

The Revival of the Radiator

**Paul Trace, Managing Director of cast iron specialists
E Richards, welcomes the comeback of the cast iron radiator**

The history of cast iron radiators can be traced right back to the early 18th century with America leading the way with their invention. Perhaps the earliest form of radiators as we know them today was invented by Joseph Nason and Robert Briggs (1863), their design used vertical wrought iron tubes screwed into a cast iron base. Soon after this Nelson H Bundy (1872) invented the 'Bundy Loop', a cast iron radiator which became increasingly popular and played an important role in the advancement in the birth of our modern day radiators.

The design of the cast iron radiator passed through many stages with continuous development, especially during the Victorian period when cast iron became a decorative feature. However, it wasn't really until the early 20th century that cast iron radiators brought central heating to Britain; in fact, very few properties had the luxury of central heating until well into the 1950s.

As styles changed, so did the popularity of radiators as the radiator was considered 'obtrusive' within a room. The marvel of a foundryman's art in making thin cast iron ornate radiators became a thing of the past, as enclosing radiators behind boxed grills and painting them to disguise them within a room became the new interior challenge.

Therefore we have now in fact gone full circle, as big bulky cast iron radiators with peeling paint salvaged mainly from demolished hospitals and schools have made a reappearance as a fashionable 'must have' interior feature. Today's trend of visiting salvage yards to buy reclaimed goods to restore Victorian and Edwardian interiors back to their original splendour has launched the revival of the cast iron radiator which now claims pride of place within domestic and commercial properties.

Reclaiming radiators plays an important part in gathering material evidence of our heritage. Many have been saved from the scrap man's crusher and been sandblasted back to their former glory. Reputable salvage yards are very good at testing the cast iron radiators for leaks and are pressure rinsed to remove any sediment. However, there is a common situation where reclaimed radiators do not fit within the room and their functionality is handicapped by either providing too much heat or not enough, therefore becoming a redundant decorative feature. Another consideration are the valves. Many reclaimed cast iron radiators come without valves, therefore the correct ones have to be sourced, which can prove problematic. Historical cast iron radiators were made at local foundries that also produced the valves. This means the correct valves have to be sourced back to the foundry, which in many cases no longer exist.

Although many restorers of cast iron radiators feel that modern replicas lack the elegance and quality finish of the originals, reproduction cast iron radiators provide design and heating solutions for both period and contemporary settings. An authentic look can still be achieved by choosing a cast iron radiator that is based on a Victorian or Nouveau design. An elaborately scrolled detailed design will complement any Victorian or Edwardian interior and look elegantly stylish. Another option is a traditional Victorian cast iron radiator as its smart appearance lends itself perfectly to a more contemporary interior especially a modern day warehouse or barn conversion.

There are a number of modern replica cast iron radiators available which can be used in conjunction with other radiators and forms of heating. Where the installation of traditional wet plumbed systems would be impractical or cause disruption to the existing building fabric, for example a wooden floor, ElectRads provide the perfect solution as they do not require any plumbing. These modern independent cast iron radiators have a heating element incorporated, therefore no pipe work is needed and they can be plugged

directly into a standard wall socket or hard wired into your electrical system. The ElectRad can be installed anywhere as it doesn't need to be attached to an existing system and has adjustable temperature settings (heating output up to 1.5Kw), including a 'frost protection' option.

One of the biggest advantages of buying a reproduction cast iron radiator is that they are 'bespoke'. Therefore, you can have as many sections as you wish according to the size of the room and also be energy efficient. Reproduction cast iron radiators also come with all the fixtures and fittings which can save time and money in the long run.

Whether it's a reclaimed radiator or a reproduction radiator careful consideration is needed to assess the room's heat requirements and where to position the radiator. Cast iron radiators are highly efficient, therefore spread and retain heat evenly for much longer periods than modern steel radiators. Although, traditionally an outside wall is the ideal place for installing a cast iron radiator, their revival as an essential stylish feature means it is perfectly acceptable to position a radiator to suit a properties layout and or even make it a centrepiece.

Therefore it can be concluded that even after two centuries the cast iron radiator has made a huge comeback, not only for its functional benefits but for its design qualities which continue to complement both period and contemporary domestic and commercial interiors.

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E Richards, founded in 1893 continues to be one of the UK's largest manufacturers and suppliers of cast iron, steel and aluminium plumbing heating.