

Friday 13 May 2022

Dear everyone

This week has been a confluence of effluence.

On Monday evening I sat next to the wonderful Director of the Museum of London, Sharon Ament, at the City of London's Education Board dinner. She is fantastic company, and told me of the various artefacts held by the museum. One artefact is a chunk of a fatberg from London's sewers. These things are part of our cultural landscape, and more than a nuisance: dangerous, and costly to remove. The now infamous Whitechapel fatberg weighed in at 130,000 kgs, some of which has been converted to biofuel. How do they come about? Wet wipes mainly, the scourge of the sewerage system. As we were to discover...

Later in the week our school enjoyed the miasma of a blocked drain. Praise the Lord for the invention of Dyno-Rod, who, Dawn noticed on numerous dog walks around Smithfield, appear to have a permanent van at the ready. The cause of our blockage? Wet wipes! Amusing in a puerile way, but unfunny in reality.

Things are better than they were, thanks to Joseph Bazalgette, appointed to sort out London's sewers in the 19th Century. In July 1855, scientist Michael Faraday wrote in *The Thunderer* (I couldn't resist that joke),

Near the bridges the feculence rolled up in clouds so dense that they were visible at the surface, even in water of this kind. ... The smell was very bad, and common to the whole of the water; it was the same as that which now comes up from the gully-holes in the streets; the whole river was for the time a real sewer.

Pepys's experience of the little office in those dread years of the plague were none too safe either. He writes on January 28 1665:

At Brainford I 'alight, having need to relieve myself, and went into an Inne doore that stood open, found the house of office and used it, but saw no people, only after I was in the house, heard a great dogg barke, and so was afraid how I should get safe back again, and therefore drew my sword and scabbard out of my belt to have ready in my hand, but did not need to use it, but got safe into the coach again, but lost my belt by the shift, not missing it till I come to Hampton Court.

1.7 billion people in the world don't have a safe place to go to the loo. This is non trivial and a serious global issue, causing the early deaths of hundreds of people around the world every day.

We're very lucky, but we do need to look after our loos. The subject was ripe for today's assembly and, as you can imagine, the children loved it. But they might also chastise you at home if your wet wipes make their way into the water closet.

To end on a more fragrant note, the wisteria in the Cathedral gardens has the most glorious perfume.

And here's *KC and the Sunshine Band*, shaking you know what...(look out for the valve trombone, not, that's not a euphemism)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqoDrWXnld0>

Best wishes

Simon