



The evolution of the light switch – *A heritage feature*

One of the most transformative developments in domestic history occurred in the late 19th century, when homes were illuminated by electric light for the very first time. Until then, illumination came from candles made of beeswax or tallow, and later oil and gas lamps. While gas lighting offered a brighter alternative, it was far from perfect, with risks of explosion and the release of noxious fumes.

Electric lighting made its debut around 1880, initially as the preserve of the very wealthy. Early systems required their own generators and were often unreliable. It wasn't until after the First World War, with the establishment of the National Grid, that electricity began to find its way into the average home. For the first time, safe, clean lighting could be summoned at the flick of a switch.

With this advancement came the humble light switch. The first toggles were rudimentary, but they laid the foundation for all the systems we know today. From classic rockers to modern touch-sensitive plates, today's options still owe their core functionality to those original innovations.

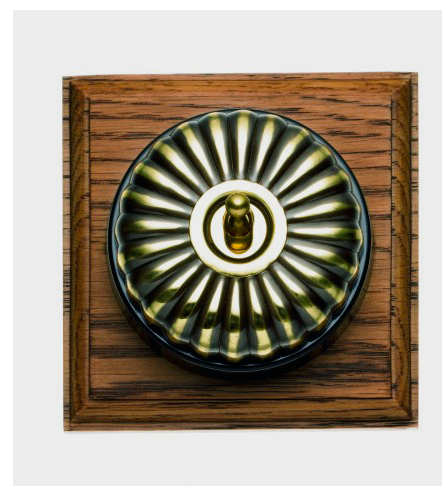
By the late 1800s, decorative switches started to appear, typically domed and often cast in beautiful metals. These designs not only

served a practical purpose but added a subtle sense of craftsmanship to a room (a quality still deeply appreciated in historic and listed properties today).

The Edwardian period saw the widespread use of Bakelite switches, which remained common well into the 1960s. During the 1920s and 30s, the fashion for streamlined interiors gave rise to flat-profile switch and socket plates in polished brass and chrome – a reflection of Art Deco elegance.

However, the late 20th century ushered in widespread change. Many original fittings were removed in favour of generic white plastic alternatives, often for compliance with new safety regulations. While practical, these fittings lacked the character and charm of their predecessors. Fortunately, in recent years, there has been a growing movement to restore the period integrity of interiors, with more homeowners opting for reproduction switches and sockets made to modern standards.

At Bromleights, we've spent over 30 years championing the return of authentic fittings – ones that honour the past while meeting today's safety and performance standards. Our Period Collection is at the heart of this mission. With faithfully reproduced toggle switches, 'jelly mould' dome designs and a variety of traditional plate finishes, it remains one of our most sought-after ranges for listed and heritage homes.



▲ **Top to bottom:**
A bespoke design plate finished in Aged Brass – featuring a combination of toggle and dimmer switches

Fluted Brass Period Switch on Medium Oak Pattress

Hammered Copper Dome on Medium Oak Pattress



◀◀ **Hand finishing a wooden pattress in our UK workshop for a Double Period Switch**

Each piece in the Period Collection is crafted from solid metals using time-honoured methods. These switches are not only historically appropriate but also highly functional – proof that style and substance can co-exist beautifully. Whether you're restoring a Georgian townhouse or breathing life back into a Victorian terrace, these fittings deliver Timeless Craftsmanship, Modern Elegance.

The Pendant and Pullswitch collection are essential details in sympathetic restorations. Pullswitches continue to be a favourite for period bathrooms where surface-mounted wiring is a necessity. Designed to complement wall plates from the period, they bring both practicality and authenticity to even the most challenging spaces.

Not all products are available 'off the shelf' and so for those requiring something more tailored, a bespoke design service allowing for complete creative freedom is required – from unique switch configurations and sizing to custom materials and finishes. Collaboration with architects, designers, and homeowners to replicate or reinterpret original fittings with precision and respect for the building's heritage is an option.

The small details matter in period properties – the switches and sockets we use every day should be as carefully considered as the paint colours, mouldings or flooring, with respect for the past and designed to meet the demands of the present, demanding authenticity, quality, and attention to detail.

From boutique hotels and historic farmhouses to stately homes steeped in literary and cultural history these traditional fittings have been selected for heritage restorations across the UK and Ireland, including privately owned period properties, sensitively renovated country estates and projects carried out in collaboration with conservation bodies and trusts.

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