeral, which is used when the King or Queen wasn't the first one with that name. Have you spotted King Charles III's new cypher yet?

1837-1901



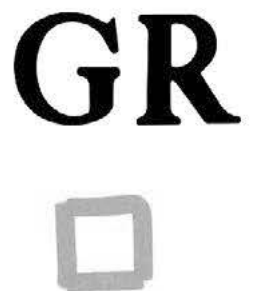
1837-1901



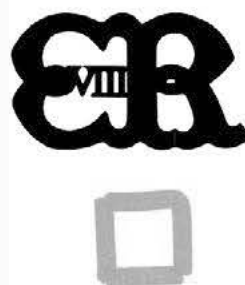
1901-1910



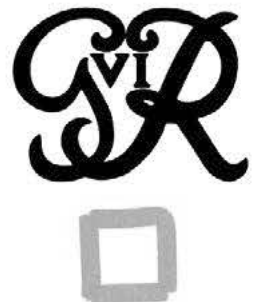
1910-1936



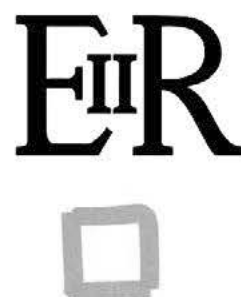
1936



1936-1952



1952-2022



Present



# Post boxes

The first Royal Mail post boxes were installed in England in 1853. Early post (or letter) boxes were red and hexagonal in shape – this made them easy to spot, but they were also heavy and expensive to produce.

In 1859, a cylindrical design that was cheaper and easier to make was introduced around the country. You might also have seen post boxes fixed into walls – these started to be used in 1857. By the end of the 19th century there were over 33,500 post boxes in the United Kingdom.

What did you see?

---

When did you see it?

---

Where was it?

---

There are currently  
over 85,000!



**Pillar**



**Type A**



**Penfold**



**Wall**

# Road signs

Road signs might seem completely normal now, but the idea is only a few hundred years old.

Before that, many distances were only **marked on stones!**

Some signposts are known as ‘finger posts’, because they point in different directions! Early signs had many different designs until a new law called the 1930 Road Traffic Act standardised their colour and appearance across the country.



What did you see?

When did you see it?

Where was it?





# Shop signs

In the past many shopkeepers displayed the sign of the service they were offering above their shop. Not only could this be seen from a long way away, but it was also really useful when not everyone could read.

These are less common now, but you might still spot a 'barber's pole', used by many hairdressers, if you go for a haircut.

Which shop signs  
have you seen?

What did you see?

---

When did you see it?

---

Where was it?

---



Tea shop



Barbers



Pub



Hat shop

# Ghost signs

In the past, adverts and signs were painted by hand above shops or onto the side of buildings. Many have now been painted over or covered with modern signs. If you can spot one it may be the only evidence of what a shop used to sell, or what a building was once used for. These signs will often have faded over the years and are from the past, so are called ghost signs!

What did you see?

---

When did you see it?

---

Where was it?

---

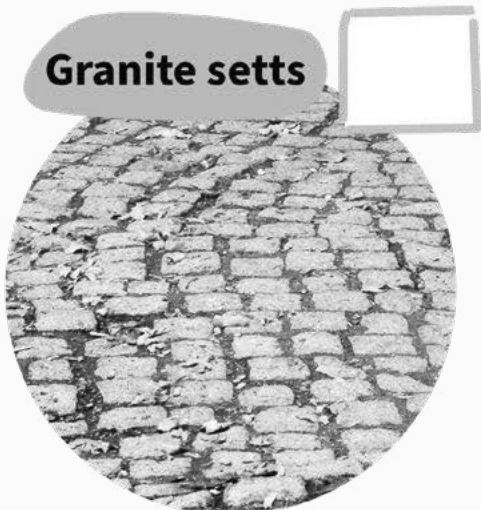
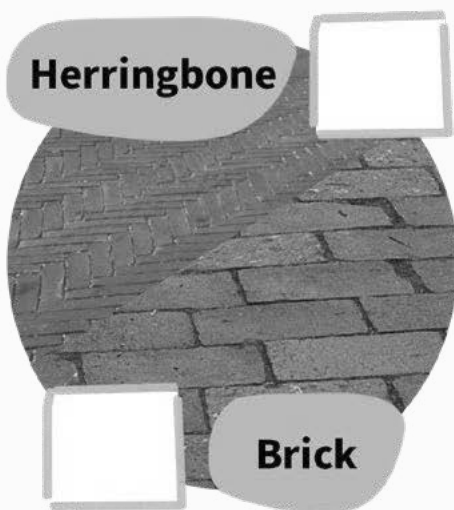
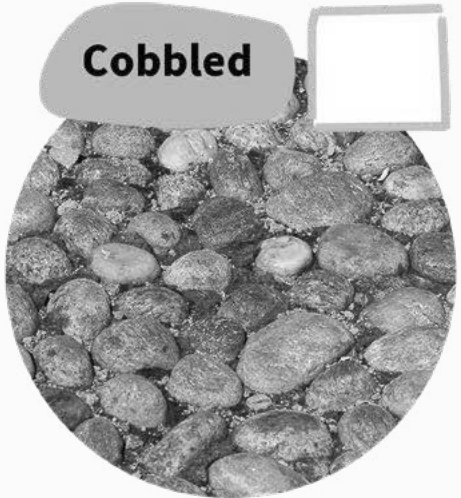


# Street surfaces

Have you ever thought about the heritage under your feet? It can tell you when a road was first built, and what it was built for!

Some examples might be stone, brick, tarmac, or even cobbles. You often get many different types on the same stretch of pavement, showing how it has been replaced or repaired over the years.

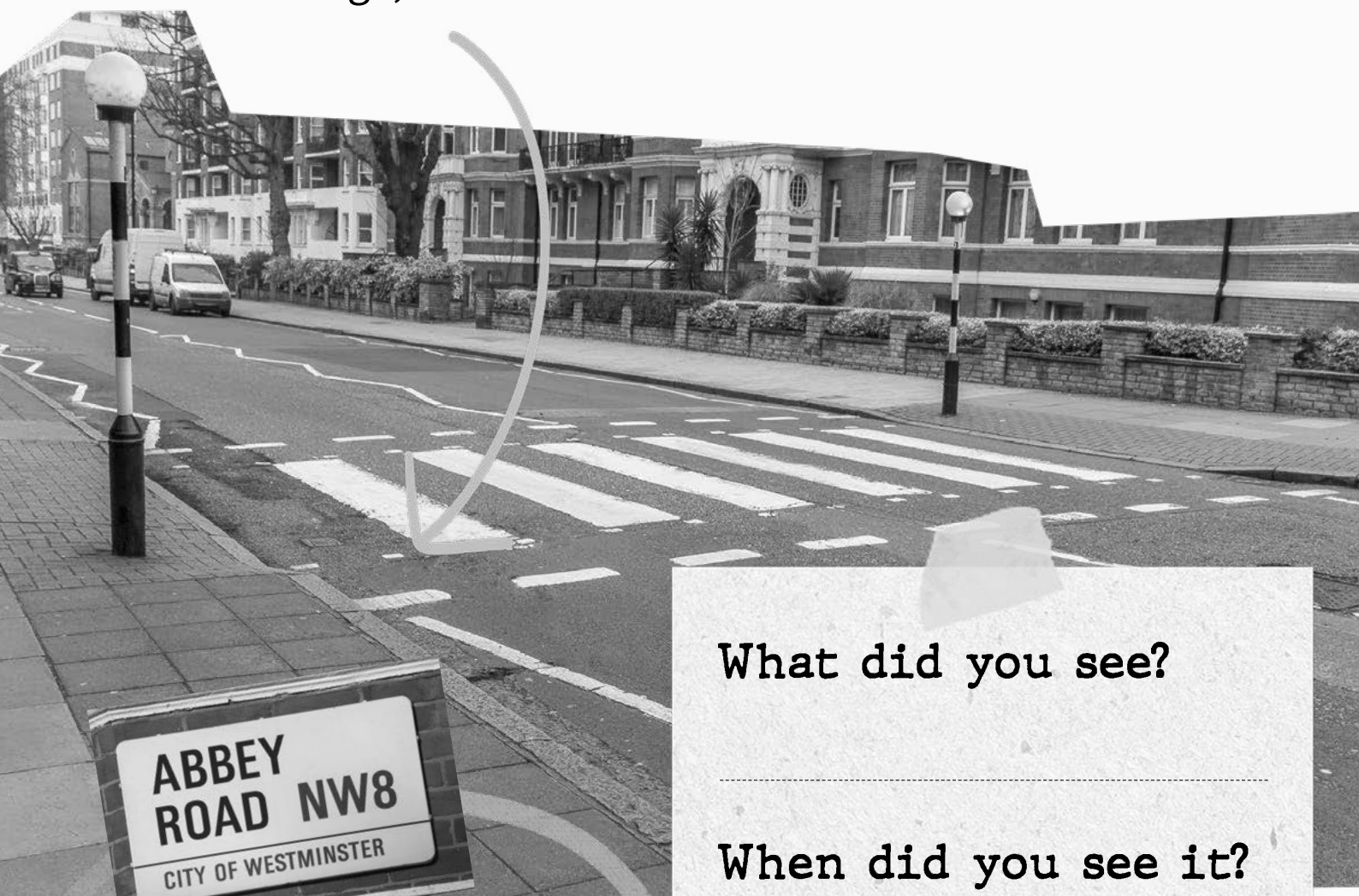
The next time you walk down the street, see how many kinds of pavement you can spot!



# Crossings and beacons

Crossing roads is something we all do almost every day. The first official crossings were installed in 1935, and the lights that accompanied them almost immediately became known as 'Belisha Beacons', after the Transport Minister who introduced them.

The painted white stripes, which led to the crossings becoming known as 'zebra crossings', were first used in 1949.



Abbey Road, in London, has the only listed road crossing. Do you know what it is famous for?

What did you see?

.....

When did you see it?

.....

Where was it?

.....



# Bollards and railings

Bollards have been used to protect people and buildings since the 1700s, from horses and carts in the early days to cars and lorries today. The first bollards were made of wood, before iron ones replaced them. In fact, old cannons were repurposed in many port cities and harbours — although most bollards were made specifically for the job!

Protecting buildings and pedestrians also required railings. Many, however, were removed during the Second World War to be smelted down and turned into guns and ammunition.

**What did you see?**

---

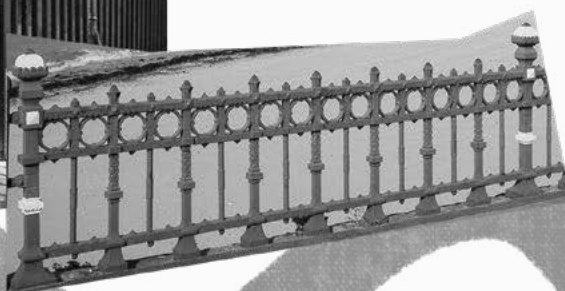
**When did you see it?**

---

**Where was it?**

---

**Have you ever seen  
a cannon bollard?**





# Fountains and water pumps

You can still find public drinking fountains and water pumps in many urban and rural places, especially in public parks. But did you know that many were originally intended as an important health intervention in the Victorian era? Introducing safe drinking water into communities helped stop the spread of the deadly illness cholera. The first drinking fountains were installed in Liverpool by Charles Pierre Melly, who had seen examples during a visit to Geneva, in Switzerland, in 1852.



Special troughs also provided drinking water for cattle and other animals on their way into market towns.

**What did you see?**

---

**When did you see it?**

---

**Where was it?**

---



# Street lamps and lamp posts



The first public street to be illuminated by gaslight was Pall Mall, in London, in 1807. The lights became increasingly popular and many different designs, normally made from iron, quickly followed.

The first electric lights were introduced in 1879, when 40 lights were put up between Westminster and Waterloo.

Outside London, Chesterfield in Derbyshire and Taunton in Somerset were lit by electricity from the 1880s.

**What did you see?**

---

**When did you see it?**

---

**Where was it?**

---



# Weather vanes

Weather vanes were originally used on tall buildings to show people on the ground which way the wind was blowing. Over time, designs changed and became more detailed — they often reflected local landmarks or legends.

What did you see?

---

When did you see it?

---

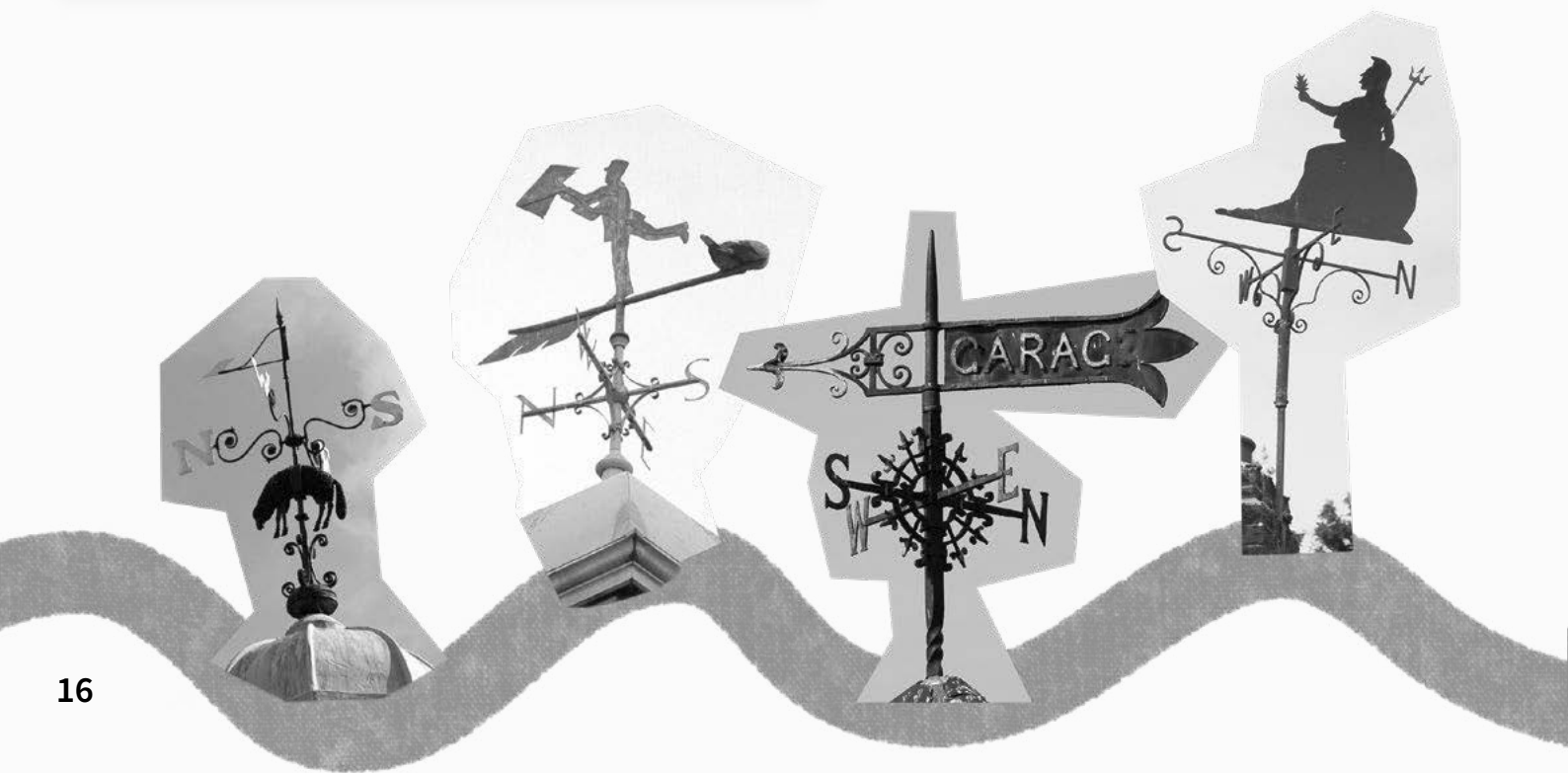
Where was it?

---



What unusual weather vane have you seen?

---



# Statues and sculptures

For hundreds of years, we have celebrated important people and events with statues and sculptures in public places. Sometimes a sculpture can tell you something about the past, sometimes it is just there for us to enjoy as a piece of art. Through our culture, places, stories, and rituals we pass down what matters to us.

What did you see?

.....

When did you see it?

.....

Where was it?

.....



What or who would you like to see a statue of in your neighbourhood?

What or who would you like to see a statue of in your neighbourhood?



# What have you found?

Once you have found an example of everthing in this list, you'll be a true heritage detective!

**Architecture through the ages**

☐

**Telephone boxes**

☐

**Royal cyphers**

☐

**Post boxes**

☐

**Road signs**

☐

**Shop signs**

☐

**Ghost signs**

☐

**Street surfaces**

☐

**Crossings and beacons**

☐

**Bollards and railings**

☐

**Fountains and water pumps**

☐

**Street lamps and lamp posts**

☐

**Weather vanes**

☐

**Statues and sculptures**

☐





# Certificate of Achievement

Heritage Detective

Date



# My special local heritage

Use this page to draw anything historic that you see that isn't in this book. Is it something special to your local area? Draw a sketch and take some notes to investigate later.



## This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal dashed lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting or drawing. There are no other markings, text, or illustrations on the page.

# Want to know more?

If you would like to know more, or have any comments or questions, please email

**Heritage.Schools@historicengland.org.uk**

If you you'd like to find more history and local heritage teaching resources please visit:

**<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/>**