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# A World of Unmentionable Suffering

## *Women's Public Conveniences in Victorian London*

Barbara Penner

*In this paper, I provide an in-depth analysis of a dispute that broke out in 1900 over the proposal to construct a women's public lavatory in Camden Town, using the often conflicting evidence provided by the St. Pancras Vestry Minutes, the St. Pancras Gazette and the Vestryman, George Bernard Shaw.*

*The aim of this paper is not to reconstruct one true version of the controversy; rather, it is to provide a detailed account of how the decision to build an everyday object such as a public lavatory for women was implicated in producing, maintaining and contesting the patriarchal power structure of late Victorian London.*

*Consequently, this paper considers the following two points: first, how the design and siting of a women's lavatory is not a neutral act but one that is shaped by historically and culturally specific notions; and second, how an everyday space such as a public lavatory actively positions (and re-positions) its users in relation to the existing power structure, providing an opportunity for small resistances to the status quo to occur.*

**Keywords:** feminism—Great Exhibition—water-closets—women's public conveniences—women's suffrage

## Introduction

England, and by extension its civilisation, has shown only too well that the master of waste and the warden of souls are one and the same.

Dominique Laporte<sup>1</sup>

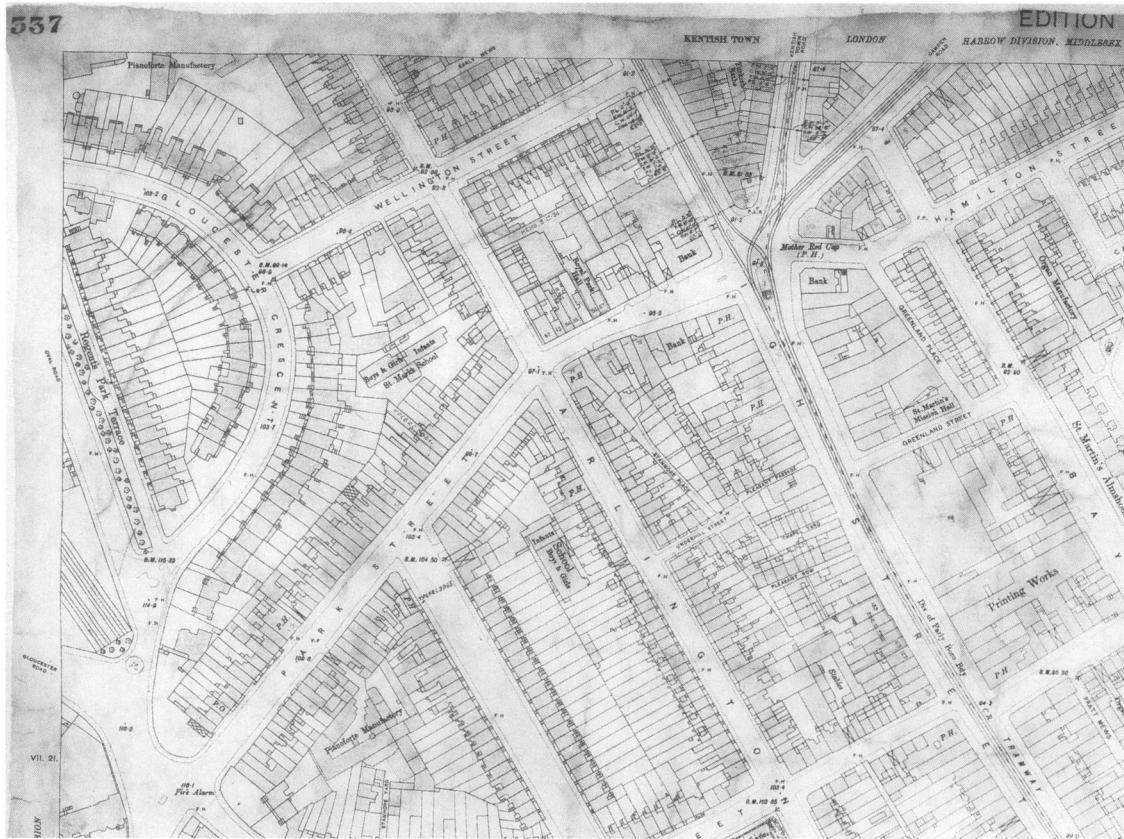
On 5 September 1900, a curious affair unfolded in the London Vestry<sup>2</sup> of St. Pancras. The Vestry received an influential deputation made up of omnibus proprietors and local residents, objecting to a proposal to construct a female convenience on Park Street, at its busy junction with Camden High Street [1].<sup>3</sup>

While the Park Street residents maintained that the lavatory would lower their property values, the omnibus proprietors argued more convincingly that it had already proved to be an impediment to traffic. The representative for the bus companies, Mr French, noted that a wooden model of the lavatory

erected on site by the Vestry had been hit an incredible forty-five times, causing several accidents and very nearly a serious casualty.<sup>4</sup>

The *Vestry Minutes* recount one history. Its authority, however, is challenged by another version of events, given voice by a Vestryman who served St. Pancras between 1897 and 1903: the playwright George Bernard Shaw.<sup>5</sup> In an essay written in 1909 called *The Unmentionable Case for Women's Suffrage*, Shaw recalls the alleged traffic difficulties this way:

[The wooden obstruction] brought about all the power of the vestryman over the petty commerce and petty traffic of his district. In one day, every omnibus on the Camden Town route, every tradesman's cart owned within a radius of two miles, and most of the rest of the passing vehicles, including private carriages driven to the spot on purpose, crashed into that obstruction with just violence enough to produce an accident without damage. The drivers who



**Fig 1.** Ordnance Survey Map of Camden Town, 1894–6. The disputed site is to the north on Park Street where it meets Camden High Street (between the Bank and Public House). Note the existing convenience for gentlemen in the middle of Camden High Street (opposite the Mother Red Cap Public House)

began the game were either tipped or under direct orders; but the joke soon caught on, and was kept up for fun by all and sundry.<sup>6</sup>

The absurdity of the scene Shaw describes is striking. The men Shaw accuses were not mere pranksters involved in a spontaneous joke but, in many cases, respectable members of the community, whose indirect yet determined opposition on this and other occasions ensured that the struggle over the Park Street convenience would drag on in the Vestry for another five years.

This paper proposes to investigate the various manifestations of the Park Street lavatory debate, drawing on the sometimes conflicting evidence of the *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, the accounts of Vestry meetings in the *St. Pancras Gazette* and the writings of

George Bernard Shaw. Its aim is not to reconstruct one true version of the controversy; rather, it is to provide a detailed account of how the decision to build an everyday object such as a public lavatory for women was implicated in producing, maintaining and contesting the patriarchal power structure.

Underlying this project are two central propositions. The first is that a lavatory is not simply a technological response to a physical need but a cultural product shaped by complex and often competing discourses on the body, sexuality, morality and hygiene. In other words, far from being neutral or self-evident, the planning of conveniences is informed by a set of historically and culturally specific notions that are loaded in gender and class terms. To cite an obvious example: prior to the modern industrial period, toilets were frequently communal

and mixed. It was only in the nineteenth century, with increasingly strict prohibitions on bodily display and the emergence of a rigid ideology of gender, that visual privacy and the spatial segregation of the sexes were introduced into lavatory design, and they continue to be its dominant features today.<sup>7</sup>

The second proposition follows on from the first and takes its cue from the work of feminist geographers such as Gillian Rose and Doreen Massey, and architectural historians like Beatriz Colomina: everyday spaces such as public lavatories do not merely passively reflect existing social relations and identities but are involved in actively producing and re-producing them.<sup>8</sup> According to this view, users do not have a universal response to spaces but experience them differently according to factors such as their sexuality, gender, race, class and age. Daily encounters with the built environment continually position people in relation to the dominant power structure, enforcing and reinforcing their differences. (Rose likens everyday space to 'an arena' where power relations are '(re)created and contested').<sup>9</sup> While power relations most obviously operate in everyday space through physical barriers and various forms of exclusion, as we will see, they can also work more subtly, creating invisible boundaries that shape experience in equally powerful ways.

If we accept the role of everyday space in shaping personal and collective experience, then the fight over the construction, location and visibility of the Park Street lavatory does not appear marginal or unimportant. Instead, we see such a debate as being necessarily political, invoking issues such as access and mobility, as well as a more complex set of social relations. On a basic level, as the Vestrymen well knew, the presence or absence of a female lavatory on Park Street sent local women a powerful message about their right to occupy and move through the streets of Camden Town. Moreover, by its very nature, the debate over the lavatory's construction contested prevailing cultural notions of privacy, decency and femininity, concepts which are not stable but are open to redefinition within certain, historically specific limits.

Although it did not represent a dramatic break with convention, this paper will argue that small struggles like the Park Street debate pushed against the boundaries of existing social concepts, allowing for a subtle, sometimes subversive, renegotiation of

their terms. As such, what seems at first to be little more than a local political clash over an everyday space deserves to be recognized as, in the words of Lisa Tickner, 'an integral part of the fabric of social conflict with its own contradictions and ironies and its own power to shape thought, focus debates and stimulate action'.<sup>10</sup>

## Of the necessity of latrine accommodation for women

By 1900, the time of the Park Street controversy, there was a veritable boom in convenience construction, with facilities being built throughout St. Pancras: on High Street, Tottenham Court, Prince of Wales, Fortress, Mansfield, Pancras and Kentish Town Roads. In fact, reading the *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes* between January 1890 and December 1900, one is struck by how often public conveniences come up in vestry business. The Vestry, whose jurisdiction contained 200,000 inhabitants, regularly dealt with a long list of convenience matters, from providing temporary urinals, to hearing complaints about existing ones or the lack thereof, and overseeing the construction of new permanent facilities.<sup>11</sup> Public conveniences were not insignificant investments for the council—the Fortress Road facility, for example, cost nearly £2,000<sup>12</sup>—and were frequently designed to be handsome public landmarks, equipped with ornamental wrought-iron railings and expensive marble and teak fittings.

This boom in construction was the result of several factors: first, by that period, local authorities had been authorized both to spend ratepayers' money on public amenities and to build underground; and second, because of the health reform movement from the 1850s onwards, there was a greater recognition of the necessity of providing conveniences, particularly to improve the cleanliness of London's streets. It was not only medical experts and sanitary engineers who appreciated their importance. Conveniences were welcomed by enlightened members of the public as symbols of progress, particularly on occasions where large crowds gathered: in 1852, describing the Duke of Wellington's funeral, Lady Stanley of Alderly was moved to exclaim, '200 conveniences are provided—how the world improves!'<sup>13</sup>

The most significant precedent was set when conveniences, designed and operated by George Jennings, were installed at the Great Exhibition in 1851. Mention of the lavatories was predictably discrete: the exhibition's official guide noted simply that 'Commodious refreshment rooms, with the accompaniments usually connected with them at large railway stations, have been provided.'<sup>14</sup> The conveniences were a great success; they were reportedly used 827,820 times, raising £2,441 over the course of the 141 days of the Exhibition.

Jennings was a fervent early supporter of public lavatories, believing the day would come when they would be a permanent feature of both large and small towns. Furthermore, he noted, 'the engineer who has the courage to carry into effect a scheme of this kind, in the interest of public health, will have established a lasting record of the wisdom of his age'.<sup>15</sup> However, even though such facilities were both popular and financially rewarding, their provision at public events was not guaranteed: during the Henley Regatta of 1886, for example, the *Lancet* medical journal revealed that thousands of watchers on the banks and boaters on the Thames had resorted to using the river as a latrine.<sup>16</sup>

Ameliorating the city's sanitary conditions was not the only benefit the publicly minded found in conveniences. Many also recognized the importance of ensuring that the populace could meet in and move through the city in comfort. The success of the Great Exhibition conveniences, for instance, prompted a declaration of the 'necessity of making similar provisions for the public wherever large numbers are congregated [to alleviate] the sufferings which must be endured by all, but more especially by females on account of the want of them'.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of facilities was a very real impediment to female mobility in the urban realm. Mary Vivien Thomas, in her autobiography *A London Family*, described how in the 1870s she and her mother would come by bus to shop at Peter Robinson's but could only stay for half-a-day: 'a morning's shopping was all we could manage for one day, for, strange as it seems now, the big shops had no restaurants, no rest-rooms, no conveniences for toilet, however dire one's need'.<sup>18</sup> This situation was made worse by the prevailing dress styles of the day. Despite the fact that dresses were considerably less bulky than in previous decades—the crinoline

had died out in 1860s, and the bustle was by then out of fashion—both working- and middle-class women's dress in the 1890s still included corsets and full-length skirts.<sup>19</sup> In addition to their corsets, women habitually wore several other pieces of underclothing: often a chemise and drawers, or a 'combination' outfit, with a petticoat over top [2].

In the absence of public conveniences, women who got caught short in public had few hopes of 'civilized' relief. While stowing a chamber-pot under the seat was practical for those women who owned private carriages, this was not a possibility for the majority who relied on public transport.<sup>20</sup> Many had little choice but to resort to relieving themselves in city back-alleys, a custom testified to by the presence of *Commit No Nuisance* or *Decency Forbids* signs in many London streets and yards.<sup>21</sup> Shaw also corroborates this practice, darkly referring to 'the world of unmentionable suffering and subterfuge' which existed for women in the 'little byways and nooks in the borough which [afforded] any sort of momentary privacy'.<sup>22</sup> In these cases, women were most likely grateful for the protection offered by their long skirts and for the fact (subtly obscured in most nineteenth-century fashion catalogues and magazines) that underclothing, drawers and combinations were left open at the crotch.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, buttons or fastenings on



Fig 2. Ladies' bloomers and 'combination' outfits, 1897

underclothes would have made going to the lavatory a practical impossibility for women.

From the 1860s on, however, women did begin to have other options. Some department stores, such as Seaman, Little & Co. on Kensington High Street, and restaurants such as Crosby Hall in Bishopsgate, introduced facilities for females relatively early on in an effort to win their custom.<sup>24</sup> Private companies also stepped into the void: in 1884, for example, the Ladies' Lavatory Company opened its first establishment on Oxford Circus (near Peter Robinson's).<sup>25</sup> Some women's organizations, such as the Ladies' Institute at 19 Langham Place (where the *English Woman's Journal* was published), also attempted to remedy the problem by providing a place where women could eat, relax and find lavatories while in central London.<sup>26</sup>

These facilities, however, were still inadequate in proportion to the demand for them. Moreover, they were mostly reserved for the use of paying customers, not for the ever-increasing mass of female passers-by who were either heading to or returning from work or a day of shopping. For them, the need for public conveniences had never been more urgent, a problem that did not go unnoticed by sanitation officials. James Stevenson, the Medical Officer of Health for Paddington, in his 1879 report *Necessity of Latrine Accommodation for Women in the Metropolis*, drew attention to the increasing numbers of women travelling into the city or to work. He observed, 'From recent returns it appears that there are 143,321 women enrolled in the trade societies of the metropolis alone, many of whom . . . have daily to walk long distances to and from their workshops.' Stevenson pointed out that these women were often forced to seek out a millinery, a confectionery or a restaurant 'and order refreshments which they do not require' to make use of the establishment's facilities: he shuddered at the thought that they might obey the calls of nature *sub frigido Jove*.

Joining a number of health experts who believed resisting the calls of nature could be fatal, Stevenson warned that abstinence posed a great health risk, causing or aggravating conditions such as apoplexy, and cerebral and cardiac disturbance. In addition, Stevenson hinted at the increased need women had for conveniences while pregnant or menstruating. 'There are,' he stated delicately, 'periods and conditions peculiar to the sex, when latrine accommodation would be specially convenient; and as at such

times the requirements of nature are apt to be more urgent and more frequent, women would be spared much unnecessary mental and physical distress, were the accommodation provided.' Concluding that the demand for ladies' conveniences would 'at length be impossible to resist', Stevenson also outlined exactly how to ameliorate the situation, including aspects of lavatory design, location, maintenance and finance.<sup>27</sup>

Stevenson's extensive report was written as a response to the Ladies' Sanitary Association (LSA) which, since the 1870s, had been actively campaigning local vestries such as Paddington and St. Pancras for the provision of women's conveniences.<sup>28</sup> Founded in 1857, with a membership that ranged from the Princess of Wales to Janey Morris, the LSA was a high-profile and vigorous group whose mandate was to enlighten the public on issues related to the general welfare and health of women and children. To this end, the LSA organized lectures and published tracts on sanitation, domestic economy and dress reform, and mounted campaigns to raise awareness about existing conditions which endangered public health.<sup>29</sup> Like its campaign to improve poor working conditions for female dressmakers and shopgirls, the LSA's 'lavatories for women' campaign was long-running and remarkably persistent though, as the LSA Report noted with frustration in 1881, the local vestries' response was often 'weak' and 'halting'.<sup>30</sup>

The LSA was not the only organization lobbying for change by the 1890s. On 21 December 1898, the Union of Women's Liberal and Radical Associations of the Metropolitan Counties, which claimed to represent four thousand mostly working-class women in and around London, wrote a letter asking that each vestry be obliged to provide one free water closet in each of their public conveniences for women.<sup>31</sup> And on two separate occasions, men addressed the Vestry as well, urging that the inadequate provision for women be remedied.<sup>32</sup>

While Stevenson noted in 1879 that women's conveniences were already established in Glasgow, Nottingham, Paris and other continental cities, the first permanent women's conveniences in London were reportedly built only in 1893 in the Strand opposite the Royal Courts of Justice.<sup>33</sup> By 1900, the year of the Camden High Street controversy, however, there were already at least two conveniences in St. Pancras, on Kentish Town Road and Pancras Road, which did provide accommodation for

women.<sup>34</sup> Overall, one might conclude from these facts that there existed a fair degree of public awareness of, even sympathy for, the need for female conveniences by 1900. However, as Shaw's anecdote revealed earlier, not everyone was so eager for women's lavatories to adorn London's streets and the expression of their disapproval took many forms.

## An abomination

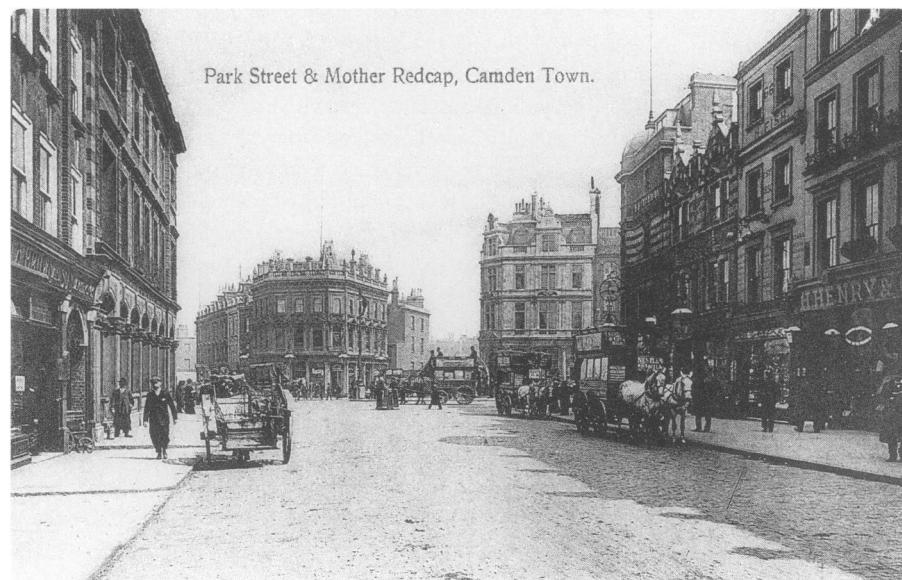
Owing to the fact that they were built by local councils, women's public lavatories in London are surprisingly well documented in official records. These documents provide us with a path into the Park Street lavatory debate and a glimpse of the women it was meant to serve. However, the *Minutes* shed little light on to the Vestry's attitude towards these women or their actual experiences. Women's views were in fact rarely aired through official institutions: few women served on the London vestries and they were banned entirely by the 1899 London Government Act.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the woman who was best situated to discuss female needs, St. Pancras' female sanitation inspector, was unable to report to the Vestry, for as Shaw explained, 'the subject of sanitary accommodation [was] one to which no lady should allude in the presence of a gentleman'.<sup>36</sup>

The fact that local papers such as the *St. Pancras Gazette* reported the proceedings of the councils in

great detail, adding the Vestry's reactions in brackets (i.e. laughter, applause, 'no, no', 'hear, hear'), furnishes us with a means of reading the official accounts against the grain for clues as to contemporary attitudes towards both lavatories and women. Through the *Gazette* a more complete picture of the debate begins to emerge, providing hints of the highly sexist sub-text and innuendo that swirled about the women's convenience debates but was never articulated within the *Vestry Minutes*. What follows is a detailed account from the *St. Pancras Gazette* of the debate that took place at the St. Pancras Vestry meeting on 5 September 1900.

Before the Omnibus Proprietors and Park Street Residents were allowed to proceed with their deputation, George Bernard Shaw moved that the Vestry not receive them on the grounds that, although the lavatory was a women's question, there was no woman on the deputation. Shaw was immediately overruled by the Chairman of the Vestry, Mr McGregor. His complaint was also responded to by Mr White of the National Bank who later observed to the Vestry that 'no man came on a deputation of this sort without his wife knowing it' (laughter).

Mr French, the representative of the omnibus companies, then stated that their objection to the proposed lavatory was that it would greatly increase the congestion in an already crowded thoroughfare and would endanger traffic [3]. He painstakingly



**Fig 3.** The busy intersection of Park Street and Camden High Street, c.1900. The wooden obstruction would have been situated near the bollards (opposite the Britannia Public House)

explained how only 16ft. separated the wooden model of the lavatory from the kerb and that, as an omnibus was 7ft. 9in. wide, this left just 9ft. or 9ft. 2in. for other vehicles to pass, despite the fact that many brewers' drays were 9ft. wide. Not only was this site a danger, Mr French concluded, it would 'certainly not be acceptable to ladies who constantly used the omnibuses on their way to shop in the West-End.'

Then the Vestry heard from Mr Tibbs, also representing the omnibus trade, who argued that Camden Town was 'not a place like Piccadilly and he was prepared to guarantee that 90 per cent of the women passing to and fro lived in the neighbourhood of Camden Town', implying that they could avail themselves of facilities at home. Mr White, representing the local inhabitants, confirmed the legitimacy of the omnibus proprietors' points and added, on a personal note, that he, like (he supposed) every member of the Vestry, 'did not want such a place under his own windows.' Finally, Mr H. Wakeley noted that the lavatory would 'spoil a most important thoroughfare and seriously depreciate the character and value of property in the immediate vicinity.'

After the presentation of the deputation, Mr Barnes, a Vestryman, moved that the Works Committee be instructed to find another site for the women's convenience. In response to Dr Smith's suggestion that a house in the vicinity might suit the purpose, Mr McGregor stated that he would investigate whether 'a suitable house for the use of ladies' could be found (laughter).

There was some dissent. The sole Vestrywoman present, Mrs Miall Smith, urged the Vestry to investigate the matter properly, asserting that a women's convenience near Park Street was desperately needed for the 'thousands of women and girls on their way to and from the factories of the district'. George Bernard Shaw expressed his fear that the matter was being abandoned altogether and chastised another Vestryman for calling the proposed structure 'an abomination'. Mr Barnes' motion, however, was carried by an overwhelming majority: the matter was referred to the Works Committee and the Park Street site was abandoned.<sup>37</sup>

In considering the intricacies of the *St. Pancras' Gazette*'s account, two points stand out. The first is that the members of the deputation clearly felt the proposed convenience's capacity to shock and offend was caused less by its function than by the sex of its

future users. While Mr French believed that the view of the Park Street lavatory would not 'be acceptable to ladies . . . on their way to shop in the West-End', he seemed to find it unremarkable that for years they had endured the sight of a gentleman's convenience at the very same intersection, without suffering any obvious ill effects.

The second point is that not one of the Vestry members attempt to deny the sheer volume of women in the streets. The women mentioned in the Vestry meeting, whether shopping or heading to work, were highly visible participants in the public sphere, going past the proposed site in 'the thousands' according to Mrs Miall Smith. The principal argument against the proposed lavatory was not that ladies had no need of it, but that Park Street was already too congested, a point which later prompted Shaw to ask: 'Does not so much traffic make lavatory accommodation all the more urgent?'<sup>38</sup>

What, then, underlies the deputation's objections? Reading through their testimony, one gets a distinct sense of their uneasiness not only about the sex but the class of the lavatory's potential users: the factory girls identified by Mrs Miall Smith. Mr Tibbs' statement, for instance, is a good example of how local residents attempted to deny the existence of a mobile, working-class female populace in Camden Town. Not only was Mr Tibbs' assertion—that 90 per cent of the women on Park Street were living locally, rather than travelling in from other districts—highly implausible,<sup>39</sup> but the implication that most women would have access to facilities at home was disingenuous at best. Only middle- and upper-class residences of this period were regularly equipped with water-closets and baths: despite the recommendations of prominent health reformers such as Edwin Chadwick, working-class housing would not regularly enjoy such facilities until the 1920s, relying instead on chamber pots, outdoor privies and common urinals.<sup>40</sup>

Taken as a whole, the deputation's comments reveal how the issue of class, along with its attendant connotations of decency and morality, was embedded in the Park Street debate. It also reveals how misleading it is to speak of 'women's needs' as a unified entity, as it is evident that the needs of working-class women and 'ladies who shop' were not considered to be the same. Indeed, far from being universal, women's needs during this period appear highly

contingent, fissured by social distinctions and fractured by class, a point which another, parallel debate over lavatory charges makes even more strikingly.

## A prohibitive charge

Three years before the Camden High Street debate, another major controversy erupted around women's lavatories, this time over the subject of free accommodation. Public lavatories, like public baths and washhouses, were built mainly for the use of the working-classes.<sup>41</sup> While men were able to use urinals at no cost and paid a penny only if they needed to use a water closet, women were charged one penny every time, which, as Shaw correctly observed, was an 'absolutely prohibitive charge for a poor woman'.<sup>42</sup>

The penny charge was the legacy of Jennings, who had charged this amount for use of his water-closets at the Great Exhibition (this is reputedly also the origin of the expression to 'spend a penny'). The controversy over free accommodation for women points to a tension between the competing imperatives of public service and profit that underlay the vestries' management of public lavatories. While the vestries did not look at the conveniences necessarily as a money-making venture, they were clearly not meant to 'become an infliction in any degree on the ratepayer'.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes conveniences did report profits—those at Waterloo, Cannon Street and Charing Cross stations were particularly lucrative—but rarely in poor neighbourhoods. In addition, contractors occasionally ran facilities, paying all water charges, attendants, lighting and so on, in exchange for users' fees. The financial necessity that these facilities made money, or at least broke even, meant that these conveniences were never truly public. Instead, they adopted practices which, as the Union of Women's Liberal and Radical Associations recognized in their 1898 petition for free provision, inherently discriminated against women, particularly poor ones. These policies ranged from charging for the use of a water-closet to providing fewer facilities for women.

James Stevenson anticipated this problem in his unbuilt design for a female lavatory in 1879. As a preventive measure, he recommended creating two classes of female lavatory accommodation—first and second. These two classes would be physically separated from each other, demarcated by their own sign

and entrance. The second-class closets were to be free, while the first-class closets, which would be considerably more elaborate, would be paying. Stevenson initially justified the spatial segregation of the facilities by stating that it was only reasonable to offer finer accommodation to those who intended to pay directly for it. His subsequent comments, however, reveal a powerful social motive as well. He stated: 'women of the middle class will not be willing to company, for however short a time, with a promiscuous crowd, even of their own sex'.<sup>44</sup> Underpinning his proposed segregation of the lavatories by class as well as sex was a strong desire to prevent the mixing of the classes and to reinforce existing social relations.

A more radical proposal to get around the penny charge was for the installation of 'urinettes' [4]. Smaller than conventional water-closets, with curtains instead of doors (hence less acoustical privacy), they were automatically flushed like men's urinals. Although a halfpenny was to be charged for their use, the unnamed vestry which installed urinettes as an

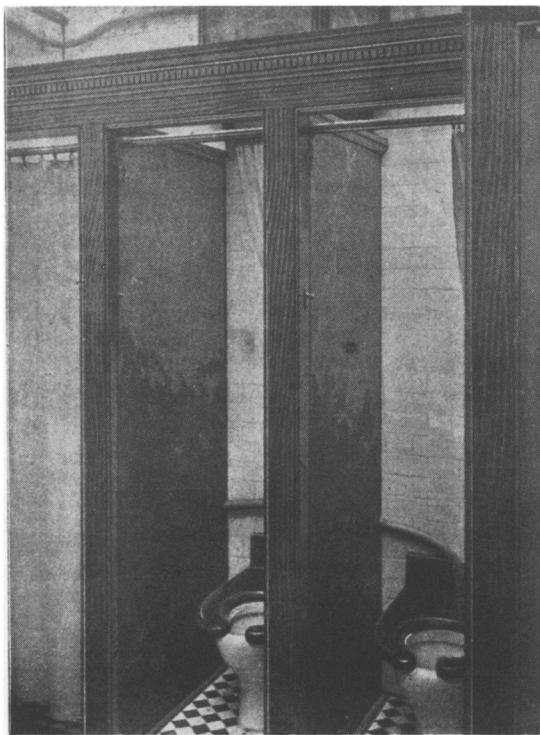


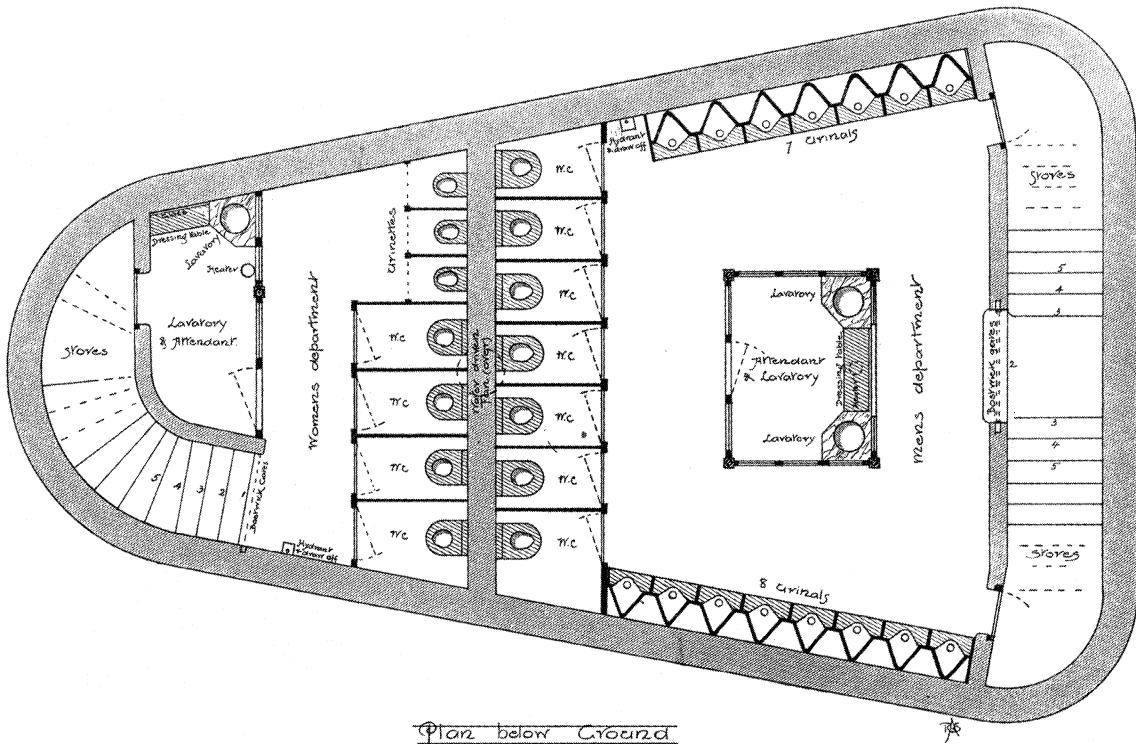
Fig 4. Photograph of urinettes installed in an unnamed London Vestry, c.1898. Note the use of curtains instead of doors

experiment gave the attendant permission to allow some people to use conveniences for free, generously recognizing that poor people have, 'the same calls of nature as those of us who can afford to pay for the convenience provided'—an enlightened stance for the day.<sup>45</sup>

Looking at the ground plan for the convenience with urinettes, one is struck by a strangely familiar sight: while the women's side is equipped with four water-closets, three urinettes and one lavatory, the men's side has seven water-closets, fifteen urinals and two lavatories [5]. This asymmetry was no accident but was standard in conveniences at this time [6]. The successors to George Jennings' firm, George B. Davis and Frederick Dye, explained in their 1898 work *A Complete and Practical Treatise upon Plumbing* that the problem was that women often did not make use of their side, with the consequence that conveniences for 'the weaker sex' were 'more often failures, financially and practically, than a success'. Men made frequent use of their side, making them ultimately more profitable. Consequently, Davis and

Dye praised plans which give less space to women's facilities than to men's, observing that 'with the scanty appreciation such places receive' more were not necessary. They went so far as to recommend that a building be arranged so that if women did not use their side, the whole could be easily converted into a men's-only facility (and gave precise directions as to how this could be done with minimum expense and trouble).<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, private contractors, vestries and ratepayers regarded the issue of providing free accommodation or an equal number of places for women as a potential drain on their revenue. However, the St. Pancras Vestry did agree in July 1897 to provide one free water-closet in all existing women's lavatories for a trial period of six months, despite the fear of Mr Fitzroy Dell that the water supply would be used by flower and watercress girls to freshen up their violets and watercress.<sup>47</sup> At the end of the six months, however, the free place was abolished. Shaw's letters at the time reflected his anger and disgust. On 27 April 1898, he wrote:



**Fig 5.** Plan of gentlemen's and ladies' convenience. The ladies' side (on the left) includes urinettes

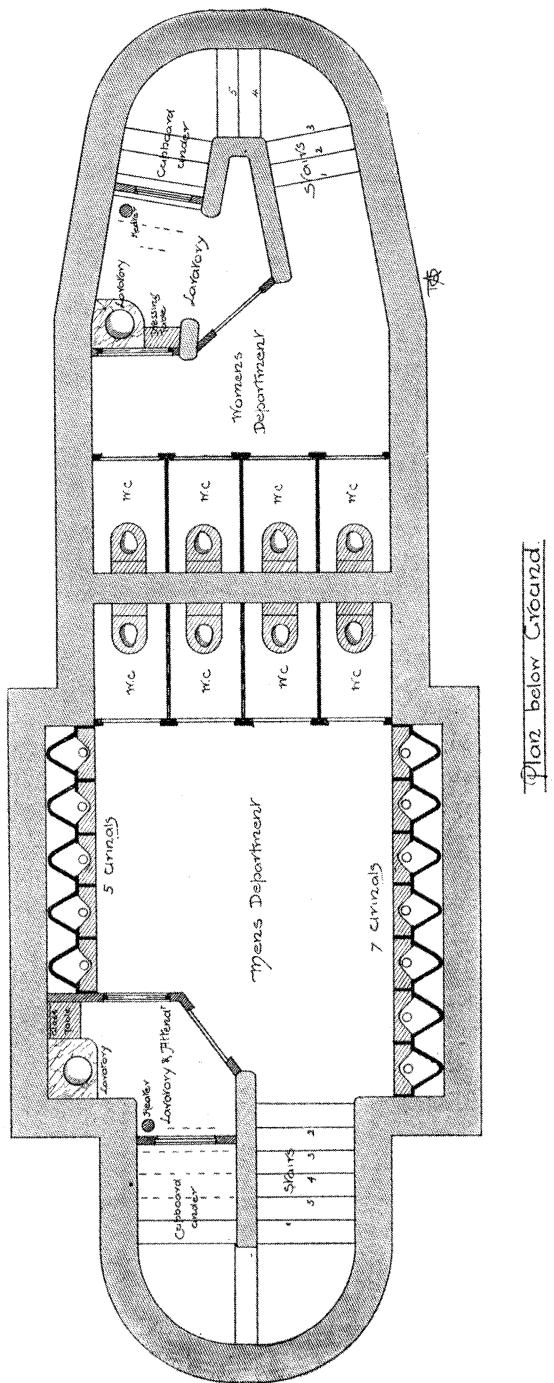


Fig 6. Plan of gentlemen's and ladies' convenience

Fearful trials at Vestry . . . One particularly fearful business over a resolution to stop free accommodation for women in sanitary conveniences. I move amendment [to continue free closet]. J. W. Dixon, a pillar of the Church, rises in saintly majesty, and says my remarks are disgusting. Then says Mrs. Phillimore has behaved indecently in seconding me. Chairman [W. H. Matthews], much ashamed, rebukes him & he collapses . . . I sit amiably & feel that I must soon unmask my guns & begin to fight the vestry.<sup>48</sup>

On 7 May 1898, Shaw reports to Sidney Webb:

[I have] at last thrown off the mask and attacked it [the Vestry] in print . . . The thing goes like this. Cunningham Graham writes a letter to the [Daily] Chronicle raising the question whether, as a dramatist, I am a pupil of Ibsen or De Maupassant. I reply with a long letter, shewing that the real force which influences me is the attitude of the St. Pancras Vestry on the question of providing free sanitary accommodation for women. This gives considerable piquancy to the correspondence, and had a most subduing effect on the Vestry.<sup>49</sup>

Shaw, like Stevenson before him, clearly relished his role as champion for the female cause. In fact, Shaw's representation of the situation—and his role in it—merits analysis because, in its own way, it is as revealing as the reactions of the more conservative Vestry members.

By the 1890s, as we have seen, there was actually a limited acceptance of the need for women's facilities and women (such as Mrs Miall Smith and Mrs Phillimore) and women's organizations (such as the LSA) played a key role in campaigning for them. Shaw, however, represents himself as a lone champion, speaking of his desire to 'unmask his guns' and 'fight' and 'attack' his opponents in the Vestry on the behalf of suffering masses of women.<sup>50</sup> This portrayal in turn is picked up later by others who, ignoring the role played by other Vestrymen and women's groups, praise Shaw as 'a pioneer in providing lavatories for women'.<sup>51</sup>

The use of the word 'pioneer' immediately signals the larger game afoot. As Judith Walkowitz has noted, the metaphor of discovery often characterized the narratives of Victorian urban explorers such as Charles Dickens or Henry Mayhew, who used it to transform 'the territory of the London poor into an alien place, both exciting and dangerous'.<sup>52</sup> After reading Shaw's descriptions, it becomes evident that the unknown, alien territory he considers himself to

be charting is the female body—particularly the poor, lower-class body—with its unmentionable functions and needs which he claimed ‘no man ever thought of’.<sup>53</sup>

Shaw’s description, as much as those of the more conservative Vestrymen or the men of the deputation, effectively secured women in their place as Other, by defining them rigidly in relation to the dominant male identity. All the while he offers proof of female suffering at the hands of a paternalistic political system, he naturalizes their status by emphasizing the distinction between his (privileged) position as a male Vestryman and that of the largely disenfranchised women for whom he speaks. The women, whose letters he describes as ‘piteous, anonymous’, are seen as a silent mass with no names and no voices, powerless at the political level and undifferentiated as a social group.<sup>54</sup>

This is not to say that we should completely reject Shaw’s account, nor to deny its usefulness to this history. However, it is to recognize that Shaw’s testimony, far from being objective and removed from the dominant discourse, uncritically reproduced its terms, participating, however subtly, in the assignment of women to their subordinate position. It also indicates the pervasiveness of the Victorian ideal of womanhood, which not only infused the debates for and against the construction of lavatories, but often overrode the experiences and needs of its users themselves.

## The barrier of publicity

As Davis and Dye’s comments indicate, the reason why ladies’ conveniences were notorious financial duds, was not simply because poorer women could not afford to use them. The reality was that, far from being universally put to use by women, public lavatories were often shunned by them, whether out of fear, distaste or, as Davis and Dye put it, with no small degree of impatience, a ‘peculiar excess of modesty’ which often forced their closure.<sup>55</sup> The degree to which women had internalized the patriarchal system of representation, particularly the discourse of decency and femininity, can be roughly gauged by the sheer number of times this observation recurs. Their widely acknowledged embarrassment was why the St. Pancras Vestrymen could argue with some confidence that, if built, the Park Street lavatory

would occupy ‘too public a position and ladies would not care to use it for this reason’.<sup>56</sup>

There is something profoundly ironic about a public amenity being condemned for being ‘too public’. However, the sense of transgression roused by this excess of publicity must be understood in light of the lavatory’s intimate association with the female body, as the container of its natural functions: urinating, defecating and menstruating. Owing to its provocative corporeal associations, a female lavatory evoked the spectre of sexuality which, as Walkowitz has observed, encompassed a nebulous constellation of issues above and beyond sexual conduct itself: ‘dangerous sexualities [for the Victorians] had as much to do with work, life-style, reproductive strategies, fashion and self-display . . . as with nonprocreative sexual activity’.<sup>57</sup>

Sexuality was explicitly invoked when, after the Park Street site was abandoned, Mr McGregor promised to find a ‘suitable house for use of ladies’ as an alternative; the laughter which accompanied his remark makes clear what type of house the Vestrymen had in mind (a joke given extra *frisson* owing to the proximity of several ‘houses of ill-fame’).<sup>58</sup> The easy slip from lavatory to brothel betrays the most extreme prejudice of the concerned citizens, the Vestry and of women themselves: that, in using a public convenience, women would be little better than ‘public’ women, prostitutes, who exposed their bodies in the streets.

Certainly, as the condemnation of the convenience as an ‘indecent’ object or an ‘abomination’ signals, the objections to its construction had an unmistakable moral dimension. They implied that providing a lavatory would encourage a gradual loosening of the tightly maintained mechanisms of control which circumscribed women’s movements and behaviour—with potentially disastrous consequences for standards of decency and the ideal of femininity. It was not only sexuality and gender but class which underlay such fears. The complaints about the ‘promiscuous’ mixing of working- and middle-class female bodies which occurred in such facilities indicates that decency and femininity were defined primarily as middle-class attributes: mixing in the lavatories threatened the moral contagion of the ‘ladies’ by the factory and flower girls, auguring the former’s descent into vulgarity and corruption.

When lavatories were provided, the desire to

reduce an overt connection with women's bodies and prevent mixing affected discussions not only about the conveniences' location but their design as well. Often located underground without windows, protected from the 'public' gaze and, by means of internal partitions, from the eyes and ears of other women, the conveniences were meant to seal off and contain the 'unmentionable' secrets of the female body [7]. Other strategies of concealment focused on reducing the prominence of the lavatory's entrance, as it was in negotiating its threshold that women were most compromised.

Davis and Dye, for instance, enthusiastically approved of one design which obscured the entrance to the ladies' facilities, praising it as an ideal scheme for avoiding 'the publicity which is such a barrier to the use of those places by the opposite sex' [8].<sup>59</sup> This proposed building, while providing a street entrance to the men's facilities, eliminated the street entrance for the women's. Instead, the women's conveniences could only be reached through the ladies' waiting room, located at the end of a sequence of spaces which moved from the most visible and public (the general waiting

room, lobby and parcels office), to the semi-private (the ladies' waiting room), to the most invisible and private (the ladies' lavatories). This hierarchical distribution of rooms according to degrees of privacy, gender and class was not uncommon but was a well-established convention of late Victorian planning. Deployed in domestic, public and commercial interiors from country houses to schools to hotels, it perhaps reached its apotheosis in the elaborate sequence of ladies-only Club and Retiring Rooms which developed in department stores like Harrods and Debenhams a decade later.

In considering tactics aimed at containing the female presence, we are now treading on familiar academic ground. As feminist historians such as Elizabeth Wilson and Judith Walkowitz have convincingly demonstrated, by the mid-to-late Victorian era, increasing female (working-class) mobility was widely regarded as a potential threat to patriarchal order and a wide variety of strategies were deployed to check it: from the production of an ideology of separate spheres which aimed to confine 'respectable' women to the home, to the creation of laws aimed at regulating prostitutes (i.e. the 1864 Contagious Dis-

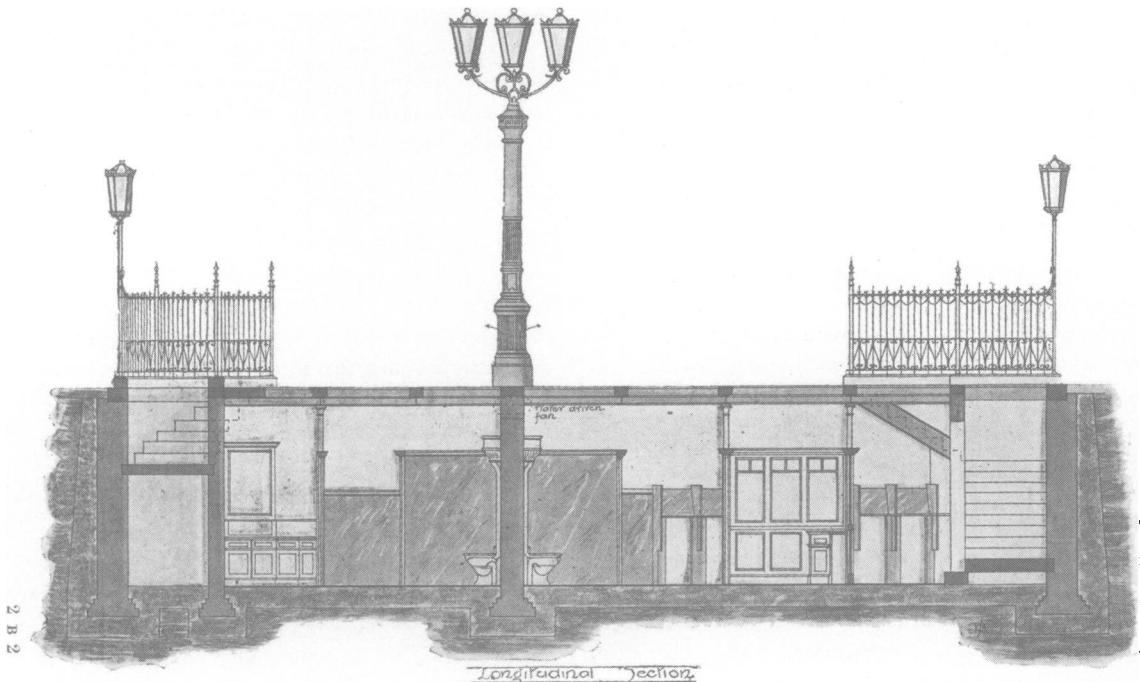
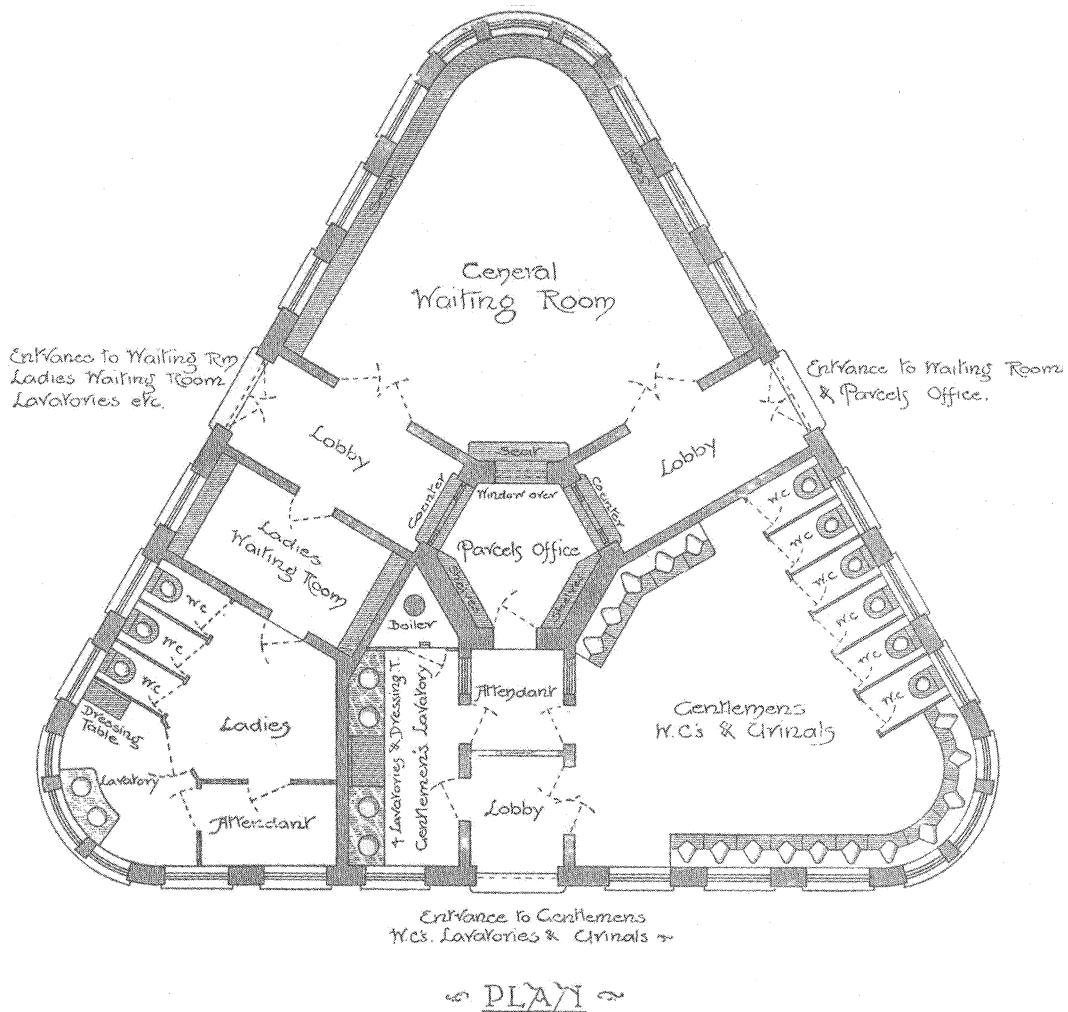


Fig 7. Longitudinal section of an underground gentlemen's and ladies' convenience. Note the ventilating fan lamp-post

## Women's Public Conveniences in Victorian London



**Fig 8.** Proposed Waiting Rooms and Convenience at Bristol by R. Stephen Ayling, Architect, c.1898

eases Act), which made all women in the city streets an object of speculation.<sup>60</sup>

Yet like most of these strategies and in spite of their careful design, lavatories were only ever partially successful at containing the secrets of the female body. At the edges, a reminder of things buried or concealed continually threatened to break through. For a women's convenience exposed female bodies at the same time as it hid them, amplifying their presence in the public mind. In addition to the conveniences' physical presence in the street, medical reports about their necessity, campaigns and political struggles for their provision and the press coverage of those struggles had the effect of making the female

body the legitimate subject of popular scrutiny. Far from suppressing the female body, debates such as that in St. Pancras gave it greater symbolic force, pushing it from the sidelines to an increasingly public and central position.

As this movement was not one that sat easily with the Vestrymen, local tradesmen and property-owners, or even with a large proportion of women, it did not go unchallenged. Indeed, this sense of discomfort and anxiety lay behind the passionate objections to the lavatory's construction and ultimately mobilized the attack on the wooden obstruction in Park Street—a symbol of the future lavatory and of women's presence in the metropolis—an

aggressive reminder, to the disorderly women who forgot their place, of who ultimately controlled the streets.

## Happy ending

On 20 December 1905, following an inquiry by Mrs Miall Smith and a report from the Highways, Sewers and Public Works Committee, the Borough quietly and swiftly agreed to construct a female lavatory on the Park Street site, bringing five years of stalling to an end.<sup>61</sup> The lavatory still stands in Camden Town to this day and, though shut for many years in the 1980s, has now reopened for the use of women, free of charge, a deceptively banal feature of everyday life [9].

While it is tempting to read the lavatory as a sort of early ‘triumph’ for feminism en route to suffrage, to do so, as Joan Scott has warned, is to dull the critical impact of its history, setting up a causal link between



Fig 9. Camden Town public convenience today, reopened for the use of women and free of charge

women’s experience and emancipation and neglecting the significance of other forms of difference (e.g. class) in organizing social identity.<sup>62</sup> In fact, perhaps the most useful aspect of this history is how it resists simple conclusions and categorizations. Far from being unified or universal, women’s experience during this period appears highly contested, split by class distinctions and intertwined with the ideological construction of Victorian womanhood. As we have seen, the latter not only permeated (and was perpetuated by) legal, political and social institutions, but was so deeply embedded in female identity that it often assumed a far greater authority—both on an individual and a social level—than the physical needs of women themselves.

In this history, then, women’s ‘experience’ cannot be tied directly to their senses, a transparent ‘reflection of the real’ from which knowledge springs; rather, the link between female experience and knowledge is shown to be constantly mediated by the dominant (patriarchal) system of representation. By rejecting the notion that female identity is the sum total of individual, visceral experiences, the way is opened for a more sophisticated understanding of how it is constructed by collective social practices and positioned by difference. In other words, an understanding of how the distinctions not only between men and women but between ‘ladies’ and ‘watercress girls’ were constructed, maintained and reinforced in late Victorian London, through individual acts, group protest, media coverage, local and national government action, and everyday spaces.

In the same way that ‘woman’ is not a monolithic, unchanging category, the significant concepts that play a key role in this story—the ‘private’, the ‘public’, ‘femininity’, ‘decency’—are revealed to be equally elastic. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams drew attention to the way that ‘nominal continuity’ of words often masked or obscured quite radical changes in their meaning, giving them a fictive stability. When we go beyond dictionaries, he wrote, ‘we find a history and complexity of meanings; conscious changes, or consciously different uses; innovation, obsolescence, specialization, extension, overlap, transfer.’<sup>63</sup>

Although the history of the Camden Town lavatory does not illuminate radical changes, it does demonstrate how meanings are flexible and contingent. To begin with, in the Park Street debate, the

meaning of particular concepts was clearly influenced by their speaker's position within the power structure and their interests: 'decency', for instance, did not encompass the same standards of behaviour for Mr Tibbs as for Mrs Miall Smith. The clash of these differing interpretations effectively amounted to an ongoing process of negotiation, in which the boundary separating seemingly opposed concepts (private/public, indecent/decent) was challenged and occasionally stretched to include new objects, spaces or conventions of behaviour. So, with the decision to construct a ladies' public convenience, the 'public' in Camden Town was suddenly expanded to include women, though in other matters (e.g. serving in local government) the 'public' continued to be defined as exclusively male. While not a major triumph for women, this shift in the definition of 'public' was a positive one, not only because it helped legitimate the female presence in Camden's streets but because it pointed to the fact that such changes could occur: small shifts in existing boundaries that could be embraced—or contested—in their turn.

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## Notes

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Some of the historical material discussed here was first broadcast in *The Ladies' Room*, a documentary produced for BBC Radio 4 by Just Radio in 1998. (For a short summary of the broadcast, see the review by Lucinda Lambton, 'At whose convenience?', *New Statesman*, 5 June 1998, pp. 42–3.)

1 Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*, trans. Nadia Benabid & Rodolphe el-Khoury (1978), MIT Press, 2000, p. 63.

2 At this time, London was made up of a 'patchwork' of forty-two vestries which were in charge of local governance. Vestrymen were elected by the ratepayers of each parish and were largely responsible for making decisions regarding local drainage, paving, lighting, repairing, the maintaining of streets and the removal of 'nuisances'. (Larger decisions concerning city drainage or Building Acts were the domain of the London County Council.) The St. Pancras Vestry's jurisdiction extended from Islington to Marylebone, Holborn to Hampstead.

- 3 *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 22, July–December 1900, p. 282.
- 4 *St. Pancras Gazette*, 8 September 1900.
- 5 For a detailed account of Shaw's six years in local politics, see Michael Holroyd, 'The political philosophy of Bernard Shaw and the St. Pancras Vestry', *Camden History Review*, vol. 21, 1997, pp. 2–6; and Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: Volume 1, 1856–1898*, Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 409–25.
- 6 Bernard Shaw, 'The unmentionable case for women's suffrage', in Lloyd J. Hubenka (ed.), *Practical Politics*, University of Nebraska Press, 1976, p. 104.
- 7 For an account of the increasingly strict rules guiding conduct and displays of the body, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process*, trans. E. Jephcott (1934), Blackwell, 1994; and Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, Faber & Faber, 1994.
- 8 The relationship between space, identity and gender is elaborated in Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press, 1994; Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Polity Press, 1993; and Beatriz Colomina, 'The split wall: domestic voyeurism', in Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space*, Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, pp. 73–130.
- 9 Rose, op. cit., p. 17.
- 10 Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–14*, Chatto & Windus, 1987, p. ix.
- 11 Urinals were frequently the cause of ratepayers' complaints. For example, it is recorded in the *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes* of 1 July 1891 that a deputation was heard from Reverend Woffendale, the Minister of Somer Town Presbyterian Church. Revd Woffendale complained that the urinal of the Shepherd and Shepherdess Public House adjoined the entrance to his church and caused much offence to the women and children in his parish. *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 4, July–December 1891, pp. 43–4.
- 12 A £2,000 investment would represent approximately £132,000 today. Robert Twigger, 'Inflation: the value of the pound, 1750–1998', *House of Commons Research Paper*, 23 February 1999.
- 13 Quoted in M. D. R. Leys & R. J. Mitchell, *A History of London Life*, Longman, Green & Co., 1958, p. 155.
- 14 *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, 1851, Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue*, W. Clowes & Sons, 1851, vol. I, p. 67.
- 15 Quoted in George B. Davis & Frederick Dye, *A Complete and Practical Treatise upon Plumbing and Sanitation Embracing Drainage and Plumbing Practice etc.*, E. & F. N. Spon, 1898, p. 172. Jennings, in fact, did attempt to be this mythical engineer: he proposed to build a network of conveniences all over London which he would maintain in exchange for charging a small fee. Although he did manage to install several urinals around London, his scheme was never adopted on a larger scale.
- 16 Quoted in Sir John Simon, *English Sanitary Institutions: Reviewed in their Course of Development, and in Some of Their Political and Social Relations*, John Murray, 1897, p. 467. After observing that the refuse from house-boats was deliberately dumped into the Thames, the reformer John Simon asked despairingly: 'What sentiment of cleanliness prevailed among the thousands who could thus deal with their neighbours' drinking-water, and among the millions who were placidly bearing the outrage, is a question which may be left for such future historians as will

- discuss the curiosities of English civilization at the close of the nineteenth century.'
- 17 Quoted in Duncan Crow, *The Victorian Woman*, George Allen & Unwin, 1971, p. 118.
- 18 Quoted in Alison Adburgham, *Shopping in Style: from the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance*, Thames & Hudson, 1979, p. 141.
- 19 Christopher Bewerd, *The Culture of Fashion*, Manchester University Press, 1995, p. 156.
- 20 For some examples of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chamber pots, see Lucinda Lambton, *Chambers of Delight*, Gordon Fraser, 1983. Perhaps the most spectacular example is Marie Antoinette's gilt-enriched Sèvres porcelain travelling chamber pot of 1758, p. 28.
- 21 Thomas Burke, *The Streets of London Through the Centuries*, B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1940, p. 133.
- 22 Shaw, op. cit., p. 104.
- 23 Thanks to Lucy Pratt and Rachael Church for assisting me in establishing this fact with reference to the V&A's collection of late nineteenth-century women's undergarments.
- 24 Elizabeth Wilson, 'The invisible flâneur', *New Left Review*, vol. 191, 1992, p. 67.
- 25 Adburgham, op. cit., p. 141.
- 26 Lynne Walker, 'Well-placed women: spaces of the women's movement in Victorian London', in Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro & Jane Rendell (eds.), *Strangely Familiar*, Routledge, 1996, p. 25.
- 27 James Stevenson, M.D., *Report on the Necessity of Latrine Accommodation for Women in the Metropolis*, Paddington, 1879, pp. 7, 11, 13–14, 21–2.
- 28 As John Richardson has established, wrangling over female conveniences in St. Pancras had also occurred throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In the 1870s, for instance, despite the urging of several doctors and the application of a company to build and run them, the Vestry refused to approve a plan for female lavatories, prompting a letter of complaint from the LSA in 1878. Richardson, *Camden Town and Primrose Hill Past*, Historical Publications, 1991, p. 61.
- 29 By 1891 the LSA claimed to have published over one hundred tracts on a variety of subjects and distributed nearly two million copies of them. *The Report of the Ladies' Sanitary Association to the Seventh International Congress of Hygiene and Demography*, Ladies' Sanitary Association, 1891.
- 30 *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Ladies' Sanitary Association*, Ladies' Sanitary Association, 1881, p. 5.
- 31 *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 18, July–December 1898, p. 777. A water-closet is an individual cubicle containing a lavatory.
- 32 *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 15, January–June 1897, p. 309; vol. 17, January–June 1898, p. 230.
- 33 Sue Cavanagh & Vron Ware, *At Women's Convenience*, Women's Design Service, 1990, p. 15. Thanks to Lynne Walker for originally directing me to this source.
- 34 Each convenience has an interesting anecdote attached to it. In the case of the Pancras Road convenience, the building of female lavatories necessitated the hiring of female attendants—not surprisingly, when two were hired in 1897, they were paid 18s. a week, versus the male attendants who were paid 25s. a week. *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 15, p. 965. In the case of the Kentish Town Road proposal, the deputation of Kentish Town ratepayers who protested against its construction argued that there was no need for it as there were already several urinals in the vicinity. How they imagined this would help local women was far from evident—thankfully, the Vestry moved to go ahead with construction. *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 15, pp. 350–1.
- 35 The London Government Act removed the forty-two vestries and replaced them with twenty-eight metropolitan boroughs. While women were granted the right to vote (without a property requirement), they were disqualified from serving on the vestries (as they had been doing since 1894), according to Shaw on the basis that the House of Lords facetiously decided that a woman could not be an alderman. The borough elections first took place on 1 November 1900, which explains the presence of Mrs Miall Smith and Mrs Phillimore in the debates that follow. Christine Bolt, *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s*, University of Massachusetts Press, p. 185; Holroyd, op. cit., pp. 416–17.
- 36 The St. Pancras Vestry did have a female sanitation inspector on staff who was hired to look into the conditions of factories and workshops which employed women. One of her specific duties was to ensure that women had adequate and clean lavatory provision (often they had none). Miss O'Kell, the female inspector in St. Marylebone, made 2,122 inspections in 1900, for instance, and checked the female public conveniences two to three times a week to ensure their cleanliness. While few people were better situated to discuss female needs, however, the female sanitation inspector was nearly invisible at vestry meetings: Shaw felt that had it not been for her name on the salary-list, he never would have known of her existence at all. He commented: 'The exclusion of women from the Borough Council left the inspectress in a difficult position. The barrier of the unmentionable arose between her and members of the Health Committee. It was all the higher because the inspectress was generally an educated woman of university rank, not at all conversant with the sort of local tradesman who regards the subject of sanitary accommodation as one to which no lady should allude in the presence of a gentleman.' Shaw, op. cit., p. 105.
- 37 *St. Pancras Gazette*, 8 September 1900.
- 38 *St. Pancras Gazette*, 21 December 1901.
- 39 Camden Town at this time was an active and busy thoroughfare, a shopping, business and trade district well serviced by trams and the North London Line train. For a detailed description of Camden Town businesses, shops and transport links, see Richardson, op. cit., pp. 53, 99–116, 121.
- 40 The author of the first Public Health Act (1848), Edwin Chadwick recommended that all outdoor privies and cesspools be replaced by water-closets. Under his influence, Henry Roberts' 'Model Houses for Four Families' on display at the 1851 Great Exhibition provided each flat with its own water-closet. His precedent, however, took many years to catch on. Adrian Forty notes that, while bathrooms began to appear in all new homes subsidized by the state in 1919, bathrooms were not widely standard in working-class homes home until about 1930. Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire*, Thames & Hudson, 1986, p. 167.
- 41 That these public facilities were part of a general effort to enlighten the masses about personal hygiene is made clear by the title of Jasper Roger's 1857 book, *Facts and Fallacies of the Sewerage System of London . . . Pointing out the Necessity for Public Lavatories, Closets etc. etc. as the First Step Towards the Moral*

*Advancement of the Lower Classes.* The first step towards their 'moral advancement', however, had already been taken with the 1846 Baths and Washhouses Act, which was intended to provide bathing and laundry facilities for London's urban poor. The campaign seemed only partially successful so that in 1899 A. Tiltman was still able to complain that there were still many members of the lower class who seemed unconvinced of 'the necessity and benefits of the bathing habit'. A. Hessel Tiltman, 'Public baths and washhouses', *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal*, vol. 6, 1899, p. 170.

42 Shaw, op. cit., p. 103.

43 Davis & Dye, op. cit., p. 172.

44 Stevenson, op. cit., p. 19.

45 Davis & Dye, op. cit., p. 185

46 Ibid., pp. 171–2, 182.

47 Supposedly his assertion was met with laughter and shouts of 'Nonsense!' and Shaw went on suggest (to much laughter) that this was one of the best reasons why the lavatories should be free. Quoted in David Thomson, *In Camden Town*, Hutchinson, 1983, p. 214.

48 Quoted in Dan H. Laurence (ed.), *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters, 1898–1910*, Max Reinhardt, 1972, pp. 37–8.

49 Ibid., p. 40.

50 Ibid., pp. 37–8.

51 R. F. Rattray quoted in John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw: His Life, Works and Friends*, Constable & Company Ltd., 1956, p. 352.

52 Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London*, Virago Press, 1992, pp. 18–19.

53 Shaw, op. cit., p. 104.

54 Katherine Kelly has drawn attention to the fact that, despite the

popular perception that Shaw shared the political stance of progressive feminists, Shaw's relationship to feminism, like that of many avant-garde intellectuals of his day, was actually quite ambivalent. While he did write plays, essays and letters and gave speeches in support of feminist issues, his statements often revealed profound scepticism about the aims of the suffrage movement and the political necessity of the female vote. Katherine E. Kelly, 'Shaw on woman suffrage: a minor player on the petticoat platform', in Bernard F. Dukore (ed.), 1992: *Shaw and the Last Hundred Years*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, p. 71.

55 Davis & Dye, op. cit., pp. 171, 185. Their statements are borne out by the fact that the Ladies' Lavatory Company at Oxford Circus failed because 'ladies feared to be seen entering' it. Adburgham, op. cit., p. 141.

56 *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 22, p. 282.

57 Walkowitz, op. cit., p. 6.

58 These houses of ill-fame were located just a mile away, clustered in streets like Warren Street off Tottenham Court Road. Holroyd, op. cit., p. 413.

59 Davis & Dye, op. cit., p. 182.

60 Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, University of California Press, 1991.

61 *St. Pancras Vestry Minutes*, vol. 10, July–December 1905, pp. 656, 660, 840, 895.

62 Joan W. Scott, 'The evidence of experience', in James Chandler et al. (eds.), *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 368, 382.

63 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Fontana Press (1976), 1988, p. 17.