

The Provision of Underground Public Conveniences in London with Reference to Gender Differentials, 1850s-1980s

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Contents

	Page
Title Page	1
Contents	2
List of Abbreviations	4
List of Figures and Tables	5
Acknowledgements	7
Introduction	8
Chapter One: Background	15
Early Modern Toilet Facilities in London	15
First Underground Public Toilets	18
Drive to Civilization	20
Chapter Two: Women in the City	22
Women's Work in the City	24
Lack of Provisions in the Workplace	27
Perception of Women in Public Space	28
Voices for Women's Conveniences	29
Chapter Three: Location	31
1890s City of London Reports	31
Facilities for Women	33
Case Study (Part I): Holborn Underground Public Conveniences	36
Cost of Construction	38
Underground	40
Chapter Four: Architecture	42
Case Study (Part II): Holborn Underground Public Conveniences	44
Civic Pride	45
Sanitation – Hand Washing	46
Materials	47
Gendered Space	47
Chapter Five: Gendered Economics	50
Charging for Use	50
Unequal Charges for Men and Women	52
Urinettes	55
Chapter Six: Twentieth Century Developments	57
Provisions Post-WWI	57
Public Versus Private Provision	59

Closures	61
Conclusion	65
<i>Bibliography</i>	67

List of Abbreviations

BMJ	British Medical Journal
CAC	Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre
LCC	London County Council
LGL	City of London Guildhall Library
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MOL	Museum of London Archives
RSA	Royal Society of Arts

List of Figures and Tables

Figures	Page
Cover A London Underground Public Convenience, Circa 1900, with Cast-iron Railings Source: R. Kilroy, <i>The Compleat Loo: A Lavatorial Miscellany</i> (London, 1984), p. 2.	
0.1 Disused Underground Public Convenience, Rosebery Avenue at Clerkenwell Source: Author	8
2.1 City of London: Population, 1866-1981 Source: Figures from R.C. Michie, <i>The City of London: Continuity and Change, 1850-1990</i> (Houndsmills, 1992), p. 14.	22
2.2 Women at Work in the City, in the Post Office Central Telephone Exchange Source: H. Thompson, <i>In the Post Office Central Telephone Exchange (St. Paul's Churchyard): Receiving Calls</i> , 2012, Photograph, Dictionary of Victorian London, Web, 01 Sep 2012 < http://www.victorianlondon.org/communications/telephonedescription.htm >.	25
3.1 Map of City of London Underground Public Conveniences in 1895 Source: LMA CLA/006/AD/07/025/005, D.J., 'Report to the Streets Committee of the Honourable the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London, on the Subject of Providing Underground Conveniences' (London, 1895), n.p.	32
3.2 Location of Holborn Underground Public Conveniences for Men and Women Source: Corporation of the City of London, <i>Ten Years Growth of the City of London: Report ... With the Results of the Day-census, 1891</i> (London, 1891), n.p.	37
4.1 Eastcheap Underground Public Conveniences, City of London Source: Anon., <i>File:Public Toilets, Gracechurch Street - geograph.org.uk - 571127.jpg</i> , 2007, Photograph, Wikipedia Commons, Web, 01 Sep 2012 < http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Public_Toilets,_Gracechurch_Street_-_geograph.org.uk_-_571127.jpg >.	43
4.2 Holborn Public Conveniences, City of London Source: Author	44
4.3 Cherubs on Holborn Conveniences Ventilation Pipe Source: Author	45
4.4 Plans for Holborn Underground Public Conveniences, 18 October, 1892 Source: LMA COL/PL/01/101/C/019, John Mowlem & Co., 'Public Conveniences: Holborn, Contract Plan' (London, 1892).	47
5.1 Coin Operated Toilet Lock, England, 1890-1930 Source: Anon., <i>Coin Operated Toilet Lock, England, 1890-1930</i> , n.d., Photograph, Science Museum Brought to Life: Exploring the History of Medicine, Web, 01 Sep 2012 < http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/objects/display.aspx?id=5938 >.	50

5.2 **Entrance to a Women’s Underground Public Convenience in London’s East End, Circa 1979. Note sign advertising “One Free Urinette.”** 55
 Source: M. Baldwin, *Taken Circa 1979 in the East End. What does a Urinette Look Like?*, 2009, Photograph, Picasa, Web, 01 Sep 2012
 <http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/VeV-gyo_-OB2dO1BttzClQ>.

6.1 **Map of City of London Underground Public Conveniences in 1980/81** 60
 Source: LGL Co co rep 1980 no 2, Planning and Communications Committee, ‘Report – Planning and Communications Committee: Public Conveniences in the City’ (London, 1980), n.p.

Tables **Page**

2.1 **City of London, Numbers of Workers on April 16, 1891** 23
 Source: London County Council (LCC), *London Statistics, 1892-93*, III (London, 1893), p. viii.

2.2 **Defective Sanitary Accommodation in City of London Workplaces, 1904-1906** 28
 Source: LCC, *London Statistics, 1905-06*, XVI (London, 1906), p. 182; *1906-07*, XVII (London, 1907), p. 186; *1907-08*, XVIII (London, 1908), p. 202.

3.1 **City of London Underground Public Conveniences at End of 1895, with Provisions and Opening Hours** 35
 Source: LMA CLA/006/AD/07/026/003, D.J. Ross, ‘Report on the Works Executed by the Honourable the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London During the Year 1895’ (London, 1896), p. 41.

3.2 **Top Inlets into the City of London: Traffic Totals over 16 Hours, 1891** 38
 Source: Corporation of the City of London, *City of London Day Census, 1911* (London, 1911), p. 108.

6.1 **1928 Public Conveniences and Urinals Provided and/or Maintained by Borough Councils** 58
 Source: LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, Public Health Committee, ‘Public Conveniences in London’ (London, 1928), pp. 14-15.

6.2 **City of London Underground Public Conveniences, 1968-1980/81** 62
 Source: LGL Co co rep 1973 no 3, Planning and Communications Committee, ‘Report – Planning and Communications Committee: Public Conveniences in the City’ (London, 1973), n.p.; LGL Co co rep 1980 no 2, Planning and Communications Committee, ‘Report – Planning and Communications Committee: Public Conveniences in the City’ (London, 1980), n.p.; LMA COL/PL/01/099/C/002, City Engineer, ‘Ordnance Survey Plan of City Showing the Location of Public Conveniences’ (London, 1968).

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Introduction

There are many traces of London's past hidden in plain sight in the city's modern urban landscape. These include obsolete coal hole covers in pavements, disused water troughs for cattle and horses on roadsides, and slender black wrought iron cones, formerly used to extinguish torches, by Georgian terraced houses. Amongst the most iconic items of London street furniture are underground public conveniences. These concealed spaces, in both prominent and out-of-the-way locations, are evidenced by often remarkable ironwork. Derelict locations, such as those on Rosebery Avenue at Clerkenwell, give little hint of the site's former purpose (Figure 0.1). A flight of steps with a metal handrail may be seen, though, leading down to what was previously a lighted, well-appointed chamber fitted with water closets, urinals and hand basins. A particularly fine example on High Holborn was closed in 1978; felicitously, the Museum of London acquired the fixtures in 1980, and one of the urinals is now on display in its Victorian Walk.



Figure 0.1 Disused Underground Public Convenience, Rosebery Avenue at Clerkenwell
Source: Author

A consideration of these mostly Victorian and Edwardian artefacts, some of which are still in service, provides an unusual view into the life of the city and its inhabitants. The City of London, in particular, was a pioneer in the provision of underground public conveniences. As a bustling centre of commerce, facilities for public relief were a welcome addition to the streetscape and were heralded by government agencies as a positive step forward in sanitary reform. However, not all the public was catered to equally. The differential in sanitary provision for the sexes in the City, from the 1850s to the 1980s, may be examined through governmental reports and maps, newspaper articles and correspondence, and in the architecture of the facilities themselves.

Underlying this paper will be two propositions. The first is Penner's proposal 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.¹

The second is that financial considerations are at the core of the development of underground public conveniences and provision for women in the City of London.

These necessary yet sometimes derided facilities played an important if overlooked role in the life of women in the City, both in their provision and in their absence. Their ornate exteriors and substantial interiors, with stout wooden stall doors, gleaming marble and shining brass, are now regarded with nostalgia, especially as so many locations have closed. Beginning with a discussion of background information, this paper will consider the lives of women in the City in the late nineteenth century, location and urban planning aspects of underground conveniences, architecture and its implications, the gendered economics of administering the facilities, and twentieth century

¹ B. Penner, 'A world of unmentionable suffering: women's public conveniences in Victorian London', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 14 (2001), p. 36.

developments. By considering the City of London's underground public conveniences through the lens of provision for women, this paper will attempt to illuminate under-examined aspects of London's social history.

Scope

This paper will focus on the underground structures remaining in the urban landscape, as well as those which have disappeared but are traceable from archival evidence. The underground facilities considered will, by necessity, be limited to those constructed by the municipality, not those which happen to be below ground, associated with railways or Underground (tube) stations. Above-ground, cottage-style, facilities will not be covered. The geographic area of interest will be central London north of the Thames River, where there has historically been the greatest population, with a concentration on the City. The time period covered will be from the 1850s, when the first underground public convenience in London opened, to the 1980s, when many facilities were closed. Emphasis will be placed on the 1890s, when many City of London conveniences were constructed.

An initial aim of this paper was to compile an authoritative and detailed list of the location of every underground public convenience in greater London, past and present, and compose a master map, from vestry minutes, municipal reports, secondary literature, maps, plans, photographs, and so on. A preliminary database of over fifty was compiled, but the difficulty of ensuring accurate data soon surfaced. Locations, dates, and changing nomenclature were the most challenging details to verify. For example, Charing Cross Road (North) was also known as St Giles Circus. There were sometimes two separate facilities on the same street, such as at either end of Rosebery Avenue in Camden. Sites which had once existed had been bombed out or paved over, such as Circus Place. The same name refers to a site which appears to have been relocated, such as at Aldgate, and archival plans exist for facilities that may never have been built.

Further challenges are that street names have changed over time. A point of confusion on available maps is that some facilities had been renovated to accommodate both sexes, but then one of the sections has been closed so that the facility appears to be single-sex again. Records of facilities were encountered that may or may not have been underground. Much walking about London was involved, examining the streetscape for historical evidence.

A decision was made to focus on one area in London where sufficient records existed for analysis. Westminster and Camden were considered as there are many sites of disused underground public conveniences in evidence in both. However, the City of London was chosen for this study, as it is the home of the first underground public convenience installed in Britain, reports from early days of operation are available, and the City has several fine examples of street-level lavatory ironwork still visible.

Literature Review

A literature search revealed no comprehensive consideration of the underground public conveniences in London. However, there is a growing body of scholarly literature regarding public conveniences with respect to gender issues. Penner's pioneering 2001 article discusses the controversy surrounding the establishment of a public convenience for women at Camden High Street in the Vestry of St Pancras, to match that previously erected for men in 1890.² Greed's 2003 *Inclusive Urban Design: Public Toilets* is a foundational text which thoroughly examines the current inadequate provision of public toilets in Britain and provides possible solutions.³ Greed stresses the importance of public toilets in urban design, as integral parts of well-functioning cities. Gershenson

² Ibid., pp. 35-51.

³ C. Greed, *Inclusive Urban Design: Public Toilets* (Oxford, 2003).

and Penner's 2009 *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender* contains chapters from a selection of authors on topics including provisions in Victorian-era Australia.⁴ Stanwell-Smith has considered the status of public toilets in London 1890-1910 with respect to public health and sanitation.⁵ Houlbrook has studied the dual public and private nature of London's public conveniences, and their alternative life as a meeting place for homosexual men.⁶ Brunton's work has concentrated on Scotland.⁷ Little has been written on the City of London's underground public conveniences in particular, though, and their place in the lives of women.

Legislative Context

The City of London's public conveniences were originally installed to improve sanitary conditions, as part of a greater movement in London sanitary reform. Indiscriminate urination contributed to a foul environment whereby, according to the theory prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century, "people contracted infectious diseases by breathing the fumes generated by decomposing wastes."⁸ Thus it was smell, more than bacterial transmission, which was originally the concern. The facilities that did exist, urinals in particular, were seen as a nuisance: odorous, unsightly, and offensive to the Victorian sense of modesty.⁹

⁴ O. Gershenson and B. Penner, *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender* (Philadelphia, 2009).

⁵ R. Stanwell-Smith, 'Necessary nuisances: public health and the public toilet in London, 1890-1910' (unpublished dissertation, Society of Apothecaries, 2011), pp. 1-33.

⁶ M. Houlbrook, 'The private world of public urinals: London 1918-57', *London Journal*, Vol. 25 (2000), pp. 52-70.

⁷ D. Brunton, 'Evil necessities and abominable erections: public conveniences and private interests in the Scottish city, 1830-1870', *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 18 (2005), pp. 187-202.

⁸ M. Allen, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens, Ohio, 2008), p. 8.

⁹ Brunton elaborates on the establishment of underground public toilets as a manifestation of Victorian sensibilities. "Public urination and defecation involved the exposure of parts of the anatomy which were increasingly prescribed as private." Brunton, 'Evil necessities and abominable erections', p. 190.

Legislation pertaining to the provision of public toilets in Britain is thoroughly covered by Greed and Stanwell-Smith, but two significant acts should be noted.¹⁰ Firstly, the **Public Health Act of 1848** allowed local authorities to erect public conveniences at their discretion.¹¹ Secondly, writing in 1907, Jephson stresses the importance of the **Public Health (London) Act of 1891** in the sanitary evolution of London.¹² The removal of street urinals was of serious concern, and this Act included a provision which neatly provided a solution.¹³ By granting access to the subsoil under roadways, the Act gave authorities the opportunity to replace the existing urinals with new underground conveniences. The timing of the Public Health (London) Act explains why so many of London's underground toilets were built in the 1890s.

Sources

Information has been obtained from a variety of primary sources, including reports and minutes of local government authorities, contemporary newspaper and journal articles, photographs, maps, and architectural plans. One of the difficulties in finding information on underground toilets is vocabulary. Early facilities were referred to euphemistically as halting stations, waiting rooms, or withdrawing rooms. Later, if documents such as reports or minutes happen to be indexed, the subject may be listed under comfort stations, (public) (sanitary) conveniences, (public) lavatories, (public) toilets, etc. Then there is the ambiguity and misuse of the term "water closet," which originally referred to the particular sanitary fixture, not to a facility containing a collection of fixtures. Much of the primary source material available is accessible due to serendipitous survival. However, ample documentation exists from key periods to conduct a

¹⁰ Greed, *Inclusive Urban Design*, pp. 37-43; Stanwell-Smith, 'Necessary nuisances', pp. 1-33.

¹¹ J. Stevenson, *Report on the Necessity of Latrine Accommodation for Women in the Metropolis* (London, 1879), p. 14.

¹² H. Jephson, *The Sanitary Evolution of London* (London, 1907), p. 356.

¹³ Penner calls attention to an occasion in which a local minister, "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." Penner, 'A world of unmentionable suffering', p. 49.

qualitative and at times quantitative analysis of provision and attitudes, with respect to women's needs. Through an examination of these contentious though undeniably useful features of the London streetscape with respect to gender differentials, it will be seen that the City of London's underground public conveniences deserve their celebrated status as representative icons of London's past.¹⁴

¹⁴ Several London disused underground public conveniences have been Grade II listed by English Heritage, including those at Guilford Place, Kennington Cross, and Bow Road.

Chapter One: Background

Early Modern Toilet Facilities in London

Disposal of human waste has long been an issue in urban life throughout the world. A Roman solution was the communal public toilet, with waste emptying directly into an engineered channel of running water which flushed it away, as at Housesteads Fort on Hadrian's Wall.¹ London, with its large and concentrated urban population, presents a particular case. Before turning to modern sanitation, it is necessary to consider what designated facilities have been available to Londoners in public over time. The answer, up until the late nineteenth century, is very few. A building known as Whittington's Longhouse, featuring rows of seats for males and females, is known to have existed in the fifteenth century over a gully washed by the Thames.² However, Ackroyd notes that into late medieval times, "Public places ... were used more often than private spaces. Pissing Lane, later known as Pissing Alley, 'leading from Paules Church into Pater Noster Rowe', may be mentioned, along with two other alleys of the same name dating variously from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries."³ Later local government authorities installed urinals in strategic locations for men, such as the remaining (but non-functioning) late nineteenth century Grade II listed cast iron urinal at Star Yard, near Lincoln's Inn. However, street fouling still occurred, necessitating the posting of "Commit No Nuisance" signs in susceptible spots all over London, from Soho to Southwark.

¹ R. Kilroy, *The Compleat Loo* (London, 1996), p. 11.

² Greed, *Inclusive Urban Design*, p. 33.

³ P. Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London, 2001), p. 337.

What was the danger of street fouling? Into the nineteenth century, London had regularly suffered from cholera, typhoid, and other epidemic diseases, caused by a lack of sanitation leading to an infected water supply. Victorian sanitary reformers were beginning to spread what Allen succinctly calls “the gospel of sanitation: that cleanliness equals health, while dirt and disease equal death.”⁴ Furthermore, the reformers “were teaching the Victorian public to recognize a dirty environment and especially foul odours as sources of disease. Where there was smell, there was death.”⁵

The siting of public sanitary conveniences had long been a matter of concern, with respect to smell but also to sight. Writing in *The Builder* in 1851, “Quondam” offered suggestions for the location of “halting places,” implicitly referring to urinals for men, in London. He observed that “Common comment agrees upon the expediency of yielding to this requirement, and yet every inhabitant objects to the erection of fixtures in contiguity with, or within view of, his abode”⁶ Although Quondam acknowledged the reasonableness of householders’ objections, he argued for the benefit of established “resting-places” as they would “obviate many public abuses, tend materially to the health of the ambulant population, and relieve the peace officers of a most disagreeable duty.”⁷

Subsequent letters to *The Builder*, in response to Quondam’s article, reiterated the urgent need for public sanitary accommodation. Reasons for timely consideration included London’s present and increasing population, and “the accession of foreigners that may be expected this spring,” for the Great Exhibition, held over six months in 1851 in Hyde Park.⁸ “A District Surveyor” wrote in *The Builder* in January of that year that “one of two things must occur, i.e. either decency

⁴ Allen, *Cleansing the City*, p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁶ Quondam, ‘Halting places’, *The Builder*, Vol. 9 (1851), p. 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸ A District Surveyor, ‘Halting places &c.’, *The Builder*, Vol. 9 (1851), p. 64.

outraged or these proper and necessary appendages put up.”⁹ Another contributor opined, “if they [foreign visitors] do not find ‘halting-places’ prepared for them, they will scruple little to ‘halt’ wherever it may be convenient for them to do so”¹⁰

When the Great Exhibition was held, an event ultimately attracting six million visitors,¹¹ pioneering sanitary engineer, toilet manufacturer, and inventor George Jennings saw an opportunity to debut his plans for public conveniences. Initially genteelly referred to as “halting stations,” the (above-ground) facilities Jennings was permitted to install, for men and women, charged a penny per use, and earned a profit of £2,441.¹²

Other privately-run public toilet schemes were tried in the 1850s in London, in particular two locations set up by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). RSA archivist Susan Bennet recounts that “two experimental ‘public waiting rooms’ opened in February 1852, for ladies at 51 Bedford Street, Strand and for men at 95 Fleet Street, with an entrance fee of twopence. This facility was advertised in *The Times* three times a week for a month and 50,000 handbills were distributed. Unfortunately, the experiment was not a success, only 58 men and 24 women used the rooms during the month,” and the “waiting rooms” were closed after six months.¹³ Lack of use by men was likely due to the existing private facilities, such as gentlemen’s clubs and omnipresent public houses with urinals.

⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰ Necessitas Non Habet Leges, ‘Halting places &c.’, *The Builder*, Vol. 9 (1851), p. 64.

¹¹ R. Dennis, ‘Modern London’, *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume 3: 1840-1950*, ed. Martin Daunton (Cambridge, 2000), p. 127.

¹² D.J. Eveleigh, ‘Jennings, (Josiah) George (1810–1882)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. L. Goldman, Oxford: OUP, May 2009, 22 July 2012 <<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/56370>>.

¹³ S. Bennett, ‘The Society of Arts and public conveniences’, *RSA Journal*, in *The Amateur Casual*, “‘Spending a penny’: or the first public flushing toilets - open on this day in 1852”, *The Victorianist*, 02 Feb 2011, 09 Sep 2012 <<http://thevictorianist.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/spending-penny-or-first-public-flushing.html>>.

First Underground Public Toilets

Jennings's Great Exhibition public toilets were so successful, however, that he was able to persuade the City of London to let him install London's, and indeed the world's, first underground public conveniences in 1855, in front of the Royal Exchange. These facilities have since been renovated, but today's City of London-operated conveniences, accessed by the tunnels leading to Bank Underground Station, stand in the same place.

What did Londoners think of these first underground toilets? At the opening, the facilities appear to have been met with praise and great expectations, as evidenced by this extract from an 1854 poem by George Young:

I'front the Royal Exchange and Underground,
Down Gleaming walls of porc'lain flows the sluice
That out of sight decants the Kidney Juice,
Thus pleasuring those Gents for miles around,
Who, crying for relief, once piped the sound,
Of wind in alley-ways. All hail this news!
And let the joyous shuffling queues
For Gentlemanly Jennings' most well found
Construction, wherein a penny ope's the gate
To Heav'n's mercy and Sanitary waves¹⁴

¹⁴ L. Lampton, *Temples of Convenience & Chambers of Delight* (Stroud, 2007), p. 20.

Though a welcome innovation to “Gents for miles around,” London’s first underground public conveniences did not cater to women, and it would be almost another 40 years until women would have a designated public toilets facility in the City of London.

Joyce provides an ideological suggestion as to why public sanitary provisions for women were behind those for men. He observes that:

The more intimate the part of the toilette performed, the more anxiously it was governed. The inevitable tension between the public and private evident in public provision for intimate, private functions went right to the heart of liberal governmentality.¹⁵

Joyce refers to the first public toilet for women in Manchester in 1890 (7 years after the City of London’s similar installation at Holborn, see below), which was “denoted by the sign ‘women’, ‘ladies’ being expected to find their own provision in the shops and restaurants of the main thoroughfares, and in the railway stations (places that working-class ‘women’ were less likely to frequent).”¹⁶ As government decision makers were male, their unfamiliarity with intimate female activities (urination, defecation, menstruation) may have led to the delay in implementing facilities for women. As Joyce adds, “Urinating was more easy to govern than defecation, and men’s urinating more than women’s.”¹⁷ Thus, until pushed by sanitary reformers and activists to implement provisions for women, it was simply easier to administrate only the more familiar and less anxiety-provoking intimate sanitary needs of men than women.

¹⁵ P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), pp. 74-75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Drive to Civilization

In 1908 an editorial appeared in *The Times* in praise of Jennings and his remarkable contributions to London sanitation.¹⁸ It quotes an undated letter from Jennings to London City Engineer William Haywood, in which Jennings offers, “through you to supply and fix in any part of the City of London every appliance indicated in my designs free of any expense,” provided that the users are obliged to make a small payment for this attended service.¹⁹ Jennings argues that:

The civilization of a people can be measured by the perfections of their domestic and sanitary appliances, and ... I am convinced the day will come when public lavatories, replete with every convenience, will be constructed below the pavement level, not only in large towns, but in every locality where large numbers assemble, and 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.²⁰

The *Times* was clearly of the opinion that the innovations proposed and, in time, carried out by Jennings are indicative of London’s status as a world-class city. “Nothing so much marks a nation’s progress in civilization as its attention to Sanitation,”²¹ in private and public spheres, and:

... both have made enormous strides, but before public sanitation was thoroughly recognized much resistance and prejudice had to be overcome. For

¹⁸ Anon., ‘The progress of sanitation: remarkable inventions: how achieved: an expert’s opinion’, *The Times*, 05 May 1908, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

instance, public underground conveniences are an inestimable boon to the public, and it is now difficult to imagine large cities without them.²²

As a manifestation of the Victorian spirit of invention, personified by George Jennings, underground public conveniences were a civilizing feature of London to be celebrated.

²² Ibid., p. 14.

Chapter Two: Women in the City

The City of London is an unusual community in that, by the nineteenth century, it was primarily a commercial rather than a residential locality. Residential population statistics show a decline in overnight population from 1866 (Figure 2.1). However, these figures are misleading as they do not account for the daily large influx of workers into the City, many of them female. Figures available for working population (combined male and female) from 1866 on show an increase from mid-nineteenth century, such that by 1891 there was almost 8 times the number of working people as residents (Figure 2.1).

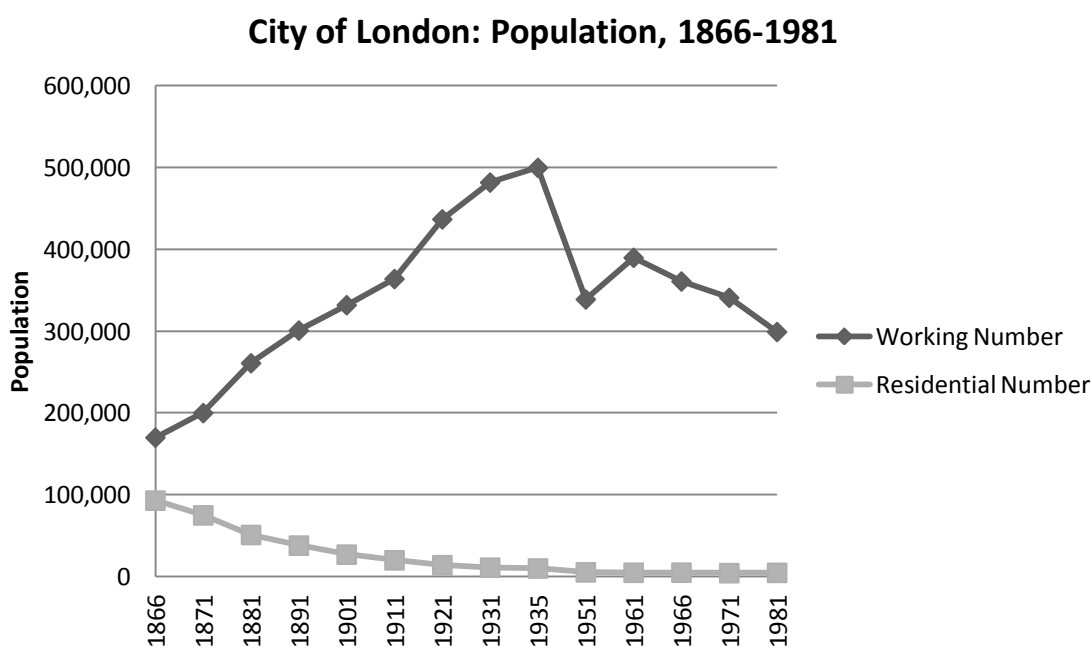


Figure 2.1 City of London: Population, 1866-1981

Source: Figures from Michie, *The City of London: Continuity and Change*, p. 14.

How many of the workers in the City of London were female? London statistics for 1891 show employment figures for males, females, and children (Table 2.1). Assuming all “principals” are

male (and they may not be), and including 8,930 girls under 20 known to be working in the City in 1891,¹ females make up approximately 20% of the working population of the City.

# of Principals	29,520
# of Employees	
Males	202,213
Females	50,416
Children	19,235
TOTAL	301,384

Table 2.1 City of London, Numbers of Workers on April 16, 1891

Source: LCC, *London Statistics, 1892-93*, p. viii.

It was not only workers entering the City each day, but also shoppers and visitors. White estimates that “Including those who didn’t work there, but who came for business, some 1.2 million people entered the City’s square mile each working day in 1891.”² Rappaport discusses the issues faced by women shoppers in the West End of London, whereby their movement and enjoyment of the city were limited due to insufficient public restaurants and lack of public lavatories.³ She quotes “middle-class diarist” Ursula Bloom, who recalls that:

... in London fashionable ladies went for a day’s shopping with no hope of any relief for those faithful tides of nature until they returned home again The fact that the evening might easily be spoiled by the desires of nature was one of those hard facts which had to be accepted!⁴

¹ Figure for number of girls is for Holborn and City – separate figures not available. LCC, *London Statistics, 1892-93*, III (London, 1893), p. 359.

² J. White, *London in the 19th Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London, 2008), p. 166.

³ E.D. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 79-85.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Although shopping was a lesser motivation for women visiting the City, due to its primary nature as a business district, Bloom's comments are nevertheless reflective of women's experience moving through the metropolis.

Women's Work in the City

What kind of work were women doing in the City? In Sims's *Living London* of 1902, Thompson's description of female employees at The National Telephone Company serves as an enlightening example. Thompson writes that the company "recruit their operators from the ranks of bright, well-educated, intelligent girls, who are, in many cases, the daughters of professional men"⁵ The female operator's working day was about nine hours long, with time off for midday dinner and afternoon tea.⁶ Figure 2.2 shows women at work, and is notable for the illustration of contemporary clothing. Skirts are floor-length and full, with underskirts or petticoats. Such fashions would require much management to keep clean and out of the way in the course of using a toilet. Unfortunately, Thompson does not mention what sanitary provision there might be at this type of workplace.

⁵ H. Thompson, 'Telephone London', *Living London: Its Work and its Play, its Humour and its Pathos, its Sights and its Scenes*, ed. G.R. Sims (London, 1902), p. 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116.



IN THE POST OFFICE CENTRAL TELEPHONE EXCHANGE (ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD): RECEIVING CALLS.

Figure 2.2 Women at Work in the City, in the Post Office Central Telephone Exchange

Source: Thompson, *In the Post Office Central Telephone Exchange*, Dictionary of Victorian London, 01 Sep 2012 <<http://www.victorianlondon.org/communications/telephonedescription.htm>>.

White notes that “more than all these [businesswomen] were thousands of women manufacturing workers employed in City factories and workshops. Even at the end of the century the City was the densest manufacturing quarter of London, despite the increasing dominance of commerce and financial services. Some 62,000 manufacturing workers were employed in the City around 1900 and of these 29,000 (47 per cent) were women.”⁷

White adds that “these businesswomen were just the upper crust of the City’s invisible ranks of women workers. An apron army marched each day across London and Blackfriars Bridges as the housewives and girls of Southwark and Lambeth moved in to char for offices and chambers.”⁸

⁷ White, *London in the 19th Century*, p. 171.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

The British Weekly, subtitled *A Journal of Social and Christian Progress*, was a London-based religious weekly publication.⁹ Their 1889 special publication, *Toilers in London; Or, Inquiries Concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis*, provides a window into employment prospects for female City-workers who were less well-off or well-educated than those in the telephone offices. Such women fall into two classes, the “factory-girl” who is a “child of the unskilled labourer,” and the “City work-girl” or “daughter of the artisan.”¹⁰ The factory worker earns from 4s. to 8s. per week, while the “City work-girl” earns almost twice as much, from 8s. to 14s. per week.¹¹ For the more skilled female worker, the vast number of trades practised includes bookbinder and folder, umbrella maker, and harness maker.¹² The publication alludes to prostitution as a further source of income for some women, saying that:

There is one trade in London that has no slack time for women, and the number of those who ply it is said to be no less than 100,000 City work-girls do not add to its numbers openly, but they swell the numbers of those women who carry on a hidden trade to eke out their wages.¹³

Working conditions for the skilled workers in the City are described as much less pleasant than those of the telephone operators. The authors mention women working in printers’ and publishers’ offices, such as “a large establishment near Fleet Street [in which] the girls work from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., with an hour for dinner, and half an hour for tea if they like to forfeit their tea-time in wages ... and there is little ventilation, no sanitary arrangements”¹⁴ The explicit reference to “no

⁹ “British Weekly” Commissioners, *Toilers in London; Or, Inquiries Concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis* (London, 1889), Internet Archive, Web, 16 Sep 2012 <<http://archive.org/details/toilersinlondon00commgoog>>, p. 272.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 174, 185.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

sanitary arrangements” at the workplace is telling, as it is precisely these women who are most in need of public conveniences.

Lack of Provisions in the Workplace

London statistical reports bear out that even 15 years after *British Weekly's* 1889 special report, much of what City workplace sanitary provision existed was unacceptable. According to London County Council (LCC) statistics, workplace inspections were made in each borough under the Factory and Workshops Act of 1901.¹⁵ Of the factories, workshops, workplaces, and homeworkers' premises inspected in 1904, 18% were found to have defective sanitary accommodation, either insufficient, unsuitable or defective, or not separate for the sexes (Table 2.2). Figures for 1905 and 1906 show no improvement. The data are problematic as they do not say what proportion of all existing workplaces in the City was examined. However, as a general gauge, the data are an indicator of the non-universality of appropriate sanitary accommodation in the workplace, for men and women, in the early years of the twentieth century. If provisions were not being adequately supplied at work, working women would need to look elsewhere.

¹⁵ London County Council, *London Statistics, 1905-06*, XVI (London, 1906), pp. 182-183.

	During 1904	During 1905	During 1906
Number of Inspections of:			
Factories (including factory laundries)	160	656	1,708
Workshops (including workshop laundries)	4,505	2,025	3,481
Workplaces	1,558	854	1,159
Homeworkers' Premises	4	21	0
	6,227	3,556	6,348
Defects Found			
<i>Nuisances Under the Public Health Acts:</i>			
Sanitary Accommodation:			
Insufficient	12	24	16
Unsuitable or Defective	1,053	1,220	1,592
Not Separate for Sexes	53	66	81
Total	1,118 (18%)	1,310 (37%)	1,689 (27%)

Table 2.2 Defective Sanitary Accommodation in City of London Workplaces, 1904-1906

Source: LCC, *London Statistics, 1905-06*, p. 182; *1906-07*, p. 186; *1907-08*, p. 202.

Perception of Women in Public Space

Since such a large proportion of City workers was female, lack of sanitary provisions implied a lack of welcome to women's presence in the City, and a disregard of their needs. The respectability of a woman in public was in question, for, as Greed writes, "In the nineteenth century a woman who was out on her own 'fancy free' in the streets might be assumed to be a prostitute."¹⁶ Lack of toilet provisions limited a female's movement in the City. As a woman interviewed by Rappaport says, "Either ladies didn't go out or ladies didn't go."¹⁷ Whereas in the West End female shoppers might have made use of sanitary facilities provided by department stores, there were no equivalents in the City. In addition, as noted above, the role of women was changing, from working at home to out into the public sphere. As Gershenson and Penner write:

¹⁶ Greed, *Inclusive Urban Design*, p. 72.

¹⁷ Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, p. 82.

Sanctioning the women's lavatory effectively sanctioned the female presence in the streets, thus violating middle-class decorum and ideals of women as static and domestic.¹⁸

Women relieving themselves in public, necessarily having business with their private parts, even alone in a cubicle, could cast an air of unseemliness. As Gershenson and Penner assert, "By making women's bodies and the 'private' functions publicly visible, the lavatory threatened to transform its users into 'public women.'"¹⁹

Voices for Women's Conveniences

By the early 1890s, hundreds of thousands of women were making the daily trek into the City, making their presence felt and their voices heard. Greed observes that "the campaign for public lavatories for women was a key component of the Suffragette Movement, almost with equal importance to attaining the vote."²⁰ In addition, the Ladies' Sanitary Association had been lobbying for public sanitary facilities for women from the 1870s, in London vestries.²¹

It is notable that one of the strongest voices for female sanitary facilities comes from a man, Dr James Stevenson, Medical Officer of Health for Paddington, whose "Report on the Necessity of Latrine Accommodation for Women in the Metropolis" was written in 1879.²² With delicacy, Stevenson writes that:

¹⁸ Gershenson and Penner, *Ladies and Gents*, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁰ Greed, *Inclusive Urban Design*, p. 47.

²¹ Penner, 'A world of unmentionable suffering', p. 39.

²² Stevenson, *Report on the Necessity of Latrine Accommodation for Women*.

There are periods and conditions peculiar to the sex, when latrine accommodation would be specifically 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.²³

Stevenson is speaking up for women because the want of facilities “is experienced by those whose natural reserve upon such a subject, and whose positions in life for the most part prevent them from making themselves heard.”²⁴ Such comments may appear condescending to modern readers, but Stevenson writes as a man of his time, as part of the “patriarchal power structure of late Victorian London.”²⁵ Stevenson adds that “Ladies who are interested in the welfare of those below them in the social scale are ready to declare that poor women have often told them, with tears in their eyes, of the agony and shame they have endured in circumstances which it is not necessary to particularise,” and that he is ready to supply testimony from “medical men and others” to support women’s need for public conveniences.²⁶

²³ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁵ Penner, ‘A world of unmentionable suffering’, p. 35.

²⁶ Stevenson, *Report on the Necessity of Latrine Accommodation for Women*, p. 13.

Chapter Three: Location

After the installation of the first underground public convenience in the City by the Royal Exchange in 1855, there is no evidence of additional sites in the City of London until the late 1880s. Why this should be deserves further consideration, but is likely due to a lack of economic incentive, until advances in sanitary engineering made the large-scale provision of underground conveniences an affordable option for the City. However, once the City's building programme commenced, progress was swift.

1890s City of London Reports

David James Ross was appointed Engineer to the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London in 1894, in place of the late Colonel William Haywood. Ross's reports on the works executed by the Commissioners of Sewers during 1893, 1894, and 1895, give evidence on the first underground public conveniences built by the City. In addition, a special report to the Streets Committee, dated 30 May 1895, deals exclusively with the subject of providing underground conveniences. As a set, Ross's reports give great insight into the early development of underground sanitary provisions in the City of London, including an 1895 map of locations (Figure 3.1). It is notable that in 1897 the functions of the Commissioners of Sewers came under the Corporation of London, such that Ross became Engineer to the City Public Health Department.¹ Thus Ross's reports compose a limited and unique record of the sanitary development of late Victorian London.

¹ Anon., 'Obituary: David James Ross', *Institution of Civil Engineers: Minutes of the Proceedings*, Vol. 145, (1906), pp. 358-359.

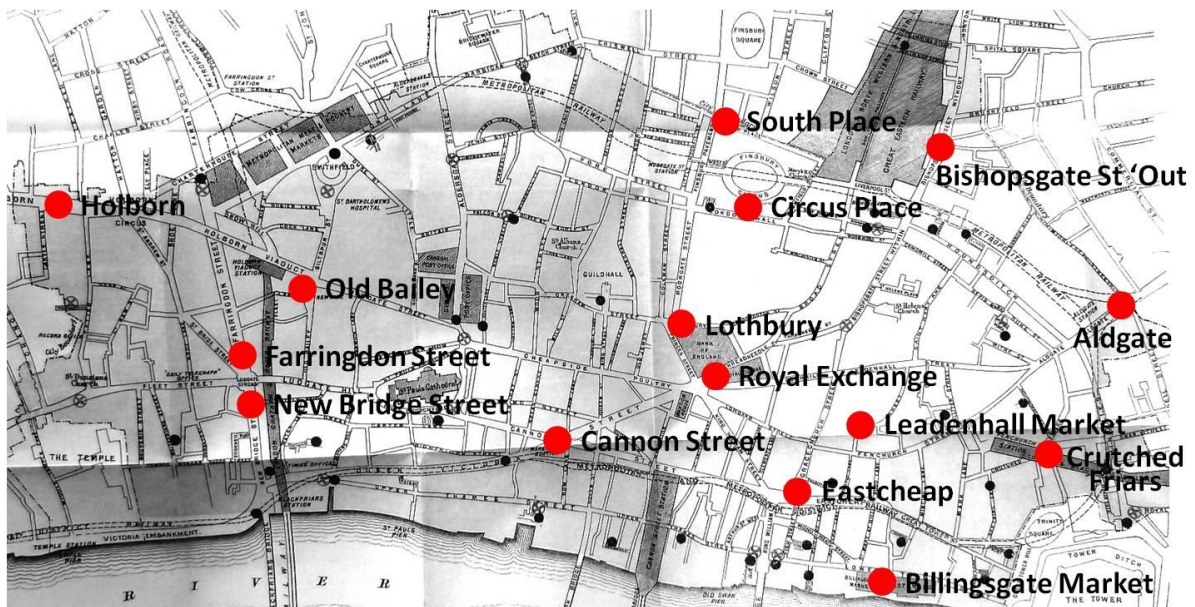


Figure 3.1 Map of City of London Underground Public Conveniences in 1895

Source: LMA CLA/006/AD/07/025/005, Ross, 'Report ... on the Subject of Providing Underground Conveniences', n.p.

Ross's first report, dated 1 May, 1894, is concerned with works executed by the Commissioners of Sewers in the year 1893, and covers topics including Sewers, Gas Lighting, Electric Lighting, and Water Supply.² Under the heading "Public Urinals," Ross gives an account of the ten underground public conveniences existing in the city of London at the end of 1893: Royal Exchange, Eastcheap, Farringdon Street, New Bridge Street, Leadenhall Market, South Place, Old Bailey, Bishopsgate St 'Out, Lothbury, and Holborn.³ All of these were for men only except the one at Holborn. The first, largest, and oldest of these is that outside the Royal Exchange. Ross reports that this location was opened in 1885, a date 30 years after George Jennings's original installation.⁴ This discrepancy may be a typographical error, but is more likely due to a refurbishment with updated plumbing and sanitary hardware for an 1885 re-opening.

² LMA CLA/006/AD/07/024/005, D.J. Ross, 'Report on the Works Executed by the Honourable the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London During the Year 1893' (London, 1894).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

Facilities for Women

A particularly notable section of Ross's 1893 report deals with the issue of sanitary provisions for women. Ross writes that the Commission constructed a dual-sex facility on Holborn which opened in August 1893, and "has been extensively used both by males and females."⁵ Ross's 1894 report states that three new underground public conveniences have been built in the City, at Crutched Friars, Aldgate, and Billingsgate.⁶ However, each of these was for men only. Furthermore, Ross mentions two more conveniences under construction, at Cannon Street and at Circus Place, also for men only.⁷

Why should the City have been hesitant to construct more dual-sex facilities after their initial provision for both men and women at Holborn? Ross's 1895 special report to the Streets Committee, "On the Subject of Public Conveniences," is not explicit in this regard, but possible reasons may be inferred from the text. He writes that "at the Holborn convenience, where accommodation is provided for women, £124. 9s. 7d. was received during the year 1894, this shews (sic) that the accommodation was used by 29,875 females, despite the fact that there are 17 railway stations in the City where retiring rooms are provided."⁸ The income figures quoted by Ross work out to exactly 29,875 pence, so it may be concluded that each visit cost one penny. The women's section of the Holborn convenience was open 114 open hours per week (as in 1895, see Table 3.1). Thus over the course of the year, the women's facilities were used by approximately five women per hour, or one every 12 minutes. Such a low usage figure may have been the factor which discouraged the Commissioners from constructing additional women's facilities. In addition, Ross's comment

⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁶ LMA CLA/006/AD/07/025/001, D.J. Ross, 'Report on the Works Executed by the Honourable the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London During the Year 1894' (London, 1895), p. 30.

⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

⁸ LMA CLA/006/AD/07/025/005, D.J. Ross, 'Report to the Streets Committee of the Honourable the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London, on the Subject of Providing Underground Conveniences' (London, 1895), p. 9.

that there were 17 railway stations in the City providing retiring rooms (toilets) for women may imply that the Commissioners saw this extensive private provision as adequate for the needs of women in the City.

Ross's 1895 special report includes a list of 16 potential sites for the construction of new underground public conveniences in the City, and only four of these include accommodation for women. Only one of the proposed sites was chosen, at Minories, including facilities for women, which was under construction in Ross's report to the Commissioners of 1896.⁹ Construction figures Ross quotes may provide a solid financial basis for the City's reluctance to build more facilities for women at this time. The total cost of construction including gas and water mains and incidental works for the men's facilities was on average £2,000 each.¹⁰ However the dual-sex Holborn conveniences cost £3,436 4s. 1d., or almost 175% more.¹¹ However, Ross provides receipts and expenditure figures for 1894, indicating that income from all ten facilities of £3,305 fell only just short of expenditures on them at £3,793.¹² So overall, the Holborn dual-sex conveniences would not appear to have been a drain on the underground public conveniences, being almost a self-supporting set of facilities.

⁹ LMA CLA/006/AD/07/026/003, D.J. Ross, 'Report on the Works Executed by the Honourable the Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London During the Year 1895' (London, 1896), p. 42.

¹⁰ LMA CLA/006/AD/07/025/005, Ross, 'Report ... on the Subject of Providing Underground Conveniences', p. 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Location	Number of Urinals	Number of Toilets	Weekdays		Sundays	
			Open (a.m.)	Close (p.m.)	Open (a.m.)	Close (p.m.)
Royal Exchange	20	12	8	10	9	8
Eastcheap	9	4	6	11	9	8
Farringdon Street	9	5	7	12:30 a.m.	9	11
New Bridge Street	8	5	7	1 a.m.	9	11
Leadenhall Market	12	2	5	9	closed	
South Place	9	5	7	12:30 a.m.	9	11
Old Bailey	9	5	7	12:30 a.m.	9	11
Bishopsgate St 'Out	9	5	7	12:30 a.m.	9	11
Lothbury	13	4	7	11	closed	
Holborn (Male)	12	8	7	12:30 a.m.	9	11
" (Female)	-	6	7	12	9	11
Crutched Friars	8	5	7	11	9	11
Aldgate	9	6	5	12:30 a.m.	9	11
Billingsgate Market	14	4	4	8	7	2
Cannon Street	14	12	6	1 a.m.	9	11
Circus Place	9	5	7	12:30 a.m.	9	11

Table 3.1 City of London Underground Public Conveniences at End of 1895, with Provisions and Opening Hours

Source: LMA CLA/006/AD/07/026/003, Ross, 'Report on the Works Executed ... During the Year 1895', p. 41.

Ross's 1895 report's table showing the number of urinals, toilets, and opening hours of each of the facilities is instructive (Table 3.1). Royal Exchange is the largest installation with 20 urinals and 12 toilets. This facility's central location would have assured it of heavy and continuous traffic during its opening hours. The other sites have 8 to 14 urinals and 2 to 12 toilets. Leadenhall Market is an unusual case, with the largest ratio of urinals to toilets (12:2), and the earliest weekday opening (5 a.m.) and closing (9 p.m.) hours, and Sunday closure. These factors imply planning for many users at once looking for a quick stop during the working day of the market. Other conveniences are generally open from 6 or 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. or 12:30 a.m. weekdays, and 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Sundays. Ross notes that "The hours during which these structures were originally opened were less than they are at present, the time having been extended as the necessities of the traffic in various localities

were found by experience to require it.”¹³ It is curious that the female section should close half an hour earlier Monday to Saturday (at 12 midnight) than the men’s section (12:30 a.m.). Perhaps this has to do with an observable number of men being out on the streets and needing facilities later than women. Nevertheless, this unequal provision, whereby the women’s section is closed while the men’s is open, would be an affront to and inconvenience for a female in need.

Case Study (Part I): Holborn Underground Public Conveniences

As mentioned, the first dual-sex underground public conveniences in the City of London were built in 1893, on Holborn opposite Furnival Street (then called Castle Street) (closed in 1997). This construction followed Greater London’s first underground dual-sex facility, in Westminster in the Strand, opposite the Royal Courts of Justice.¹⁴ In the absence of photographs, Routh and Segrave’s glowing description gives a vision of the original splendour which was still apparent in 1966:

This is a very fine example of an old-established English public lavatory. Its stair rails are the most shone brass in Holborn. It has a commemorative stone testifying to its opening by the City Commissioners of Sewers in 1893. Each fine mahogany door bears a splendid brass and glass mechanism for spending your penny in¹⁵

¹³ CLA/006/AD/07/024/005, Ross, ‘Report on the Works Executed ... 1893’, p. 34.

¹⁴ Penner, ‘A world of unmentionable suffering’, p. 39.

¹⁵ J. Routh and B. Segrave, *The Good Loo Guide: Where to Go in London* (London, 1966), p. 35.

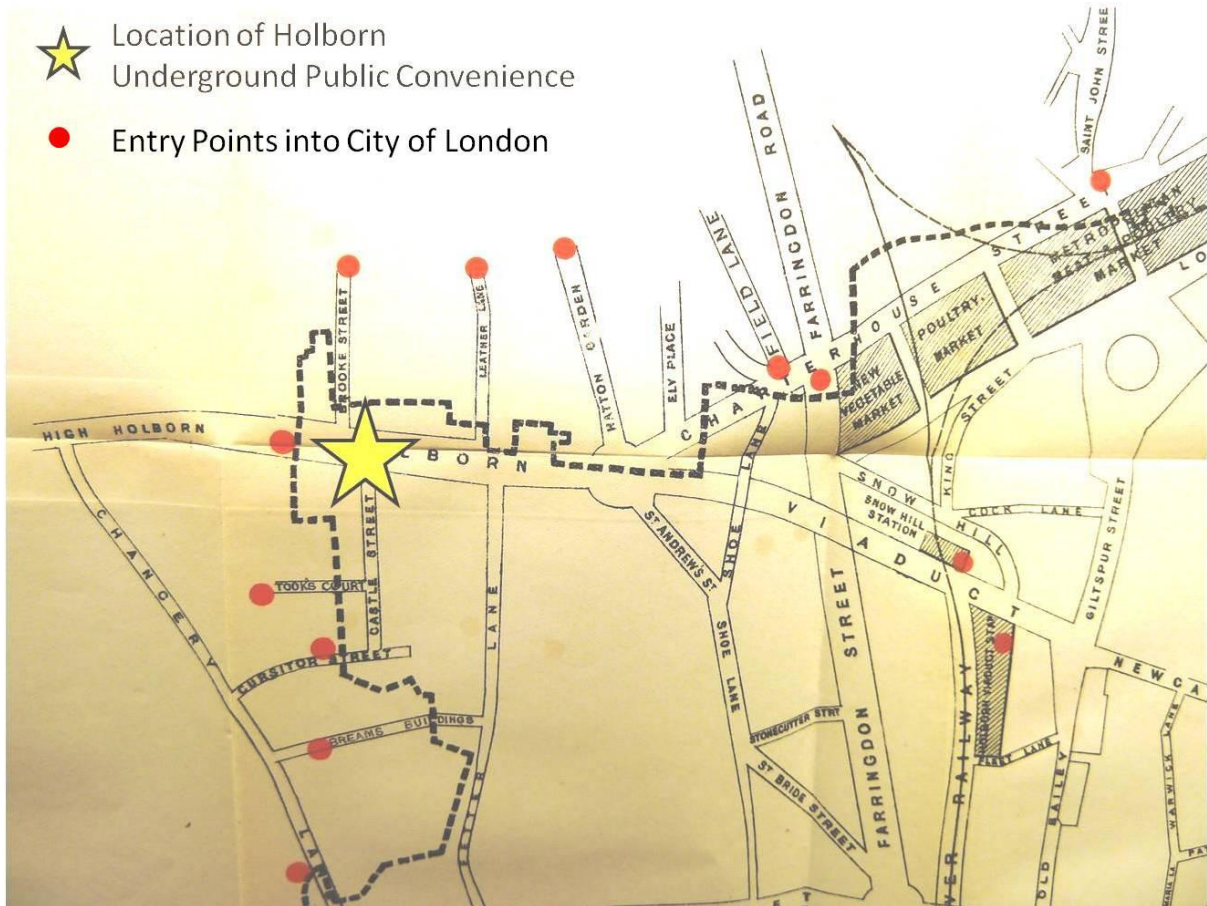


Figure 3.2 Location of Holborn Underground Public Conveniences for Men and Women
 Source: Corporation of the City of London, *Ten Years Growth of the City of London*, n.p.

Why was the Holborn site, the furthest west of the City's underground public conveniences, chosen by City planners for the first dual-sex facility (Figure 3.2)? An examination of statistics for the local static female day population is revealing. The Holborn site is in the City ward of Farringdon Without, and the female day population is higher in that ward than in any other in the City, from the first day census in 1881, through the 1891 and 1911 day censuses.¹⁶

In addition, migration patterns may be examined to see where the greatest vehicle and foot traffic occurs into the City. The day census of 1891 includes a map showing every inlet by street, bridge, and railway station (Figure 3.2). After London Bridge, Holborn is the busiest entry point into the City (Table 3.2).

¹⁶ Corporation of the City of London. *City of London Day Census, 1911* (London, 1911), p. 82-83.

	People	Vehicles
London Bridge	101,237	12,652
Holborn Bar	75,501	8,299
Temple Bar	69,649	5,363
Blackfriars Bridge	65,069	7,657

Table 3.2 Top Inlets into the City of London: Traffic Totals over 16 Hours, 1891

Source: Corporation of the City of London, *City of London Day Census, 1911* (London, 1911), p. 108.

The day census does not break down the traffic figures into males and females in vehicles and as pedestrians. However, as discussed above, as approximately 20% of workers in the City are female, it is likely that they will compose a similar proportion of the traffic entering at any particular point. In addition, as Farringdon Without Ward has the greatest female working population of the wards in the City, there may be more than an average number of females entering by the points of inlet to Farringdon Without, in the northwest corner of the City, and needing conveniences on their way to and from work. Thus, combining data for static female day population with probable female street traffic, it is logical that the municipal authorities would choose to locate their first underground public convenience for women on Holborn, where the need was greatest and it would be most used.

Cost of Construction

An underlying theme in the provision of underground public conveniences in the City of London is economics. A direct income was anticipated from these public utilities which is in keeping with what Jephson calls the Victorians' "all-powerful, the all-impelling motive and unceasing desire – commercial prosperity and success."¹⁷

Complaints were made about the excessive cost of installing underground public conveniences in London. In a letter to *The Times*, E.C. Keevil laments the tendencies of various local

¹⁷ Jephson, *The Sanitary Evolution of London*, p. 8.

boards towards excessive spending, ignoring the wishes of the ratepayers.¹⁸ Referring to Westminster, he writes:

Permit me to instance the new fad of expensive underground public lavatories ... that one at Piccadilly-circus was the first trial, and, proving a good financial success, many other vestries ... induced their members to build similar institutions in every parish in London, regardless of the fact that Piccadilly-circus is a unique position, that they have invariably proved elsewhere to be a ghastly financial mistake ... and the ratepayer pays the penalty.¹⁹

In the City, however, available data show that Keevil's concerns are exaggerated. Engineer Ross's special report of 1895 shows that the total cost of construction of the 13 existing underground toilets was £24,978, or approximately £2,000 per facility.²⁰ Furthermore, receipts for the previous five years totalled £13,898 and expenses £13,016, so the facilities were almost completely self-supporting.²¹ It appears that City officials were behaving in a fiscally responsible manner, to the benefit of the ratepayers.

¹⁸ E.C. Keevil, 'Local expenditure', *The Times*, 17 August 1898, pg. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

²⁰ LMA CLA/006/AD/07/025/005, Ross, 'Report ... on the Subject of Providing Underground Conveniences', p. 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Underground

The siting of a place for urination and defecation in the public sphere is a complicated matter, with regard to the moral and aesthetic concerns of the public. The ideal location for public sanitary conveniences would be suitably accessible, yet not so open as to offend propriety. As the LCC Medical Officer of Health writes in 1928, “The difficulty has always been to select sites which, whilst sufficiently prominent to attract the attention of those desirous of using them were not at the same time objectionable to the public or those living near.”²²

An interest in London’s underground history is well established.²³ Things hidden from view have an allure, and “Imagination generally loves to run wild about underground London, or the subways of any great city.”²⁴ Spaces under streets such as sewer systems and Tube tunnels have a fascination, and underground public conveniences are no exception. Those that are sealed yet not demolished, such as at Guilford Place or on Clerkenwell Green, provoke a curiosity for the unseen space below and the fixtures that may still exist within. Underground spaces may also have darker connotations, akin to crypts or dungeons, as ill-lit, forbidding places. To venture down into an underground public convenience is to go from the noise and bustle of the street into a quiet enclosed space, and requires more effort (and perhaps courage) than to use a street-level facility, a fact which may have been discouraging to users both male and female alike.

Joyce suggests why early public conveniences in London and elsewhere were placed beneath the streets: “The first of the public conveniences were sunk in the ground, and this long continued to be the case, *removing all bodily activities from view* [italics added].”²⁵ That Victorian propriety may

²² LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, Public Health Committee, ‘Public Conveniences in London’ (London, 1928), p. 1.

²³ Many books have been published, from *Underground London* by John Hollingshead (London, 1862) to Peter Ackroyd’s *London Under* (London, 2011).

²⁴ R. Trench and E. Hillman, *London Under London: A Subterranean Guide* (London, 1984), p. 2.

²⁵ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 75.

have necessitated the placing of facilities where genitals were exposed out of sight and thus out of mind is a possible motive. It is arguable that in the City, at least, the choice of underground sites for conveniences was almost inevitable due to economic factors: the high cost of real estate, and the free access to the road subsoil permitted by the Public Health (London) Act of 1891.

As evidence of the London-wide burgeoning construction of underground public conveniences, the 1898 *Routledge's Sixpenny London Guide* states that "Improved lavatories (hot and cold water) have been erected [at] ... Oxford Circus; Piccadilly Circus; Trafalgar Square; Charing Cross Road (south), opposite the Garrick Theatre; Charing Cross Road (north), corner of Oxford Street. All these have accommodations for women."²⁶ The central London underground locations *Routledge's* mentions were at busy intersections on large thoroughfares. Unlike the City, traffic came not only from workers and local residents, but from West End shoppers and evening theatre-goers. The City was slow to catch up, but it is documented that by 1928 the City of London had 16 conveniences with toilets for women.²⁷

²⁶ Anon., *Routledge's Sixpenny London Guide* (London, 1898), pp. 259-260.

²⁷ LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, 'Public Conveniences in London' (1928), p. 14.

Chapter Four: Architecture

An analysis of the architectural design of the underground public conveniences in the City of London shows that many conveniences had distinctive ironwork above the pavement, partly to alert the potential user to its existence. The *London Encyclopaedia* refers to “cast-iron arches, railings or pergolas,”¹ and these may be seen in Figure 4.1, the Eastcheap public conveniences at Gracechurch Street,² and in Figure 4.2, the Holborn conveniences. Decorative ironwork such as this could be found in the most respectable parts of the streetscape, such as surrounding church and burial grounds, private squares, and framing the door of 10 Downing Street. It served a practical purpose too, as a protective barrier to traffic, as the late nineteenth century in London was still the age of horse-drawn carriages and omnibuses. As Winter notes in *London’s Teeming Streets*, motor vehicles began to “bring some relief” from horse traffic only after 1910.³

¹ B. Weinreb et al, *The London Encyclopaedia* (London, 2008), p. 668.

² The blue paint is of uncertain date.

³ J. Winter, *London’s Teeming Streets 1830-1914* (London, 1993), p. 120.



Figure 4.1 Eastcheap Underground Public Conveniences, City of London

Source: Anon., *File:Public Toilets, Gracechurch Street - geograph.org.uk - 571127.jpg*,
Wikipedia Commons, 01 Sep 2012

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Public_Toilets,_Gracechurch_Street_-_geograph.org.uk_-_571127.jpg>.



Figure 4.2 Holborn Public Conveniences, City of London

Source: Author

Case Study (Part II): Holborn Underground Public Conveniences

The Holborn conveniences may be examined as a case study for architectural elements typical of City underground public conveniences.

Civic Pride

In the construction of these first underground public conveniences, the details show evidence of the builders' civic pride. The same attention to detail has been lavished upon them as on grander civic structures. The Holborn conveniences (opened 1893) provide a particularly attractive case for closer inspection. The site's ventilation pipe is a fine example of the artistry employed. A black iron shaft rising from the pavement has a square base with openwork panels featuring leaves, ornamental flourishes, and stars. About six meters up the pipe, far above eye level, is a band of artistic ironwork featuring two cherubic faces (Figure 4.3), a gratuitous inclusion reminiscent of the cherubs on the south portico of St. Paul's Cathedral.



Figure 4.3 Cherubs on Holborn Conveniences Ventilation Pipe

Source: Author

Why were these faces included? Perhaps the designers were making a statement about their civic pride in the construction of this new civic building. The conveniences, as worthy of decoration as a cathedral, were meant to beautify the streetscape, not become an unsightly detraction.

Sanitation – Hand Washing

The spatial layout of the Holborn conveniences sheds light on one element of sanitation which the City appears to have taken lightly in the 1890s. The plans for the Holborn site (Figure 4.4) are dated 18 October, 1892, and were created by John Mowlem & Co. The structure is located under a traffic island, and is divided into two sections, one for men and one for women. The men's section has a double entrance way leading down from the street. One side was meant to be an entrance and the other an exit, easing a projected flow of users in and out of the facility.

One notable aspect of the design is the placement of hand washing basins. Before the introduction of the underground public convenience, public urinating facilities had no provision for hand washing. Underground toilets allowed for access to municipal water pipes and therefore running water, allowing for flushing water closets and urinals, as well as washbasins. However, in the men's section of the Holborn toilets, the two basins are in a separate nook at the very far end of the space. A man would have had to make a conscious effort to use them before turning towards the exit. However, the basins in the women's section are directly next to the exit, making them easier to use than those in the men's. One may speculate that men were less likely to wash their hands after urinating or defecating than women due to the ill-placement of the men's washing basins. In this sense, this early underground layout is not conducive to hygiene.

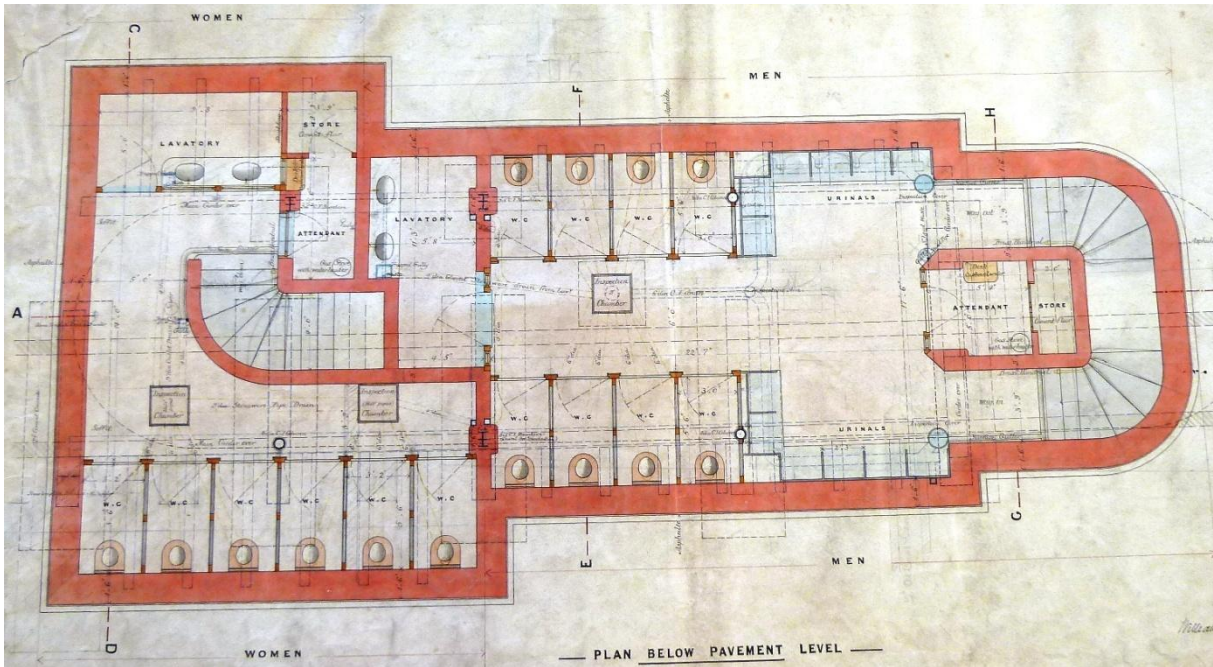


Figure 4.4 Plans for Holborn Underground Public Conveniences, 18 October, 1892

Source: LMA COL/PL/01/101/C/019, John Mowlem & Co., 'Public Conveniences: Holborn, Contract Plan' (London, 1892).

Materials

A significant feature of the design of the Holborn conveniences, and indeed many others, is the high quality of material used in construction. From the architectural drawing it may be observed that the following elements are included: brass handrails, white glazed bricks and tiles, enamelled slate panels in cubicles, coloured glazed brick dado walls, and Jennings's patented ceramic urinal fixtures.

Gendered Space

The policy-makers in the construction of the Holborn underground conveniences were mostly, if not entirely, male, from the engineer (William Haywood) and the contractor (John

Mowlem & Co.), to the sanitary ware manufacturer (George Jennings), and the members of the Commissioners of Sewers. It is unlikely that female input was solicited on the design of the location.

That facilities are divided into men's and women's sections is reflective of the contemporary social norm of gender segregation. The Holborn site's men's section has 12 urinals and eight cubicles, for a total of 20 units, while the women's section has only six cubicles. Therefore aggregate provision for men is over three times that for women. Greed comments that "Women are likely to need public toilets more often, for a greater range of reasons, because of biological differences."⁴ Thus the quantity of provision was inherently inequitable within this one location.

The City's Holborn site has separate entrances for men and women, affording a certain amount of privacy, although still visible to each other, albeit at a distance. In this case the form of the architecture belies a shared experience. The separate approaches are also a practical feature, necessitated by the narrowness of the island under which the conveniences are built. Most City dual-sex underground conveniences featured separate approaches, such as those at Farringdon Street and Cannon Street. There were exceptions, though, as at Eastcheap, which has a unified set of entrance stairs, which diverge to the right (for women) and left (for men) at the bottom. Eastcheap's design may, however, have been dictated by the shape of the island space available at the junction of Gracechurch Street, Cannon Street, and Eastcheap.

As late as 1953, in a special article to *Architects' Journal*, Barrow remarks upon complaints about lavatories received by local authorities, many of which "are not (as perhaps one might think) about the state of the lavatory, but something to do with being built so that men and women can 'see each other going in.'"⁵ Such complaints are indicative of the continuing societal norm of gender

⁴ Greed, *Inclusive Urban Design*, pp. 6-7.

⁵ F.L. Barrow, C. Fry, and T.R. Bilbow, 'Public lavatories', *Architects' Journal*, Vol. 117, (1953), p. 608.

segregation and a remaining sensitivity to conceal from the opposite sex the activity of eliminating waste.

There are two staircases for men, curving down from the street level, one for entrance and one for exit, while the women's section has only one access point. A separate entrance and exit would have made access to the men's section easier than to the women's section by regulating traffic flow. Women descending the stairs would have had the added impediment of encountering women exiting the facility. There is no provision in the architecture in female or male sections for baby-changing facilities, as are included in many modern conveniences. This is not surprising, though, considering that working women are likely to be travelling without children.

The architectural plans indicate that there is absolutely no communication between the men's and women's sections, which are separated by a 9" thick wall. This would have preserved the modesty of users, as they could not see or hear each other using the facilities, but was not ideal for the attendants, should they wish to communicate with each other or call for help.⁶

⁶ Lavatory attendant S.A.B. Rogers notes in his autobiography that it wasn't until the 1960's, at his instigation, that telephones were fitted in Westminster's six night toilets so attendants could ring the police. S.A.B. Rogers, *Four Acres and a Donkey* (London, 1979), p. 131.

Chapter Five: Gendered Economics

Charging for Use



Figure 5.1 Coin Operated Toilet Lock, England, 1890-1930

Source: Anon., *Coin Operated Toilet Lock, England, 1890-1930*, Science Museum Brought to Life: Exploring the History of Medicine, 01 Sep 2012
<<http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/objects/display.aspx?id=5938>>.

In addition to the quantity and locations of conveniences provided for women in late Victorian London, another issue was the hardship on poor women of charging a penny for these facilities' use (see Figure 5.1). In 1900 the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* writes that:

The lack of free places of this sort bears very heavily on girls of the clerk class. They frequently work with men, and may (in spite of health officers) have no special closet set apart for their use, or possibly only one for twenty or thirty women: and as this is chiefly in demand during the short time allowed for dinner ... outside, they commonly have recourse to a convenience very near. They may have to use a

station waiting-room on the way home, and possibly, if they have risen late, or are of a very nervous temperament, they may have had to use it on their way to office. Their expenditure may therefore amount to threepence a day, or eightpence a week, and this is a great tax on girls earning from fifteen to twenty-five shillings a week.¹

There is a whiff of condescension in the *BMJ*'s referring to some women "of a very nervous temperament" having to use the facilities more often than just during the dinner break and on the way home. Unmentioned, but also of great significance, is women's need for toilet facilities during the workday due to menstruation. However, to their credit, the crux of the piece is a request for at least some conveniences to be available for women at no charge whatsoever. "It is said," the *BMJ* writes, "that the attendants in charge have orders to allow such women as cannot afford the fee to use the conveniences gratis, but it ought not to be a matter of grace."² Being obliged to ask for the fee to be waived would have been demeaning and demoralizing to women. Indeed, even when an option of free provisions upon request existed, the *BMJ* notes that "we are told that ladies are fairly frequently stopped by poor women in the street who assert their inability to pay this [penny]."³ Thus some women appear to have preferred requesting the assistance of another woman to the perhaps repeated humiliation of admitting their inability to pay the facilities' one penny fee.

The *BMJ* says that "The return to the [London] County Council on the underground conveniences in London shows that some 29 out of the total 106 yield a profit," in particular those at the busiest locations, namely Piccadilly Circus, Charing Cross Road, Marble Arch, and Tottenham Court Road.⁴ The *BMJ* suggests that such profits should allow for the provision of at least one free

¹ Anon., 'Free sanitary conveniences for women', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1 (1900), p. 1512.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1512.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1512.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1512.

toilet for women where facilities for women exist at all. A delicate allusion to the differing domestic sanitary standards of classes of women follows when the *BMJ* adds that:

It should be the attendant's duty to keep this [free toilet] as clean as the others, but women who are particular in these matters would know that the closet charged for was not used by people who, being unable to pay for the use of a convenience, are quite possibly habitually unable to pay for soap and hot water.⁵

If both paid-for and free toilets are kept equally clean there should be no material difference in sanitary standards between them. However, the journal's comments suggest that in 1900 well-off ladies would have maintained a distaste for sharing facilities with potentially unclean and implicitly lower-class women, thereby serving as a reflection on the enduring class system in place in London at the time. In any case, none of the profitable locations listed by the *BMJ* are in the jurisdiction of the City, suggesting that City underground conveniences in 1900 were less profitable than those outside the Square Mile. Thus provision of free toilets for women does not appear to be a practicable suggestion in the City, according to the *BMJ*'s suggested scheme.

Unequal Charges for Men and Women

In 1928 the Public Health Committee of the LCC submitted a detailed report on the state of public conveniences in London.⁶ At the time, there was no charge for men to use the urinals in underground public conveniences in the City of London, only the toilet stalls. The report's author, Medical Officer of Health F.N. Kay Menzies, succinctly notes that "It is recognized as a considerable

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1512.

⁶ LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, 'Public Conveniences in London' (1928).

hardship that there is no free arrangement for women equivalent to the urinal for men.”⁷ Menzies goes on to explain the logic of the day, regarding who should bear the expense of the maintenance of facilities. He writes that:

The difficulty has hitherto been that W.C. fittings require an attendant, and, where the fitting is of a character calling for the services of an attendant for the sanitary protection of each user, a charge falling mainly on the user has to be imposed. Where only general supervision is necessary, as in the urinals for men, the charge is publicly borne.⁸

However, it may be argued that such a charge for the user does not *have* to be imposed, but is simply the result of the policy of the municipal authority at the time, seeking an income to counter the expense of maintenance.

Writing in 1953, twenty-five years later, in *Architects' Journal*, Barrow proposes that “... the man avoids paying a penny for urination because all he wants is a vertical surface and it would be impracticable to make a charge for this.”⁹ Barrow hints that if such a charge were imposed, men would be content to urinate for free elsewhere (such as against buildings).

Barrow subsequently remarks:

And as to why *anyone* should pay a penny for occupying a water closet compartment, there is a strong case for retaining the fee because of misuse, particularly by children ... So my conclusion about the woman's penny is that it

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹ Barrow, Fry, and Billow, 'Public Lavatories', p. 609.

is a fee demanded by Nature and not an imposition sustained by cruel or indifferent man.¹⁰

Such an egregious comment was refuted by Don in *The Medical Officer* in 1961, who writes that:

It seems surprising that in an age which has seen the development of the National Health Service to an annual cost of some £700m., when free education is universal and substantial subsidies for food and housing a commonplace, some local authorities should still seek to extract their penny toll for the use of the water closet. It is a practice founded on tradition and indefensible on any other grounds.¹¹

For the year 1957-58, the City's expenditure on underground public conveniences had been £72,807 and its income only £8,025, income making up only 11% of expenditure.¹² Don foresees that "The modern trend is undoubtedly toward making all conveniences free and it is probable that this practice will become universal within the next decade."¹³ Indeed, Don's assertion is reflected in the 1968 report of the City of London's Streets Committee which states that "... it is our policy to dispense with these [penny in the slot devices] as new conveniences are constructed or old ones renovated"¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 609.

¹¹ G.G. Don, 'Public Conveniences in the London Area: A Survey and Some Recommendations', *The Medical Officer*, Vol. 106 (1961), p. 348.

¹² Ibid., p. 348.

¹³ Ibid., p. 348.

¹⁴ LGL Co co rep 1968 no 25, Streets Committee, 'Report – Streets Committee: Public Conveniences in the City' (London, 1968), p. 3.

Urinettes

Installation in some boroughs of a fixture called the urinette was a possible solution explored to the problem of unequal charges for women. The fixture was meant to be used by women solely for urination, in the manner of the men's urinal. Table 6.1 shows how in 1928 some of the boroughs neighbouring the City of London had chosen to include urinettes in their public conveniences. Stepney, with its high population, was a major installer of urinettes, the borough featuring a total of 39 of the fixtures throughout the eight locations for women, an average of five urinettes per location. Other boroughs having urinettes in all or selected locations included Finsbury, Hackney, and Islington.

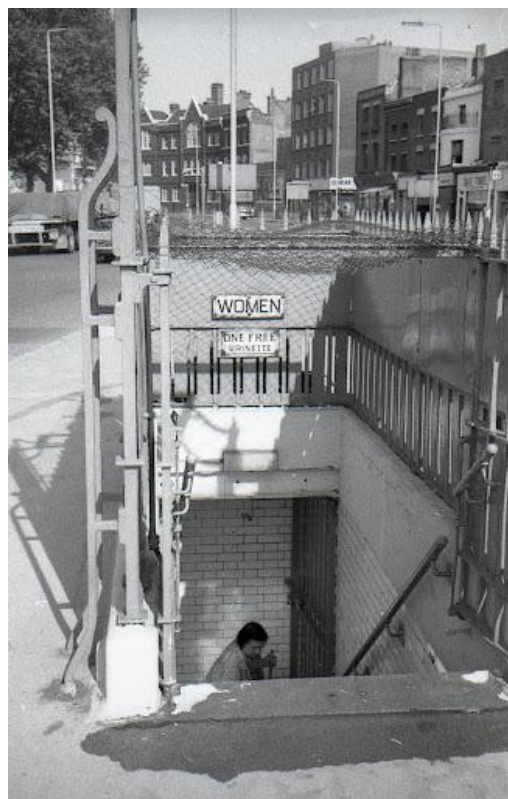


Figure 5.2 Entrance to a Women's Underground Public Convenience in London's East End, Circa 1979. Note sign advertising "One Free Urinette."

Source: M. Baldwin, *Taken Circa 1979 in the East End. What does a Urinette Look Like?*, Picasa, 01 Sep 2012 <http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/VeV-gyo_-OB2dO1BttzCIQ>.

The idea was that no charge or a reduced one would be made for use of these fixtures, as in theory they should require minimal maintenance on the same level as men's urinals, and thus the charge be borne by the public purse (see Figure 5.2). However, the fixtures were not designed to be used in the same way as the urinals, as they were placed in individual curtained stalls for privacy, in the manner of toilets. As Barrow writes:

The fitment called a urinette might be regarded as a female counterpart of the urinal, but it cannot be used with anything like the same privacy simply because of the physiology of the female. The urinette is better regarded as a *hygienic* development ... than as a device which could save the woman's penny. The penny is to secure the privacy afforded by a lockable compartment, and this is as necessary for a urinette as a water closet.¹⁵

The City of London did not choose to pursue this option in any of its 16 locations, perhaps reflecting their lack of success elsewhere. As Menzies comments, "The urinettes are not popular and, in one instance, are being replaced by W.C.'s. The attendants state that they are sometimes used in an uncleanly manner and require supervision to maintain them in a hygienic condition."¹⁶ Use in "an uncleanly manner" would have been difficult to regulate, since "While for men urination is presumably a distinct separate activity, culturally and biologically, women have quite a different perspective; as one woman commented, 'when you go in you never know what is going to come out, do you?'"¹⁷ Thus while potentially benefiting some women economically, urinettes ultimately run counter to London's drive for cleanliness and it is to the municipal authorities' credit that they were not installed in the City of London.

¹⁵ Barrow, Fry, and Bilbow, 'Public Lavatories', p. 609.

¹⁶ LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, 'Public Conveniences in London' (1928), p. 5.

¹⁷ Greed, *Inclusive Urban Design*, p. 106.

Chapter Six: Twentieth Century Developments

Provisions Post-WWI

Menzies's 1928 report to the Public Health Committee of the LCC provides insight into the status of provisions for women in London overall and the City in particular. The report is emphatic upon the still-growing need for public sanitary facilities since their first wide provision in the 1890s, due not only to population growth but especially to "Recent changes in the social conditions and habits of the community at large [which] must inevitably increase the demand for the provision of public conveniences, more especially for women."¹ Menzies explains that these changes are a result of "The fact that to-day (sic) the large army of women workers have to be catered for," and "The habit of midday shopping away from home, encouraged by the considerably extended facilities for transport by rail and road and the provision of cheap midday tickets for this purpose."²

Menzies' 1928 report includes a table showing the number of conveniences available in each of the London boroughs and the City. Reproduced here, the table is abridged to include the City of London and selected neighbouring boroughs, for comparison (Table 6.1).

¹ LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, 'Public Conveniences in London' (1928), p. 2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

	MEN						WOMEN					
	Conveniences with Toilets			Conveniences with Lavatories		Urinals	Conveniences with Toilets				Conveniences with Lavatories	
Metropolitan Borough	No.	Toilets	Urinal Stalls	No.	No. of Basins	No.	No.	Toilets	No. with Urinettes	No. of Urinettes	No.	Basins.
City of London	30	196	347	25	64	10	16	86	-	-	16	30
Finsbury	7	32	61	7	15	17	7	29	2	8	7	13
Hackney	7	29	60	7	13	18	5	16	5	6	5	10
Holborn	6	59	84	6	19	8	6	48	-	-	6	14
Islington	6	37	82	6	18	31	6	37	2	4	6	14
Stepney	12	63	126	11	14	41	8	34	8	39	8	10
Westminster	18	171	355	17	86	36	15	90	-	-	14	42
Total	86	587	1115	79	229	161	63	340	17	57	62	133
Toilets per location:		7						5				

Table 6.1 1928 Public Conveniences and Urinals Provided and/or Maintained by Borough Councils
Source: LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, 'Public Conveniences in London', pp. 14-15.

This table is an authoritative yet problematic source of information with respect to the number of City facilities available. Meant to provide detail upon appended maps,³ no maps are included with the report available in the London Metropolitan Archives, the only surviving copy. In particular, the table lists 30 conveniences for men and 16 conveniences for women in the City, up from 15 and one respectively as of 1895. Where were these (new?) conveniences located? A 1968 map from the City Engineer may be used to fill in this gap.⁴ The 1968 map clearly shows 16 underground public conveniences with facilities for women, distributed around the City. As many sites are identical to those known to exist for men only in 1895, such as at Royal Exchange and Eastcheap, it may be deduced that refurbishments have taken place. In addition, new dual-sex conveniences have been constructed since the 1895 report, including those in Guildhall Yard. Finally, the figure of 30 conveniences for men in 1928 may be substantiated by the same means, by observing that there are exactly 30 underground conveniences for men (16 of them dual-sex, as mentioned) on the 1968 map.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴ LMA COL/PL/01/099/C/002, City Engineer, 'Ordnance Survey Plan of City Showing the Location of Public Conveniences' (London, 1968).

An analysis of the data presented in the 1928 report to the LCC shows that only just over half of all locations of underground public convenience in the City (16 of 30) have provisions for women. The number of toilets available per location is also less for women. While men's facilities have an average of seven toilets per facility (196/30), women's have an average of only five toilets per facility (86/16). In addition, men have access to ten public urinals throughout the City of London, making the balance of municipally provided conveniences that much more in favour of men.

Public Versus Private Provision

In his discussion of the extent of provisions, Menzies says that, "Obviously the public provision made for women can be regarded only as supplementing that privately provided."⁵ A consideration of what Menzies means by privately provided facilities for women sheds light on the state of gender normative behaviour in London at the time. For women, Menzies refers to tea shops, restaurants, and stores, which "are usually equipped with sanitary conveniences which, on account of their greater privacy, are more in accord with what women themselves desire."⁶ He adds that:

I think it would be safe to say that this class of accommodation greatly diminishes the need for street conveniences, and is much preferred by women who can afford this alternative to the more public character which is almost necessarily a feature of free provision.⁷

For men, however, private provision refers to the urinals attached to public houses (where alcohol is sold), accessible directly from the street, of which there were 1,805 throughout the whole of

⁵ LMA LCC/PH/GEN/01/057, 'Public Conveniences in London' (1928), p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

London, providing 6,891 places.⁸ (Figures are not broken out for individual boroughs.) Of the 5,300 licensed premises in all of London, there are only 51 toilets approached from the street, or approximately one for every 100 pubs.⁹ Menzies remarks, however, that the number of these public house street urinals is decreasing, further increasing the need for publically provided sanitary conveniences. No mention is made of men's making use of facilities in London's tea shops, restaurants, and stores, although it is likely such facilities were available to some extent. The minimal provision for women in pubs, however, is indicative of their status as a male domain. Thus in London in 1928 it would appear that there were different quasi-public areas for men and women, a feature of urban life which Menzies presents as status quo.

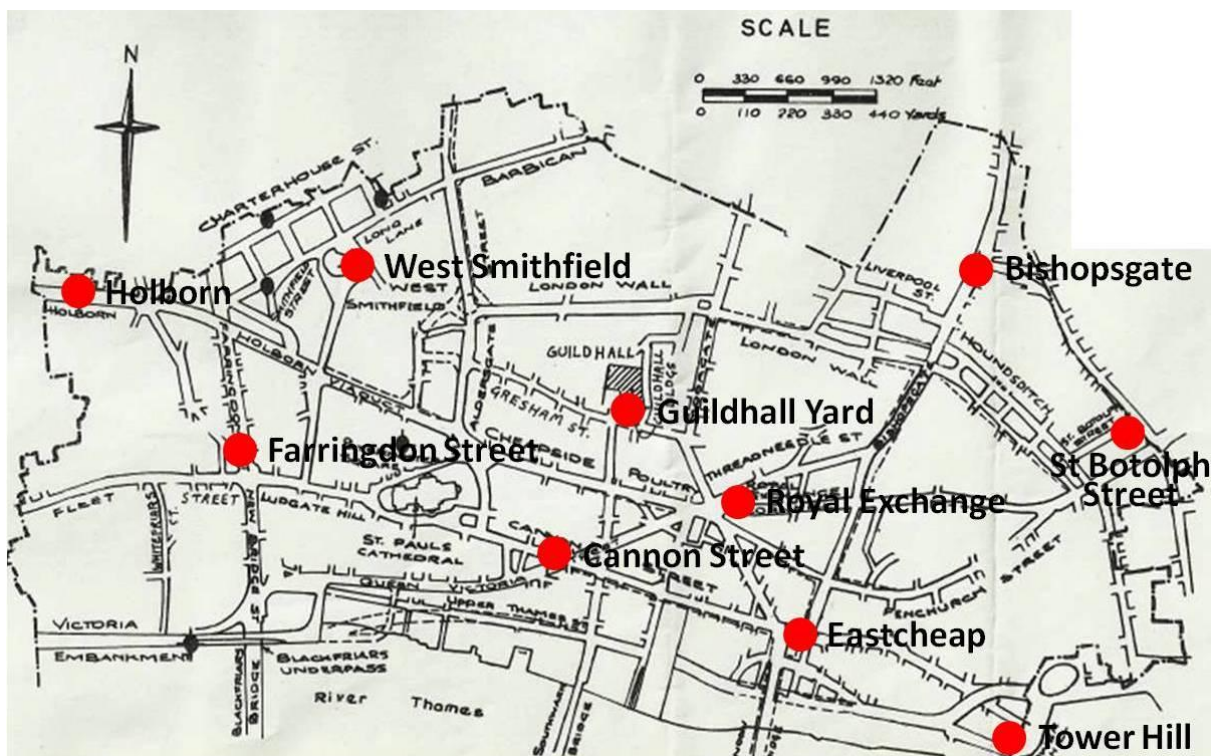


Figure 6.1 Map of City of London Underground Public Conveniences in 1980/81
 Source: LGL Co co rep 1980 no 2, Planning and Communications Committee, 'Public Conveniences in the City', n.p.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Closures

From mid-twentieth century onwards, the dominant theme in literature about London's underground public conveniences is closures. *The Times* reported in 1980 that the City of London had been "wielding the axe with enthusiasm,"¹⁰ having closed five of 17 locations in the past year, which saved the corporation £44,000,¹¹ evidence of the high cost of operating ageing facilities. With ironic humour, a 1983 *Times* column provides a guide for visitors to London and under "Lavatories" says, "Old-style lavatories can usually be recognized by a wrought-iron gate and a sign reading: 'This convenience is now closed.'"¹² The City was not the only area of London faced with financial hard times. Hosken notes that "Following Thatcher's victory [in 1979], cuts in public services bit deeper as the new government tried to balance the books. [Westminster City Council leader Shirley] Porter's response to her reduced budget was to close more than thirty public toilets across the City [of Westminster] from St John's Wood NW8 to Rochester Row SW1."¹³

¹⁰ A. Hamilton, 'London diary: all cisterns go', *The Times*, 17 Dec 1980, p. 12.

¹¹ Anon., 'Catch 22 for Londoners and tourists to worsen: economies cut public conveniences', *The Times*, 01 Jul 1980, p. 4.

¹² M. Kington, 'Moreover ...: help a London tourist', *The Times*, 22 Jun 1983, p. 12.

¹³ A. Hosken, *Nothing Like a Dame: The Scandals of Shirley Porter* (London, 2006), p. 46.

	June 1968 Map	May 1972 Map	1980/81 Map
Aldersgate Street	Men & Women	Closed	Closed
Billingsgate Market	Men & Women	Men	Closed
Bishopsgate	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Bishopsgate Churchyard	Men	Men	Closed
Cannon Street	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Circus Place	Men & Women	Men	Closed
Creechurch Place	Men	Closed	Closed
Crutched Friars	Men	Closed	Closed
Eastcheap	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Farringdon (North)	Men & Women	Closed	Closed
Farringdon (South)	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Fenchurch Street	Men	Men	Closed
Fleet Street	Men	Men	Closed
Guildhall Yard	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Holborn	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Leadenhall Market	Men	Men	Closed
Liverpool Street	Men	Closed	Closed
Lothbury	Men	Closed	Closed
Old Bailey	Men	Closed	Closed
Royal Exchange	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
St. Botolph Street	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
South Place	Men	Closed	Closed
Tower Hill	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Upper Thames Street	Men	Closed	Closed
West Smithfield	Men & Women	Men & Women	Men & Women
Men & Women:	14	10	10
Men:	11	6	0
Total:	25	16	10

Table 6.2 City of London Underground Public Conveniences, 1968-1980/81

Source: LGL Co co rep 1973 no 3, Planning and Communications Committee, 'Public Conveniences in the City', n.p.;

LGL Co co rep 1980 no 2, Planning and Communications Committee, 'Public Conveniences in the City', n.p.;

LMA COL/PL/01/099/C/002, City Engineer, 'Plan Showing the Location of Public Conveniences'.

A set of three City of London reports gives a picture of the status of underground public conveniences and provisions for women in 1968, 1973, and 1980.¹⁴ In 1968, conveniences are still a priority and substantial amounts of money are being invested: £135,000 has been spent since 1963

¹⁴ LGL Co co rep 1968 no 25, Streets Committee, 'Report – Streets Committee';

LGL Co co rep 1973 no 3, Planning and Communications Committee, 'Report – Planning and Communications Committee: Public Conveniences in the City' (London, 1973);

LGL Co co rep 1980 no 2, Planning and Communications Committee. 'Report – Planning and Communications Committee: Public Conveniences in the City' (London, 1980).

on rebuilding five new conveniences and modernising three, and £140,000 budgeted for building three new locations.¹⁵ A survey conducted shows that:

... so far as women are concerned, the majority used the same convenience regularly, travelled to the City by train, used the convenience on arrival or when going home and also used other conveniences. The majority of women also have conveniences at their place of work or at the place where they usually have lunch.¹⁶

The number of locations of underground conveniences available for women in 1968 (14) is over half the number of those for men (25) (see Table 6.2), indicating a persistent unequal provision for the sexes. Table 6.2 shows the rapidity of closures between 1968 and 1980/81, by which time women have access to all 10 of the remaining 10 facilities, an improved ratio, but with no material improvement in provision.

Why are some disused underground public conveniences still in evidence on London streets? Again, economic considerations are most likely the reason. It may be cheaper to simply close a location than to demolish it. The 1931 Guilford Place conveniences in Bloomsbury, for example, were under consideration in the 1980s. A complete refurbishment would have cost £61,950 so the Borough of Camden closed and padlocked the facilities, formerly the Borough's busiest, in 1988.¹⁷ Some locations have been removed altogether from the London streetscape, such as those at Circus Place, Lothbury, and Guildhall Yard in the City. The facilities at High Holborn in Camden would have cost about £270,000 to refurbish, including a new supportive structure overhead, while filling in

¹⁵ LGL Co co rep 1968 no 25, Streets Committee, 'Report – Streets Committee', p. 1.

¹⁶ LGL Co co rep 1968 no 25, Streets Committee, 'Report – Streets Committee', p. 2.

¹⁷ Anon., '£110,000 needed to keep spending pennies', *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 02 Nov 1985, n.p., in CAC 46.32 GUILFORD PLACE, M. Aston, 'Ladies' and Gentlemen's Public Conveniences and Frances Whiting Memorial Fountain Guilford Place, WC1: Information File' (London, 2008).

would cost only £50,000.¹⁸ Thus the High Holborn facilities were closed in 1978, no trace of them remaining on the pavement.

¹⁸ B. Schlaffenberg, Director of Planning and Communications, London Borough of Camden, letter to The Director, Museum of London, 'High Holborn Public Convenience', 30 Jan 1980, in MOL 80.16 Museum of London, accession file, 'Social history group: High Holborn conveniences', 1980.

Conclusion

By considering the City of London's underground public conveniences with reference to gender differentials, this paper has attempted to illuminate under-examined aspects of London's social history. The late nineteenth century installation of these cultural artefacts, still visible in the London streetscape, contributed to the sanitary evolution of London, yet discriminated against half of the population. A manifestation of civic pride, they provided relief to generations, yet it is clear that provisions for women were consistently fewer than those for men. Findings show that thought went into locating the first underground public convenience for women in the City, with respect to female working populations and daily migration patterns. However, contemporary attitudes towards women, and perhaps more importantly, economic considerations, delayed installation of further facilities.

Underground conveniences in general began to fall out of favour by the mid-twentieth century, due to inaccessibility to disabled users, abuse by drug users and men meeting for sex, and vandalism. Again, economic considerations, such as the cost of staffing, played a major role in closing facilities and in some cases replacing them with automated public conveniences. By the 1980s though, following many closures in London, lavatorial nostalgia set in. As Wright notes in 1989:

Unfortunately, it now appears that not only are the Borough Councils pulling down their Victorian sanitary treasure houses, but they are also closing the ones

that are left. Westminster is probably the worst culprit, although other councils – particularly the City of London – are almost as ruthless.¹

A detailed history of underground public conveniences in the City and Greater London remains to be written, but clearly toilet provisions are reflective of contemporary societal ideology. Thankfully, times have changed since when, “Either ladies didn’t go out or ladies didn’t go.”²

¹ E. Wright, ‘Spending a penny’, *What’s On*, 22-29 March 1989, p. 8, in CAS 46.32 GUILFORD PLACE, M. Aston, ‘Ladies’ and Gentlemen’s Public Conveniences and Frances Whiting Memorial Fountain Guilford Place, WC1: Information File’ (London, 2008).

² Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, p. 82.

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