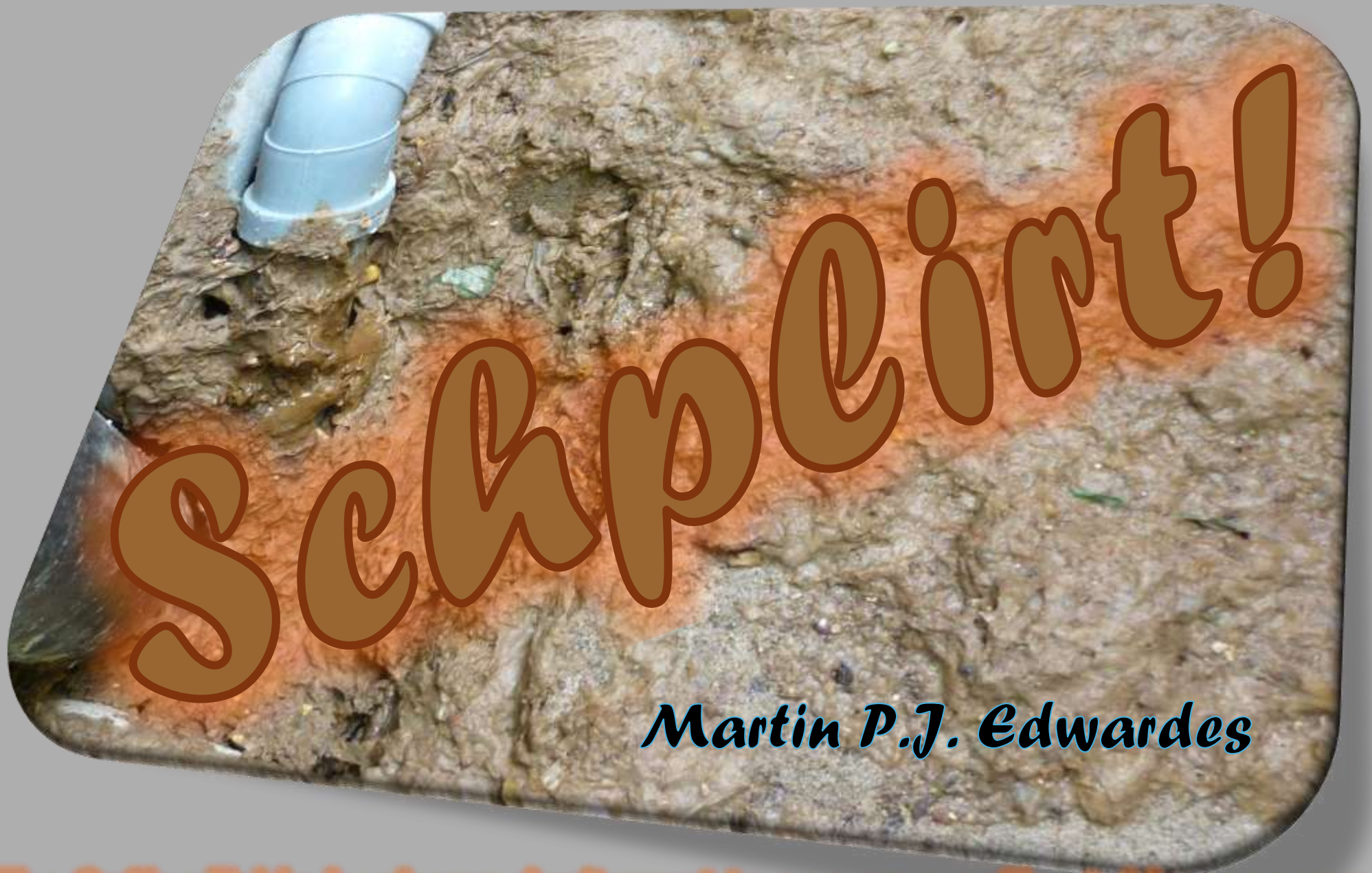




The Coffee Table book you don't want to see on a coffee table near you

Schplirt!

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Martin P.J. Edwardes



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This book would not have been possible without the support of our neighbours, those who were themselves directly involved in the situation and those who offered help and advice to get us through the worst of it. You know who you are, and you should know that you are appreciated and have our gratitude. We tried not to make this a public issue while it was ongoing, but those of our friends who knew the situation are thanked for their help and understanding.

Especial thanks go to those who helped edit this book – our neighbours, Philip, and others who prefer to remain anonymous. Without their suggestions this book would have been a harder read, and much less entertaining.

There are also some heroes at Thames Water: everyday people doing their job as best they can, and not viewing customers solely as profit centres, annoyances and ciphers. You will encounter some of them in this book.

Remember that this book represents an exceptional circumstance, and most people out there are not your enemies. You may not be able to pick your opponents, but you can often choose your wars.

Dedications

This book is primarily dedicated to cowboy builders everywhere: may you rot in Hell.

It is also dedicated to those who permitted this whole situation of privatised monopolies to come to be, such as:

- ☛ Margaret Thatcher, the Wickedest Witch of Westminster, and her flying monkeys. They thought countries could be run like households; and that monopolies were Good Things;
- ☛ the greedy and pernicious in the Financial World, who saw the whole privatisation exercise as an excuse to make a quick buck while the future could go hang;
- ☛ and the happily ill-informed and stupid who didn't realise the sounds of success they could hear were the boots of the vainglorious marching over their heads. May they live long enough to realise the rest of us are still laughing at their naïveté – with gritted teeth, but laughing.

Schplirt!

The Coffee Table book you don't want to see on a coffee table near you

Martin P.J. Edwardes

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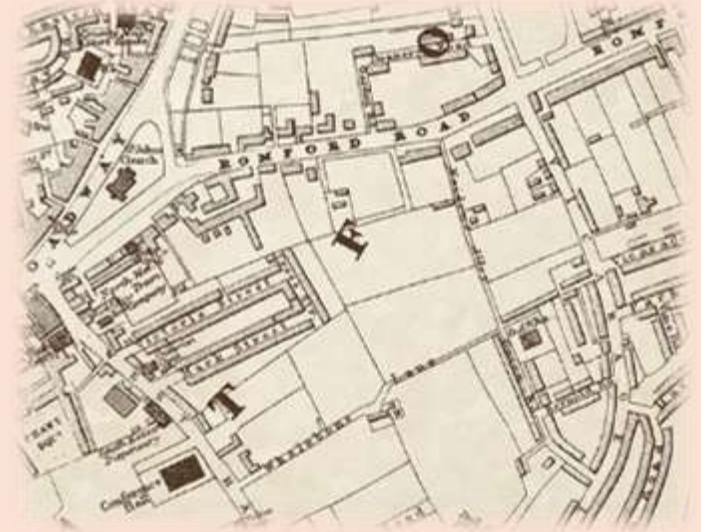
What this book is about

In 1888, The area we now know as Stratford village was still farmland. Some houses had been built along the Romford Road, but behind them were open fields of potatoes, turnips, cabbages, lettuces, peas, celery, and hay.

By 1900, only twelve years later, most of the village was complete. The roads had been metalled, most of the housing was complete, street lamps had been installed, and some of the houses were already occupied.



Below all this building work a marvel of the modern age had been installed: a Victorian sewer network – invisible but sanitary, and very effective.



This sewer system continued to serve the village through two World Wars and two major reorganisations of London, quietly taking away the unwanted detritus of life without fuss or melodrama. Nearly a century of sterling service was given by the sewer network and its human guardians.

And then a deeply silly person sold the service to accountants and spivs, and the marvel of a past age began to buckle under the strain of neglect.

This book is about customers dealing with Thames Water, one of the new water monopolies. It shows how greed makes things go wrong, and why it's so difficult to get them working properly again. The sewers beneath our feet have become a battlefield between customers who simply want a working system, and avaricious owners who want the most profit for the least cost and effort. The tale is often funny, occasionally unbelievable (but always true), and sometimes weird. It does not end happily-ever-after, but it does end satisfactorily.

Some of the quoted text has been changed to protect anonymity, but the events described actually happened.

7th November 2023: Our First Report to Thames Water

It started as a day like many others. Little did we know that it was the start of a change in our lives more invasive than Covid-19.

Where's the problem?	Outside but on private property, such as a driveway or garden
What are you experiencing?	Blocked drain on my property
Is the drain overflowing?	Yes
Where is the nearest manhole?	In the street outside my property
Is the sewage running into a roadside gulley?	No
Is the sewage running into a river, lake or stream?	No
Can you tell us any more details?	A sewer runs from our back garden through other back gardens and then (I think) out to the feeder sewer under the road. Our drain is the lowest exitable point in the run. On 26 May this year a close-by sewage aeration pipe was struck by a lorry and knocked over, so the council took the pipe away and filled in the hole with bitumen. It is possible that they have overfilled the hole, or that the removal of the aerator has created an air lock. The sewage began flooding from our drain in mid-July. We have put nothing down our lavatory and drain but water and the three Ps (Pooh, Pee and Paper), and currently a lot of drain unblocker, and when the sewage overtops the drain it seems to be mostly the three Ps. But cleaning up after an overtopping is not pleasant.
Reference	00464200

7th November 2023: Thames Water Responds

Hello Martin

We'll be out to investigate the flooding by 08:07am on Thursday 9/11/2023.

We'll let you know when we're on our way. If the flooding is in or around your home, please reduce toilet flushes and the use of washing machines, dishwashers, showers, and baths. If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].



We're on our way to investigate the problem. We'll be there around 3:12 pm.

If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].



Good news, we've fixed the problem you reported. If you need to contact us again about a new issue, you can easily report it online.

We're here for you

We understand it's worrying when there's a problem. If you need extra support in future, check if our free Priority Services could help.



We visited today to clear a blockage reference 00464200, however we were not able to find the cause.

To get to the bottom of this, the engineer has referred the investigation to a technical specialist to review.

We aim to be in touch with you within 48 hours to advise of next steps.

The Thames Water Team



11th November 2023: The First Schplirt to be Photographed*

First, the loo began to get unhappy and wouldn't flush properly.



Then, the drain began to overflow. Was it just the Autumn leaves?



*Then we had the Schplirt. "It's just water," we told ourselves.
So we took pictures, but didn't pass them on to Thames Water,
and it did eventually drain away.*

** If you want to know more about the word Schplirt, see Appendix I.*

25th November 2023: Where do Schplirts Come from?



It starts with some bubbles, and a flow of liquid out of the drain ...



... Then the flow increases, and solids of various types float out ...



... Soon, it gets damp and funky, and threatens to overtop the step into the garden



... finally the water stops coming and starts going. It's all over – except, of course, for the clean-up.

26th November 2023: Another Report to Thames Water

This was one of our weirdest dealings with TW: They fixed it, they didn't fix it, they fixed it again, no they didn't.

Can you tell us any more details?

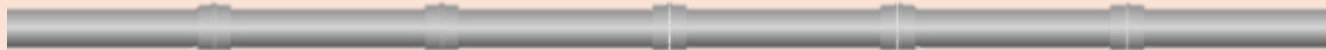
See case numbers 00464200 and 00468242. Any news on the drain blockage? You attended on 7, 13, 14 and 17 November and have agreed that there is a problem, but we have heard nothing since. I did not expect that one of the daily tasks in my twilight years would be “check overflow and deal with raw sewage”. The worst part is that the toilet gets blocked and impossible to use. A bottle of Mr Muscle Drain Gel brings temporary relief, but we are using up to four bottles a week and it is becoming an expensive habit.

I know you have no interest in visual evidence, but I have set up a gallery at http://martinedwardes.me.uk/drainy_days, should you wish to inspect it.

P.S. After yesterday's eruption it seems to be behaving itself today.

Reference

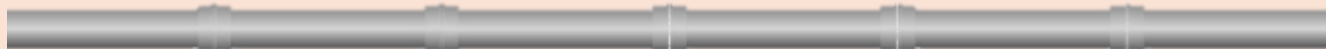
00475355



26th November 2023: From the TW Office Team

We'll be out to investigate the flooding by 11:10am on Tuesday 28/11/2023.

We'll let you know when we're on our way. If the flooding is in or around your home, please reduce toilet flushes and the use of washing machines, dishwashers, showers, and baths. If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].



We're on our way to investigate the problem. We'll be there around 12:01 pm.

If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].

27th November 2023: More from the TW Office Team

Good news, we've fixed the problem you reported. If you need to contact us again about a new issue, you can easily report it online.

We're here for you

We understand it's worrying when there's a problem. If you need extra support in future, check if our free Priority Services could help.

[The work team said the issue was not cleared and further work was needed.]

We're on our way to investigate the problem. We'll be there around 3:12 pm.

If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].

Good news, we've fixed the problem you reported. If you need to contact us again about a new issue, you can easily report it online.

We're here for you

We understand it's worrying when there's a problem. If you need extra support in future, check if our free Priority Services could help.

Learn about Priority Services

We visited today to clear a blockage reference 00464200, however we were not able to find the cause.

To get to the bottom of this, the engineer has referred the investigation to a technical specialist to review.

We aim to be in touch with you within 48 hours to advise of next steps.

2nd December 2023: Yet Another Report to Thames Water

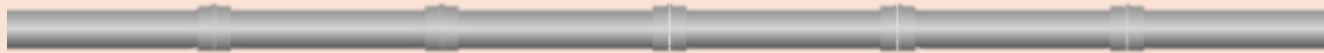
Can you tell us any more details?

See case numbers 00464200, 00468242 & 00475355. The drain has overflowed with effluent again. We went out at 9:45am this morning, when the waste water was running away OK. We got back at 1:00pm to find the drain area and surroundings full of brown liquids and solids.

See added pictures at http://martinedwardes.me.uk/drainy_days.

Reference

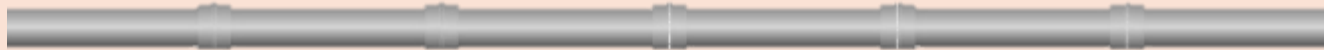
00481077



2nd December 2023: From the Thames Water Office Team

We'll be out to investigate the flooding by 13:45pm on Monday 4/12/2023.

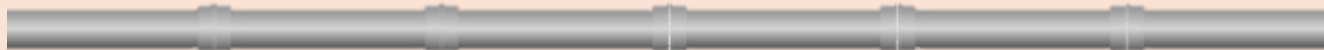
We'll let you know when we're on our way. If the flooding is in or around your home, please reduce toilet flushes and the use of washing machines, dishwashers, showers, and baths. If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].



We're on our way to investigate the problem. We'll be there around 7:40 pm.

If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].

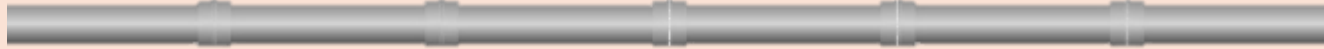
[They didn't turn up.]



3rd December 2023: More from the TW Office Team

We're on our way to investigate the problem. We'll be there around 8:47 am.

If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].

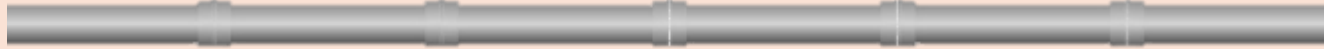


We recently got in touch about repairing an issue on our network. Just to let you know – we aim to do this on 03 December 2023.

Please note, this might change if our repair team is called out to an emergency on that day.

Before we do the repair, we may need to suspend parking bays or put out traffic cones so we can access the site. We'd be grateful if you can bear with us while we do this – it will help us do our work as quickly as possible.

We'll let you know when we've completed the repair and when we plan to resurface the area.



We've cleared the issue you reported to us reference 00481077. Thanks for helping us look after the environment.

Learn more about blockages at our top tips.

[The work team said the issue was not cleared and further work was needed.]



2nd December 2023

Before the clearance



17th December 2023

Later that same month

Interlude: The Roman Cloaca Maxima and Via Cloaca

Soon after Rome was built, the Romans realised they had a problem. The city was founded on two hills, the *Palatine* and *Capitoline*, with a valley between them; so, while official buildings and temples were built on the hills, the valley began to fill with housing, which was subject to regular flooding when it rained. While the rain flowed easily off the hills, it mostly flowed down into the houses in the valley and from there down to the River Tiber. In addition, a marsh to the North of the city needed to be drained to provide more building land. The Romans solved both problems by building a wide sewer from the marsh, through the town valley to the Tiber, and naming it, in typical Roman no-nonsense fashion, the biggest drain, or *Cloaca Maxima*. Originally it was an open stream, but it was eventually put underground with buildings on top. The Cloaca Maxima became a model for underground sewage systems throughout the Roman Empire, and it still survives today, as a street drain – although it no longer carries sewage to the Tiber.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloaca_Maxima



*The Cloaca Maxima empties into the Tiber
below the Vestal Temple*



Church Street sewer, York

Eboracum, now York, had an underground Roman sewage system called the *Via Cloaca*. It was an extensive network of tunnels, many of which are still in place. It is thought that the Viking *Great Heathen Army*, which captured York in 866CE, used the *Via Cloaca* in 867CE to ambush the English army sent to recapture the city. This, however, may be a modern embellishment to an under-reported battle.

There is a detailed study of the Roman sewers of York available free at <https://www.collections.yorkarchaeologicaltrust.co.uk/s/publicationp/item/74459>

December through February: The Gathering Storm



17th December 2023



30th December 2023



31st December 2023



2nd January 2024



5th January 2024



6th January 2024



13th January 2024



29th January 2024



1st February 2024



19th February 2024

December, January and February were not a boom time for schplirts, but it was clear the problem was getting worse, not better.

4th March 2024: First Official Complaint to Thames Water

Thames Water,

I am raising an official complaint using the email address offered by your helpline. If this is not correct, please forward it to the necessary contact point in your organisation. This official complaint is to enable me to, if necessary, pursue the issue with the Consumer Council for Water, then with the Water Redress Scheme, and finally, if necessary, with OfWat. This follows the standard complaints procedure as advised by the Citizens' Advice website, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/water/complaints-about-your-water-supply/complaining-about-your-water-company/>.

There has been an ongoing problem with the sewage capture system at our property since at least 7 November 2023. The sewer line serving our house and others is blocked, and there seems to be no way to clear the blockage, either from our end or from the roadway end. This means that sewage capture has been replaced by sewage delivery, with regular replenishment from our garden drain. We have been storing the delivered waste in a rubble bag, because putting it back down the drain is a pointless exercise, it only returns. However, we have now had to start a second bag as the first one is full.

During the past four months we have raised several call-outs to your emergency management team (case numbers 00464200, 00468242, 00475355, 00481077, 00505959, 00529697, 00532550, 00547746 & 00563517), with variable short-term success. None of the calls have been able to fully drain the system so that the nature of the blockage can at least be identified, but the blockage nonetheless does appear to be located somewhere beyond our property. There have also been several requests for your technical team to map the sewage system, which seems to have taken on a baroque configuration over the years; but that issue also remains outstanding.

I realise that we are just one problem among many, but that does not make it any less urgent for us. Some of our neighbours have young children, which I believe makes them a priority, and our own household consists of two people, both over 70 – another priority group, I believe. Personally, I had not envisaged shovelling sewage as a regular event in my Autumn years.

A solution to this ongoing issue would be appreciated. It does not have to be an immediate solution, as long as we know that the issue has a conclusion date. We would also like to know what we should do with a couple of bags of sewage. I take it that the former TW solution, taking it to a river and pouring it in, is no longer permitted.

A copy of our correspondence with Thames Water is attached, and pictures of the problem are available online.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Martin P.J. Edwardes

BSc MA PhD, FRAI AKC



Contributing Schplirts



1st February 2024



19th February 2024



2nd March 2024



3rd March 2024

5th March 2024: Response to First Official Complaint

Hello, Thank you for getting in touch.

We're working hard to respond to all enquiries as fast as we can, and we will aim to get back to you within 10 working days - but at the moment it could take us a little longer. We'll contact you as soon as possible, so you don't need to do anything else at this stage.

If you've got questions regarding your bill please visit our dedicated help pages - We've got lots of helpful information available online. If you're struggling or unable to pay your bill, we're here to help over the phone Monday to Saturday on [Customer Care number].

If you're moving home, you can tell us by using our online form, or call us Monday to Saturday on [Customer Care number].

Remember, if you have an emergency such as sewer flooding or you have no water, we are on hand to help 24/7 through our helpline - just call [Priority number].

Best regards,

Thames Water Customer Care.

5th March 2024: The other TW Delivery

An email wasn't the only thing TW delivered that day.

*Each Schplirt is a blank canvas,
just waiting for interpretation.
I call this one, "Not waving but browning".*



Interlude: Making Poo and Pee in our Inner Sewer

This book would not have been necessary if people did not produce indigestible detritus as part of their existence. In an average day, we eat about 1.75kg of food and drink 2.25kg of liquid. About 1kg is used as fuel, we sweat out 1kg, we shed and replace 0.2kg of skin and hair, we pee about 1.4kg and poo about 0.4kg. Which means that 1.8kg out of 4kg – 45% – is there just to oil the machine. We need: insoluble fibre so our gut has something to grab hold of and keep the effluent flowing; soluble fibre to feed bacteria in our colon; resistant starch to feed micro-organisms throughout the gut; and prebiotics to encourage good gut biotics and suppress bad gut biotics. Other things, like cellulose, lignin, collagen, elastin and cartilage, are unwanted components of our food, and are along just for the ride.

The gut itself is a Heath-Robinson affair: it converts food into slurry; then it extracts nutrients using a complex gut microbiota of bacteria, archaea, fungi, protozoa and bacteriophage viruses. This army of around 100 trillion micro-organisms exists in a mostly symbiotic relationship with their human host. What the human host and biotic army cannot use is expelled via the penis and anus, which is where all the troubles recounted in this book begin.

Mouth – starts digestion with saliva and mechanically pulverises food.

Stomach – chemically decomposes food with acid and enzymes.

Liver – synthesises proteins, metabolises carbohydrates, produces digestive enzymes (bile), stores glucose, detoxifies blood and decomposes old blood cells.

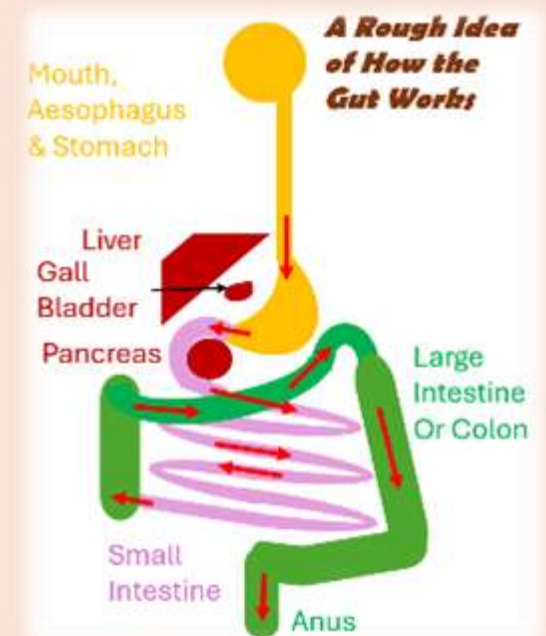
Gall Bladder – concentrates bile from the liver for stomach digestion.

Pancreas – produces bicarbonate to neutralise stomach acid, and moderates glucose levels in the blood using insulin and glucagon.

Small intestine – extracts and absorbs nutrients: sugars, amino acids, fatty acids.

Large intestine – absorbs water and salts, and packages detritus for disposal.

Kidneys – (round the back) filter blood and extract toxins (excess water, hydrogen, ammonium, potassium and uric acid). Toxins are passed to the bladder for disposal.



12th March 2024: Creating Lake TWiticaca

By mid-March, Thames Water had decided that the only way to properly inspect the full length of the drain was via our property. They would have to break through the concrete surface of our gulley, dig down to the drain, break into the drain, drain the drain, and put a camera down. This process, when eventually carried out, definitively showed the blockage to be in the shared sewer beyond our property boundary, and therefore Thames Water's problem, not ours.

FUN FACT: Sewers on private property are the responsibility of the home owner, who must pay for all sewer problems up to the boundary line. However, shared sewers on private property are the responsibility of Thames Water. As ours is the house at the start of a pipe run which passes under several houses, we should have paid for the drain-work. However, as our sewer was above suspicion, Thames Water paid.

Deciding what to do was the easy part; the difficult bit was getting the work done. This took planning and organisation; and reorganisation; and reorganisation; and ...

CASE NUMBER 00481077

Date (2024)	TW email messages
12 th March	Works have been booked for 12 March 2024. Access is not required.
Also 12 th March	Works have been rebooked for 15 March 2024. Access is not required.
20 th March	Works have been rebooked for 20 March 2024. Access is not required.
21 st March	Works have been rebooked for 21 March 2024. Access is not required.
4 th April	We'll be with you between 08:00 AM and 13:00 PM on 09 April. We'll let you know when we're on our way.
Also 4 th April	We recently got in touch about repairing an issue on our network. Just to let you know – we aim to do this on 09 April 2024. Please note, this might change if our repair team is called out to an emergency on that day.

Date (2024)	TW email messages
6 th April	Here's your reminder that we'll be with you between 08:00 AM and 13:00 PM on 09 April. We'll let you know when we're on our way.
8 th April	Here's your reminder that we'll be with you tomorrow between 08:00 AM and 13:00 PM. We'll let you know when we're on our way. Please make sure you're at home so we can complete our work.
9 th April	We're on our way to investigate the problem. We'll be there around 9:44 am. If you need to talk to someone urgently, please call [Priority number].

And so, the work was finally done – and to access our sewer they required ... access. The engineer left that evening with the cheery news that TW would not need to disturb us again. The hole-filling team attended the next day, filled in the hole and reinstated the concrete. For eight glorious days we were without schplirtation, and we did not discover the new-formed Lake TWiticaca until 3rd May.

Lake TWiticaca was formed by a geolillogical phenomenon: where the gulley had formerly sloped down to the drain, it now sloped upward for the last few inches – and gravity is a harsh mistress. We have accepted this state of affairs philosophically: the pool is small and transient, a gentle reminder that all things must pass.

Of course, while the sewer work could be rescheduled, schplirts are not so easily postponed.



23^d March 2024



29^h March 2024



30th March 2024



8^h April 2024

4th June 2024: The Hail Maria Pass

By June 2024, we had progressed to having our own Customer Liaison at TW. Maria proved to be a help and comfort through the difficult times. She arranged collections of Scheisseklumpen on request, accepting that we were unable to provide a reliable schedule for collection. She also liaised with the engineering team regarding visits and inspections. She was a credit to the TW organisation, and I hope they recognised her worth. Unfortunately, she liaised with us for only four months.



Our Ref: 33528028

UPDATE ON YOUR CASE

Dear Dr Edwardes

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your ongoing case with us. I'm writing to provide you with an update relating to our investigations into the sewer network near your home.

As discussed, we've located a defected section of sewer pipe situated in a neighbouring property. Whilst I appreciate this isn't a quick fix, please be assured we're continuing to do all we can to progress this matter as swiftly as possible. You'll likely notice the presence of our vehicles and engineers in the vicinity of your home over the coming weeks and I'll of course keep you updated along the way.

I'd like to thank you for your patience while our work is ongoing.

NEXT STEPS

I'll contact you with a further update on or before 21 June.

It may be helpful to mention, for all email contact, we'll respond within a maximum of 10 working days. If you'd like to speak with me, the quickest way to contact me is by calling [Maria's number]. I'm usually available between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. If I'm not available when you call, you can leave a message and I'll return your call as soon as possible, or one of my colleagues will be happy to help.

CONTACTING US IN FUTURE

You may be interested to know, for future reference, you can report some of the most common issues, such as blockages and leaks, on our website here. If no existing issues show up after searching your address, click on the map to start a new report.

For future reference, the quickest way to get in touch to report issues, or for any other advice, is to contact us on Twitter or Facebook. We're available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Alternatively, should you prefer to call us, our Customer Contact Centre is available on [Priority number]. Lines are always open.

DID YOU KNOW WE OFFER EXTRA SUPPORT?

If you or someone you know needs a little extra support, our free Priority Services Register helps us to understand your situation so we can take it into account as best we can, whether this is a temporary situation or a lifelong condition.

Carers, friends, or family can register on behalf of someone they think could benefit from extra support. Find out more here.

If you're worried about paying your bill, we want to support you as much as we can. There are lots of ways we may be able to help, from spreading your bills and arrears into affordable amounts to switching you to a cheaper tariff. Find out more here.

Yours sincerely

Maria, Customer Relations

2024 TW advert aimed at reducing water usage.

*If they truly wanted a Middle English feel,
the text should ideally have read:*

My taps shall runnen not over.

*-eth is the suffix for 3rd person singular;
but "taps" is plural, so -en is the correct suffix.*

Also, the negator should follow the verb.



29th July to September 2024: the Consumer Council for Water

29th July 2024: email to CCW

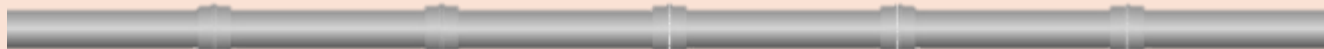
Since November 2023 we have been dealing with raw sewage coming out of our drain. Although we are the start of the sewage line (hence a private drain), our drain is also the lowest point on the line, so it is the place where all spillages occur.

Thames Water informed us that our private line was the only way to reach and investigate the blockage because, over the years, sewer access points along the line have been built over, and the only sewer access point is too convoluted for high-pressure hoses and cameras. We allowed TW to dig out our private sewer in May so they could send cameras down to locate the blockage. This they did, locating a problem further down the line (i.e. in TW's part of the line, not our private sewer). They reinstated our sewer and told us they would need no further access to our property.

Toward the end of May they turned up at our front door without prior warning, telling us they needed to dig up our sewer again so they could extract the blockage. Being dubious about the possibility of more work at our end of the line resolving the issue, and being aware that they had not been able to clear the blockage last time our sewer was open, we refused access. We suggested that TW should seek a permanent access solution on their own part of the line, not ours. After some weeks, with Maria at TW arguing our case with the management team, we were told once again that TW would seek another solution.

Since then, nothing has happened, except that the sewer line has refilled, and we are getting daily deliveries of excrement from the TW part of the sewer. We gather the sewage into bags which TW then collect; but this is not exactly how I planned to enjoy my retirement. TW refuse to give a date for sorting the problem, using the Data Protection Act as a shield for their lack of information. However, while the DPA could arguably prevent them from informing us of the who, what, and where (which we already know), and at a stretch could cover the how and why, the DPA does not prevent them from giving us the when.

Please note that we are not seeking compensation, all we want is a working sewer line. A copy of our email history with TW will be attached if your system permits, along with a pictorial history of the spillages. Otherwise, I can email them to you.



2nd August 2024: email from CCW

Dear Martin Edwardes

Thank you for telling us about your complaint against Thames Water. We are sorry to say that at this point, we are unable to help with your complaint. This is because we need you to complain to Thames Water highlighting what you're unhappy with, and give them the chance to put things right for you.

Most complaints can be resolved directly with your water company. The complaints process is as follows:

1. Stage one – your water company
2. Stage two – your water company
3. Stage three – Consumer Council for Water (CCW)

We have made Thames Water aware of your contact with CCW so they should be ready for you to get in touch with them. If you're not sure how to contact Thames Water to complain, you can usually find information about their complaints process on their website, or from their customer service teams.

Once you have exhausted stage one and stage two of Thames Water's complaints process and they have signposted you to CCW, please come back to us. We will then review how Thames Water dealt with your complaint to see if we can get a better outcome for you. Please note that due to the high levels of contacts we are currently experiencing, we will not be able to respond to you until you are to provide your correspondence signposting you to CCW confirming that you have exhausted your company's complaint process.

Or, if it's been more than eight weeks since the date Thames Water highlighting first acknowledged your complaint, you can contact us again. In this case, we will review how your water company dealt with your complaint to see if we can get a better outcome for you.

When you're ready, you can complete an online form on our website, where you can upload correspondence; or you can call us and speak to one of our advisors on 0300 034 2222* (if you live in England), or on 0300 034 3333* (if you live in Wales).

Unfortunately, there are some complaints where CCW cannot change the outcome, although we can provide some free advice and guidance. You can find more information about this at our website.

We wish you all the best with your ongoing complaint and hope that it can be resolved, to your satisfaction, directly with Thames Water. (If you email us, please remember to include the CCW ref number in the subject box. Thank you)

Kind regards, CCW



2nd August 2024: Second Complaint to Thames Water

Dear Thames Water Managerial Team,

Blocked Sewer

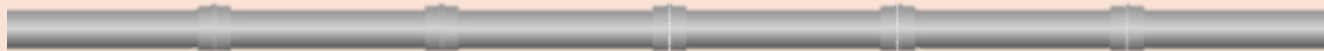
This is a formal application to complain about lack of action in dealing with the above blockage, which has been outstanding for nine months. Reference case numbers are 00464200, 00468242, 00475355, 00481077, 00505959, 00529697, 00532550, 00547746, 00563517, 00596800, 00723185, and 33528028. To facilitate identification of the cause of the blockage we allowed you access to our private sewer line; but, despite being informed that we had done all we could, that the problem was not in our sewer line, and that you would not need to bother us again, you have signally failed to provide a solution to the problem.

We are now facing almost-daily spillages of raw sewage, which we have to bag up for collection by you before cleaning the spillage area to avoid public health issues. This is not how we planned to spend our twilight years. I also attach copies of the current case history and a selection of pictures of the sewage spillages. Please note that these are "living documents" and will be updated with new information as it becomes available. If at any stage you want current copies of the documents, let us know.

We look forward to receiving your final response on this matter, either as a resolution of the problem or to allow us to escalate the complaint to the CCW.

Yours Faithfully,

Dr. Martin P.J. Edwardes, BSc MA PhD, FRAI AKC and Philip G. Rescorla, OBE



5th August 2024: email from CCW

Dear Mr Edwardes

Case 240729-000086:

Thames Water have now confirmed your complaint has been ongoing over 8 weeks. This means we can take your case forward.

You have been placed into a queue to be allocated to one of our Consumer Relations Advisors for a full review within 20 days. To help us to help you more quickly, please do not chase for an update.

Upon allocation, your advisor will make contact with you and be your point of contact going forward.

As part of their review, they will:

- Outline the actions they propose to take

- If no action can be taken, tell you why.

In the meantime, if you have any additional information that you feel would aid your complaint, please can you send this through to casework@ccwater.org.uk.

Thank you for your patience and we will be in touch soon.

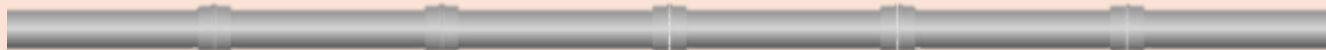
Kind regards,

CCW Casework Team

5th August 2024: email to CCW

As requested, supporting documentation for the above case is attached.

Martin P.J. Edwardes



Mid-August 2024: phone call from CCW

Nick from the CCW contacted us by phone. He arranged weekly collection of sewage by Thames Water.

2nd September 2024: email to CCW

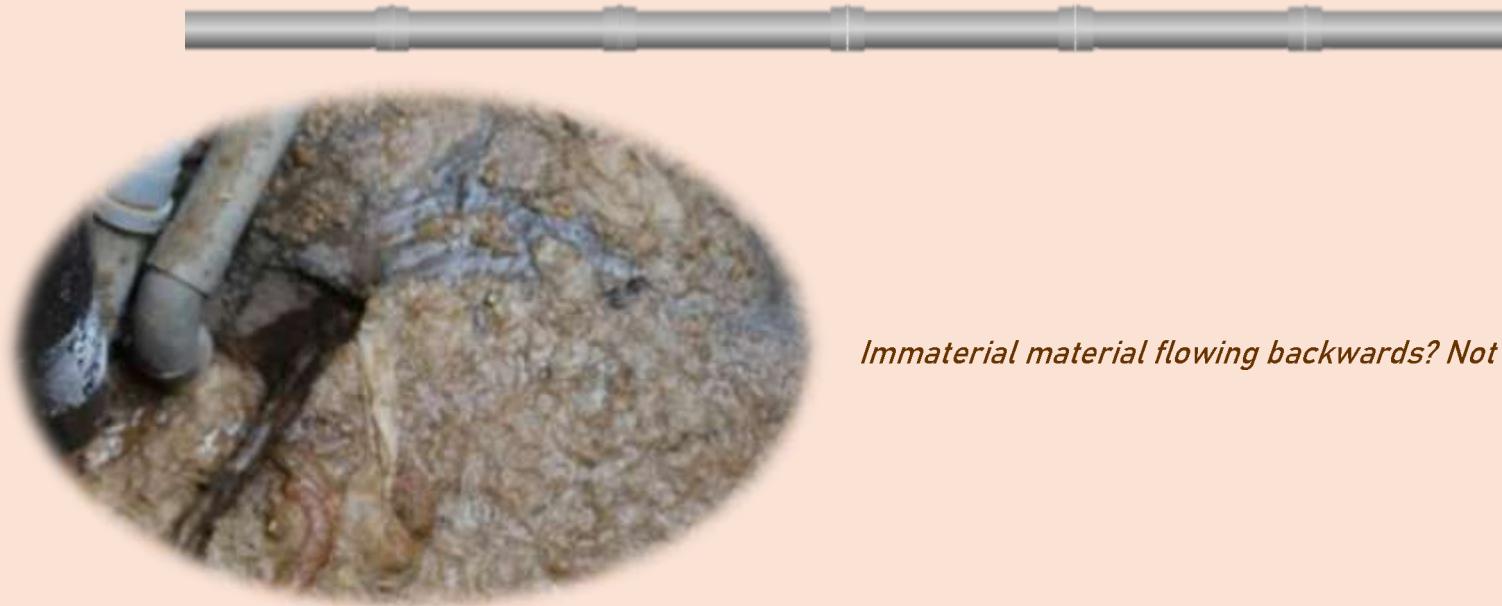
Nick,

Just to let you know that the weekly collection of sewage has not been implemented in any useful way. I am back to raising case numbers every time I have sewage for collection. An updated copy of the case report is attached. Only ten more days and TW will be reporting when we can expect this ongoing problem to end. And only two months before we get to celebrate the first anniversary. A chocolate cake would seem appropriate.

Martin Edwardes

Early September 2024: phone call from CCW

Nick informed us that CCW could no longer help us because we were not suffering “the problem” – the problem is a blocked sewer, and this had been caused in another house; our sewer line was fine. The liberal (but free) distribution of merdeliciousness into our garden was not a problem – or, at least, it was not a problem with which CCW need concern themselves: as long as our sewer line was free-flowing, the direction of flow was immaterial.



Immaterial material flowing backwards? Not a problem!

Interlude: The CCW Customer Gavotte

One, two: what can we do?
Three, four: they just want more.
Five, six: give them nix.
Seven, eight: now it's too late.
Nine, ten: feeling zen.
Job done, back to one.



September/October: Politicians, & Fish

18th September 2024: email to Stratford & Bow MP, Uma Kumaran

Dear Ms Kumaran, MP,

I am Martin Edwardes, one of your constituents. I am writing concerning an ongoing problem we have with Thames Water over a blockage in the sewer drainage line between our property and the sewer mains. Since 7 November 2023, we have been enduring regular effluent overflows from our drain into our back gulley, and there is currently no sign of Thames Water providing a solution.

We share a sewer line with other houses, which means that their sewer drainage lines are the responsibility of Thames Water. However, as ours is the first house in the line, our part of the sewer line is our responsibility. We are happy to sort out any problems in our sewer line, but there is nothing wrong; Thames Water has identified the blockage as occurring somewhere further down the line. However, while our sewer is the highest point in the line (being the start of the line), our back gulley drain is the lowest entry point on the line; which means that, when the sewer line fills, it overflows into our back gulley. Our entry point becomes an exit point.

We raised our first official complaint with Thames Water on 4 March 2024, but we continued to cooperate as fully as we could, letting them open up our private sewer to drain the sewer line. After they had drained the line and sent cameras down to identify the location of the blockage, we suggested that they install a small access chamber to monitor the line; but they stated that it was not needed, filled in the hole and restored the concrete around the drain. Two weeks later, a Thames Water operative rang our front door bell to tell us they needed to dig up our sewer line again; annoyed by their short-sightedness, we refused, telling them to sort the problem at source, i.e. further down the sewer line. This was in mid-April.

Nothing else happened until 28 July when, the sewer line having refilled, we suffered our next effluent overflow. We raised our second official complaint with Thames Water on 2 August 2024, and our separate complaint to the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) was accepted on 5 August 2024. Since then, there have been two notable events: a remarkable amount of activity in the sewer line, requiring me to clean the back gulley on a regular (almost daily) basis; and an

almost complete lack of activity by Thames Water. It seems that the kitchen in the affected house needs to be dug up to expose and clear the blockage, then reinstated to its pre-excavation state; but there is a dispute over who should pay for the work. Thames Water are claiming that the residents of the affected house should pay, because the building work that caused the blockage was not approved by Thames Water. However, the building work was done for a previous resident of the affected house, and the current residents checked with Thames Water when they bought the property to see whether there were any outstanding water issues - Thames Water said there were none. We have talked to the residents of the affected house and Thames Water, offering to pay for the blockage clearance work ourselves - just to bring this issue to a conclusion; but Thames Water has said we cannot do that.

On 17 September 2024, our contact at CCW, Nick, told us that CCW could not help further because it was an issue over private property. He recommended we contact Consumer Advice, and I will be doing that over the weekend (for some reason, the forms we need to complete are only online from 6pm Friday to 9am Monday - shades of the Hitchhiker's Guide Planning Office on Alpha Centauri?) Meanwhile I continue to gather and bag effluent, learning more about coprology every day, even though becoming a "poo whisperer" was not on the schedule of activities I had planned for my twilight years.

I'm not sure if you are able to help, but writing this has been therapeutic; and I hope it gives you an insight into some of the problems peculiar to your constituency. I attach a record of our correspondence with Thames Water and CCW, and a photo album that you will not find on any coffee table.

Yours Sincerely,

Martin P.J. Edwardes, BSc MA PhD, FRAI, AKC



18th September 2024: Auto-Response

Thank you for your email, I really appreciate you taking the time to get in touch.

Although this is an automatic reply to confirm that your email has been received, please read the following points carefully:

Due to a strict Parliamentary protocol, I can only take up your case or respond to your enquiry if you live in the Stratford and Bow constituency. Please ensure you have included your full address and postcode, and contact number within your email, or resend your email with this information if necessary. I cannot take up your case without this information.

Due to demand for assistance from my office, and the limited resources available, I am unable to review all requests and must prioritise those in greatest need. If you are not a Stratford and Bow resident, you will not receive a response to your email, but you will be provided with information on who your MP is. I apologise in advance but hope you can appreciate the reasons why.

1. To check whether you are a constituent in Stratford and Bow, please enter your postcode here.
2. My office receives hundreds of emails each day and we do respond as quickly as possible. We aim to respond to casework enquiries within 20 working days. Policy queries are currently taking much longer than we would like, but please be assured you will receive a response as soon as my team is in place.
3. By emailing and asking for help or advice we assume consent to work on your behalf. If this is not the case, you must let us know – you can withdraw your consent at any time – but please note that work on your case will cease once you withdraw. I will undertake casework using personal information provided by or on behalf of a constituent. It may be necessary for me to share your information with third party organisations. I will only do so where it is necessary and reasonable to do so, and I will share only the minimum amount of personal information necessary in order to advocate on your behalf. To find out my full privacy policy and how your data is used please [click here](#).
4. If you have copied me into an email, but not asked for any direct support from me as your MP, your email will be filed but no further action will be taken.

Parliament

The record of my speeches in Parliament, written questions in Parliament and voting record may help answer your enquiry, which you can access on the below links:

Parliamentary interventions and past speeches

Tabled written questions

My voting record

Housing

If you have an issue with social housing, please contact Tower Hamlets or Newham Council in the first instance, who will be able to take up your case directly. You can contact Tower Hamlets on 020 7364 5001 or [here](#) and Newham on 020 8430 2000 or [here](#).

Waste and Refuse

If you have a general issue with council services, including waste collection, fly tipping, parking, traffic and other important areas, please make a report to Tower Hamlets Council [here](#) or Newham Council [here](#).

Anti-social Behaviour and Crime

If you would like to report serious anti-social behaviour in your neighbourhood in Tower Hamlets you can contact Tower Hamlet's Anti-Social Behaviour on 020 7364 5015 or [here](#) [URL link given].

If you would like to report serious anti-social behaviour in your neighbourhood in Newham you can contact Newham's Anti-Social Behaviour [here](#) [URL link given].

For less serious cases, please contact your relevant Safer Neighbourhoods Team from the Metropolitan Police. You can find their details [here](#): Report antisocial behaviour | Metropolitan Police.

Personal Support

If you feel that your circumstances are overwhelming and you are in need of emotional support, you can contact Samaritans for free, in confidence, any time from any phone on 116 123 or email Jo@samaritans.org.

I use social media to keep constituents updated on what I am doing locally, my work in Parliament and the issues and campaigns that I am working on: <https://www.umakumaran.co.uk/> ; https://twitter.com/Uma_Kumaran ; <https://www.instagram.com/uma.kumaran.mp>

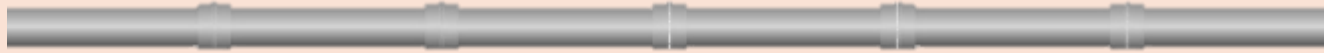
With best wishes and thank you for your email and for your patience in reading all of this message.

Uma Kumaran, Member of Parliament for Stratford and Bow

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

You can view my privacy policy [here](#). If you do not wish to receive further email communications, please reply with UNSUBSCRIBE in the subject title.

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18th September 2024: In-person Response

Dear Martin,

Thank you for getting in touch.

I'm extremely concerned to read about your horrific experience and disappointed that you haven't been receiving adequate support from Thames Water to help resolve it. As your MP I will certainly do what I can to assist, and in the first instance I have raised this as a matter of urgency with Thames Water. Once I receive their response I will be back in touch – and if anyone contacts you directly in the meantime please do keep me updated.

Kind regards,

Uma

Uma Kumaran MP

Member of Parliament for Stratford and Bow

Website: www.umakumaran.co.uk

X (formerly Twitter): @uma_kumaran

Instagram: Uma Kumaran MP (@uma.kumaran.mp)

Write to me: Uma Kumaran MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA



7th October 2024: Parliamentary Office Response

Dear Martin,

Uma has asked me to write to you, enclosing the below response that she has received from Thames Water in reply to her representations on your behalf. She also wants to thank you for copying her into your more recent correspondence with Thames Water – and notes from those emails your thoughts on the mitigation they refer to in their response.

Once you have had the opportunity to review the content of the enclosed response, if you wish to raise any aspect, or if Uma can be of any further help, please do not hesitate to get in touch. Uma would be very happy to hear from you again at any time and would be keen to receive an update following their further investigations from 9 October.

Kind regards,

Office of Uma Kumaran MP

Member of Parliament for Stratford and Bow

Website: www.umakumaran.co.uk

X (formerly Twitter): @uma_kumaran

Instagram: Uma Kumaran MP (@uma.kumaran.mp)

Write to me: Uma Kumaran MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

OUR INVESTIGATIONS

Investigations at this location began in November 2023 following reports of sewer flooding and blockages.

We completed numerous camera surveys and dye testing and was able to identify there an obstruction of debris within our foul water sewer (FWS). We know the location of this is situated under potentially two neighbouring properties. This is causing blockages, wastewater flooding and issues with internal facilities.

Despite these camera surveys we've only been able to camera survey the FWS from one direction. This is because our designated access point has been removed by a third party. Because our access point has been unlawfully removed, we've been unable to confirm the full extent of the blockage/defect from the other side of this.

We require the third party to reinstate our access point. This will allow us to confirm blockage or also a collapsed sewer/pipe. Once this has been established, we can decide the correct method of repair.

Our Field Operational Specialist (FOS) attended on 24 September and again attempted a camera survey from a smaller drain, however, due to the small diameter and layout of the pipework we were unable to get a clear visual of the obstruction.

Following this, an internal meeting has taken place to agree our next steps. I want to assure you we're doing all we can to resolve this as quickly as we can, and we will continue to work with the neighbouring properties in the meantime. Whilst we've completed dye testing, following a review of this our field teams have advised these tests are inconclusive and further investigations are needed.

Further investigations are due to take place after the 9 October. We'll continue to attempt camera surveys and dye tests from other smaller drains and gullies until our access point is returned.

MITIGATION

I note the concerns with health and safety due to risks of raw sewage to homes and gardens. To prevent this, we can put mitigation in place, and this has been offered on several occasions. This would include checks of manholes/gullies and a pump out of wastewater if required. A clean-up of the area will also take place should this be necessary. Our Network Engineer has attended again today and explained to Mr Edwardes what the mitigation will involve.

Whilst I appreciate mitigation may be inconvenient and Mr Edwardes is concerned about damage to his wildflower lawn, it would be highly beneficial. This would prevent the sewage issues you've mentioned. This would be in place until we can resolve the operational issue.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

I feel it's important to explain, we've a legal responsibility to maintain our assets and provide an acceptable wastewater removal service. Therefore, we offer mitigation to ensure the wastewater removal service continues until our work is complete.

It's also important to reiterate, our access point has been unlawfully removed by a third party, which is a criminal offence. We can only rectify our FWS once our access point has been reinstated. Before we can seek legal action, we must provide the third party with the opportunity to

rectify the issue. As with any legal case, we must provide substantial evidence and documentation detailing our attempts of communication with the third party and their refusal to comply.

NEXT STEPS

I trust this answers the points raised. I will contact Mr Edwardes again with further information no later than 11 October 2024



7th October 2024: My response to the Parliamentary Office

Dear Office,

Thank you for your response on behalf of Uma Kamarin. The attached email from Thames Water says less than they have told me. Clearly, they do not rate writing to an MP as a significant move on our part. We have taken note.

One further thing may be of interest. On Sunday, a TW operative turned up to take yet another photograph of our back-gully. Normally we would have already cleared the spillage, but we were a bit late waking up after our 52nd anniversary the day before, so we only had time to photograph the spillage before his arrival. He offered to clear the mess and, to test the mitigation process, we agreed. The rest of the tale is told in an email response to one of our neighbours in response to their own problems with Thames Water. I have attached pictures.

"Today we overslept, so we had not cleared the spillage when TW called to "inspect" it. The engineer offered to clear it, so we gave him a chance to prove TW's worth. He did not disappoint. He swept all the sewage back into the drain, doused everything in disinfectant and left it to stew. He ignored the stray turds which float up on the incoming tide and settle at high tide mark; and his 1m-wide brush was just too big to do any useful work (we use an 20cm-wide brush so we can get into the corners). I took pictures of the "mitigation" results, then went out later to drain the pond and take pictures of what a cleared spillage actually looked like. No wonder TW's Stock Market value is junk status."

Dr Martin Edwardes, BSc MA PhD, FRAI AKC and Mr Philip Rescorla, OBE



Spillage



Mitigation Pic 1



Mitigation Pic 2: note the brown spots



Mitigation Pic 3 – more stray feculence

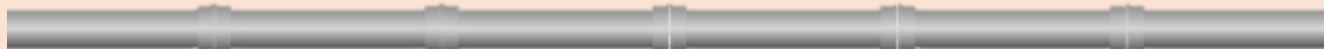


84 Minutes Later



Our Clear-up

Mitigation: the act of mitigating, or lessening, the force or intensity of something unpleasant, such as wrath, pain, grief, or extreme circumstances.



9th October 2024: Parliamentary Office Response

Dear Martin,

Thank you for your further email which is very concerning. Would you be happy for Uma to share your experience, and photos, with Thames Water? She would also be keen to hear any update from their planned visit today.

Kind regards,

Office of Uma Kumaran MP

Member of Parliament for Stratford and Bow



9th October 2024: My response to the Parliamentary Office

Dear Office,

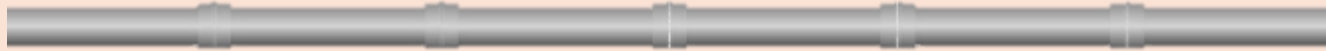
Everything we have shared with you we have also shared with Thames Water. We have also shared much more controlled rage with Thames Water than we have with you, over major issues and minor (such as one Thames Water customer liaison officer assigned to our case being unwilling to accept the word "sh**" as a descriptor of the effluent; we ended up calling it "ssh", which is ridiculous). But feel free to share our experience and photos with the CEO of Thames Water, who we have not copied in. You can also share with them that, with TW being useless, CCW being hopeless, and Citizen's Advice being helpless, we may need to go to the Press with this.

TW has not informed us of a planned visit today, but we are used to them turning up unannounced and expecting access. However, our neighbours with a sewer access point are now away, so there will be no access. TW was informed last weekend that, if they wished to drain the sewer line, they could get access on the 7th or 8th October. TW did have an opportunity to mitigate the problem for a few days; but (surprise, surprise) they missed it. Which means that those households with devices directly plumbed into the sewer line will suffer sewage leaks into their sink, washing machines and dishwashers. TW seem to be oblivious to the fact that this is affecting humans, and not just their bottom line.

If it were just our household which has been affected, I would be wondering if TW were indulging in a little light homophobia. However, TW has shown that they don't play favourites: they believe in full-on misanthropy.

If TW turn up today I will give you a report of the visit; but don't hold your breath. In the meantime, I'm going to hold my breath and clear out the pond that has formed around our drain.

Martin Edwardes



10th October 2024: My response to the Parliamentary Office

Dear Office,

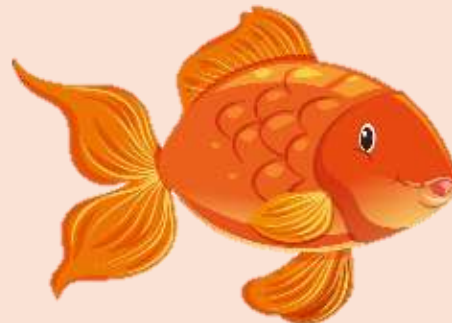
You asked us to let you know about TW's planned visit yesterday. Nobody turned up, except the TW operative known as Chas. Every few days he photographs the drain, usually after we have finished clearing it; but yesterday he arrived as we were going out to lunch, so we denied access.

Today, Philip has gone down with a vomiting bug. I'm not saying the drain issue is responsible, and I'm not saying it's not responsible; either way, it's horrible for Philip. On the plus side, no overflow so far today.

Martin Edwardes



Since then, all we have received are auto-responses from the Parliamentary Office (14th October 2024, 11th February 2025). Rab Butler told us that a week is a long time in politics; a month must exceed a politician's attention span.



*Interlude: Glove at First S*ite*

Thank heaven for rubber gloves; or, to be more accurate, thank William Halstead, the first Chief of Surgery at John Hopkins Hospital, who invented rubber gloves in 1894. The gloves were created not to protect patients, but to protect Caroline Hampton, Halstead's wife and a nurse in his operating room. The gloves controlled her dermatitis, caused by the aggressive chemicals used during operations. Protective rubber gloves quickly became common in many industries, including sewage processing.

FUN FACT: Latex condoms first appeared in the 1920s. Rubber condoms were used from the 1840s, but they tended to slip off in use, or often split. Before that, animal intestines were used; they were leaky, but better than nothing.

Disposable latex gloves were not invented until 1965, becoming popular in home and medical environments. I don't mind being older than the first mass-produced computer, but older than the latex glove? That stings. Rubber and latex gloves offer both physical and emotional protection – handling unpleasant or toxic substances becomes much easier if your hands feel dry and warm. However, rubber gloves are used more for the wearer's physical protection from chemicals and other damage, while latex gloves are used more for patient safety or for emotional protection.

Despite the name, not all rubber gloves are made of rubber. Nowadays, what we call rubber gloves are made of many different materials: as well as rubber and latex, PVC, nitrile and neoprene are also commonly used. Rubberised cotton gloves are commonly used in dirty activities like sewage handling and gardening because of their resilience.

While most gloves are made in left- and right-handed versions, some, like medical TPE and vinyl gloves, are made double-sided. This prevents unnecessary delay, because whichever two gloves you pick, you will always have a pair.

*A gallimaufry of gloves used in
or around "Project Bear Pooh"
by the clearance crew (i.e. us)*



Left to right:
Domestic rubber glove (blue)
Industrial PVC glove (red)
Rubberised gardening glove (green)
Thick latex glove (black)
Long latex glove (green)
Standard domestic latex glove (yellow)
Medical grade TPE glove (blue)
Medical grade vinyl glove (blue)

21st September 2024: Citizen's Advice: Try Elsewhere

Ongoing sewer blockage problem between our property and the sewer mains, since 7 November 2023

Dear Citizen's Advice,

We have been enduring regular effluent overflows from our drain into our back gulley, and no solution has been offered by Thames Water.

We share a sewer line with other nearby houses. Their sewer drainage lines are the responsibility of TW; but, as the first house in the line, our sewer line is our responsibility. Our part of the line is clear, and TW has identified a blockage somewhere further down the line. However, while our sewer is the highest point in the line, our back gulley drain is the lowest entry point; so, when the sewer line fills, this is where it overflows.

We raised our first official complaint with TW on 4 March 24. To cooperate as fully as we could, we let them open up our private sewer in early April to drain the sewer line. They drained the line and identified the location of the blockage, and we suggested they install a small access chamber to monitor the line. TW said it was not needed, filled in the hole and restored the concrete. Two weeks later, a TW operative came to our door to tell us they needed to dig up our sewer line again. Annoyed by their short-sightedness, and aware that the previous excavation had proved ineffective, we refused, telling them in mid-April to sort the problem at source, further down the line.

On 28 July the sewer line refilled and overflowed. We raised our second official complaint with TW on 2 August, and we complained to the Consumer Council for Water (accepted 5 August). Since then, our back gulley has required regular cleansing. TW say the kitchen in the affected house needs to be dug up to clear the blockage, but there is a dispute over who should pay. TW claim the affected household should pay, because the building work that caused the blockage was not approved by TW. However, that work had been undertaken by a previous resident; the current residents checked with TW when they bought the property, and TW said there were no outstanding issues. We have offered to pay for the work to expedite the issue, but TW has refused.

On 17 September 2024, CCW told us they could not help further because it was a private property issue. They recommended we contact Citizen's Advice. Can you help?



24th September 2024: Citizen's Advice Response

Dear Dr Martin Peter James Edwardes,

Thank you for your email on 21/09/2024 to the Citizens Advice consumer service. Your reference number 18503667.

We understand that you have problem with Thames water

YOUR RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

Unfortunately, as a UK consumer advice service, this query would fall outside of our remit for specific consumer advice. We offer advice about goods and services purchased from independent companies or traders based in the UK. We provide information about legal rights people may have when things go wrong and practical steps on how to resolve the issue.

We would suggest you contact the Consumer Council for Water Webform: www.ccw.org.uk/contact-us/ about your issue.

If you have any more problems, please call us on 0808 223 1133 or reply to this email, with your reference number.

Kind regards,

Leanne

Citizens Advice consumer service



24th September 2024: My reply

Leanne,

Thank you for your prompt response. As stated in my submission, the CCW has already told us that they are unable to help, and suggested we contact you; so, to avoid entering a death-spiral, I will not be contacting them; but I will try to pursue my options with other organisations.



Interlude: The Amazing Mr Bazalgette

In 1858, London was no place to live. The Great Cholera Epidemic of 1847 had killed 14,137 Londoners, and the cholera epidemic of 1853 had taken another 10,738. Typhus and Typhoid were also endemic, carrying off between 10,000 and 20,000 every year. And then, in 1858, came the Great Stink. The Thames was so polluted that enterprises close to the Thames were unable to function – including the Houses of Parliament on Westminster embankment. Plans were put in place to transfer the Government to Oxford or St. Albans. But what had caused this sorry state of affairs?

The answer was, as is so often the case, progress. The cesspits, where night soil was gathered, were becoming dangerous because of the explosive methane they produced; so, from 1847 on, they were being replaced by sewers which took the effluent directly down to the Thames. At the same time, old wooden sewer pipes were being replaced by iron pipes, increasing the flow through the sewers; and the growing popularity of flushing toilets also increased sewer flow. All of this detritus poured into the Thames, both North and South of the River. And the River, once the beating heart of the London, became its stinking anus.

Something had to be done. Parliament passed an Enabling Act, which earmarked a large sum of money for renewing water supply and sewage collection throughout the conurbation of London. However, money is useless without planning, and planning is useless without a vision of what is to be achieved. Fortunately for London, Joseph W. Bazalgette proved to be the visionary hero who turned the money into a very effective solution.

Bazalgette produced a plan covering the London sewer needs from Hammersmith, Putney and Wandsworth in the west to Beckton and Plumstead in the east, and from Stamford Hill and Hampstead in the north to Crystal Palace in the south. It included 160km of main sewer and over 700km of feeder sewers. There were two sewage outfall points, one north of the Thames at Beckton and one south of the Thames at Crossness, near Abbey Wood. These two outfalls held the sewage until high tide, when it was released to flow out to sea. This didn't really solve the problem, but it moved it out of the London area. The sewers were designed with a natural gradient to keep the sewage flowing, but two massive steam-powered pumping sites were needed to raise the sewage about 10m for its final trip to the outfalls. They were located north of the river at Abbey Mills in West Ham, and south of the river at Deptford.





Abbey Mills Pumping Station viewed from the Greenway public path, which follows the route of Bazalgette's Northern Outfall sewer

Abbey Mills is located only 2km from the incidents recounted in this book. It is a local site of scientific interest and grade II listed.

*A painting of the Abbey Mills Pumping Station
by P. Rayad, a local artist
(from the author's collection)*



As well as its historical role, Deptford Pumping Station is an important part of the new London Tideway Super Sewer project. This project began development in 2018 and was opened for use in early 2025 – around the time that the issues recounted in this book were being brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Thames Tideway was a giant leap forward for London sewage, but 2025 will be forever remembered in our household for the opening of our own miracle sewer.

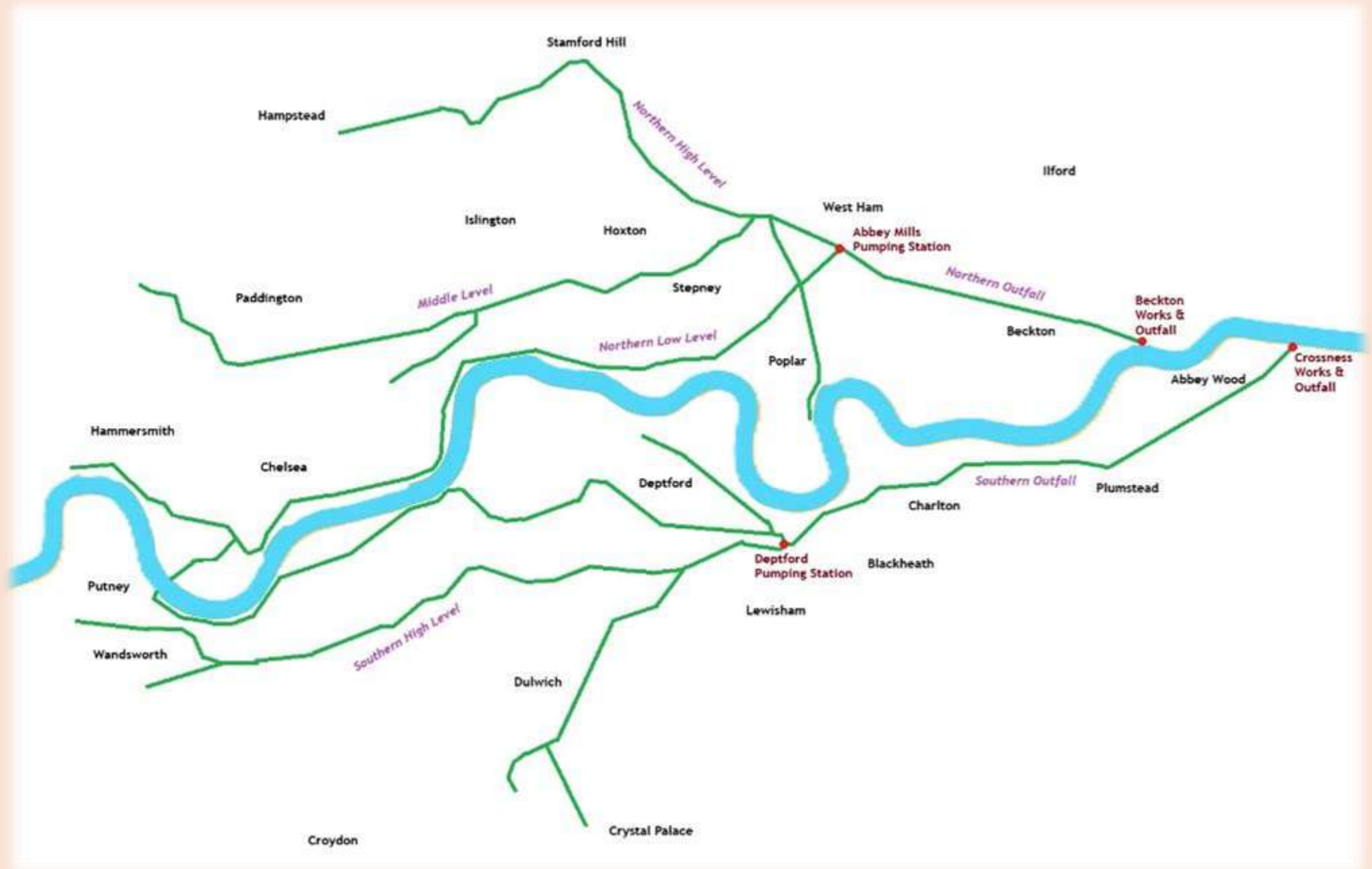
Deptford Pumping Station, viewed from Norman Road, SE10.

The Beckton Works & Outfall site has been massively rebuilt since the Bazalgette plan was completed in 1864; nothing of the original site remains. Beckton was completely remodelled for the Tideway project, and is now the largest sewage works in Europe.

In contrast, the Crossness Works & Outfall have been preserved in their original form and, although they no longer process sewage, they are perhaps the most ornate sewage works in Europe. The site is open to the public twelve times a year, and it is well worth a visit. See *Appendix V: A trip to the Crossness Sewage Works*.

Crossness main pumping house, viewed from the West.





Bazalgette's main sewer system is still in use today

23rd September 2024: Just Another Drainy Day

A dull day with a lot of rain, making for a more-than-usually wet schplirt. Fortunately, though, the rain had “laundered” the effluent: it didn’t smell quite as bad as usual because what was left was mostly paper.



However, the drain had a particular gunky funkiness all its own. There is something very special about cleaning an ordure melange out of a drain; unfortunately, it’s special in all the wrong ways.

Fighting the Hydra: Initiation

23rd September 2024: from Us to a Neighbour

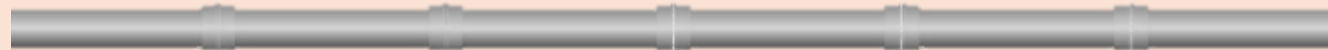
Many thanks for your excellent letter of 22nd September 2024 to Chris Weston, CEO of Thames Water, which you kindly copied to us. It accurately sets out the issues for the residents and details the solutions needed. Your references to Section 94 of the Water Industry Act 1991 and the Consumer Rights Act 2015 are particularly apposite.

Regarding your description of our household, pension-age is perfectly acceptable terminology for us. You also have permission to use the term septuagenarian, as we both are. (I also use the phrase "in my twilight years" when describing myself, but Philip doesn't like it.)

With you on the case I can see a ray of hope in what has become a habitually depressing problem. I'm beginning to feel a bit of the rage of my youth: how dare they! If you need help with legal fees or legal action, just let us know.

Many, many thanks for this. We hope you and family are keeping well.

Martin (& Philip)



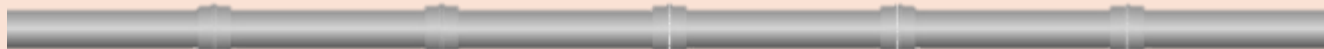
23rd September 2024: from Us to Thames Water

Dear Chris Weston et al. at Thames Water,

This is to confirm that all households are in agreement on the solutions and timescales necessary to bring this long-standing intolerable situation to a satisfactory conclusion. An apology from Thames Water would also be welcome - but an apology without action would be meaningful in quite the wrong way.

Martin P.J. Edwardes

BSc MA PhD, FRAI AKC



24th September 2024: from Us to Our Neighbours

Folks,

Amanda from Thames Water phoned today to tell me that our various complaints are being combined into one big complaint which will be finessed - sorry, dealt with - by someone called Linsie (I think that's the correct spelling). There was also a Thames Water team fussing around houses further down the line with cameras this morning - presumably to check where the blockage really is. I had an appointment so couldn't question them in depth; but something is clearly beginning to happen at TW.

Martin



29th September 2024: from Thames Water to a Neighbour

I'm writing to you in response to your email of 22 September 2024 addressed to our Chief Executive Officer, Chris Weston. I called to discuss this matter on 26 September, using the contact number ending 565, unfortunately I was unable to reach you. I trust you received my voicemail and text message.

I'm sorry you've had to write to us about the wastewater issues you're experiencing at your home. I fully understand your concerns with health and safety especially, as your baby is due in 10 days and you have a small child. I've been asked to investigate this matter to understand what is taking place, the cause of these delays and our next steps with resolving this matter.

OUR INVESTIGATIONS

We know there is a defect or blockage within our foul water sewer (FWS). We know the location of this is situated under a neighbouring property. This is causing blockages, wastewater flooding and issues with internal facilities.

Despite numerous camera surveys we've only been able to camera survey the FWS from one direction. This is because our designated access point has been removed by a third party. Due to this we've been unable to confirm what is causing the operational issues. To explain we need clear visibility of our FWS to understand if the issue is a blockage or a defect for instance a broken or collapsed section of FWS. Once this has been established, we can review and decide the correct method of repair.

Our Field Operational Specialist (FOS) attended on 24 September and again attempted a camera survey from a smaller drain, however, once again due to the small diameter and layout of the pipework we were unable to see the operational issue.

Following this, an internal meeting has taken place to agree our next steps. I must mention, because our work is required at a neighbouring property and this is a third-party matter, I'm unable to provide you with any further information at this time, due to general Data and Protection Regulations.

I want to assure you we're doing all we can to resolve this as quickly as we can, and we'll continue to work with the neighbouring properties to achieve this, the best way possible.

MITIGATION

I note the concerns with health and safety due to risks of raw sewage in your home. To prevent this, we can put mitigation in place for you. This would include daily checks of the manholes and a pump out of wastewater if required. Whilst I appreciate this may be inconvenient this would be highly beneficial and would prevent the sewage issues you've mentioned. This would be in place until we can resolve the operational issue.

LEGAL ACTION

I fully understand why you're dissatisfied, and should you wish to seek legal advice this would be entirely up to you. However, we're working as quickly as feasibly can. As this is a third-party matter, we will also liaise with our legal teams, should this be required, to ensure our access points are reinstated to let us to complete our investigations & work.

COMPENSATION

If you wish to submit a claim for damages/loss, caused by wastewater flooding, we'd advise you contact your home insurance company. Should they have any questions they'll liaise with our claims team directly. Please note, this is the correct claims process and something we're unable to change.

If you are unhappy with the service you've been provided, I'll complete a case review once our work has been completed, to assess your customer journey. Where appropriate a gesture payment may be made. Please note this is separate from any claim you may submit and is for the customer service only.

CUSTOMER GUARANTEE SCHEME (CGS)

You have mentioned you would like a reduction in your wastewater charges. If you've experienced flooding, under the terms of our CGS, you may be entitled to a payment equivalent to 50% of your annual wastewater charges (up to a maximum of £500). To help us assess whether you're due a payment, we need to understand the extent of the flooding and the impact it had on you.

Please could you complete the attached forms. It would be helpful if you could do this as soon as possible, but in any case, within three months of the incident date. If another water company sends you your bills for wastewater charges, please could you also send a copy of your water services bill covering the period of the flooding?

We'll investigate the circumstances of the flooding as quickly as we can, and if you're due a payment, we'll contact you within a maximum of 20 working days.

Should you have any queries or suffer further flooding, please call our Customer Centre on [Priority number]. For your peace of mind, lines are open 24 hours a day.

You can find out more about the Customer Guarantee Scheme on our website at thameswater.co.uk/Help-and-Advice/Customer-Commitment.

STRUCTURAL SURVEYS

We'd not complete structural surveys on your home. This is the responsibility of the homeowner. Should you have concerns with the structural integrity of your property you'd need to seek assistance from your home insurance company. Once again, if they have any questions, they'll contact our claims team directly.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

We've a legal responsibility to maintain our assets and provide an acceptable wastewater removal service. This is why we're offering mitigation to ensure the wastewater removal service continues until our work is complete.

It's important to reiterate, our access point has been removed by a third party. We can only rectify our FWS once our access point has been reinstated. Should this be refused or not actioned our next steps will be to take legal action.

NEXT STEPS

To summarise, we're working with the necessary third parties to agree next steps and an amicable way forward. I am unable to discuss any other individuals or their properties with you due to GDPR. Once we've confirmed the cause of the operational issue and the method of repair

required, I will certainly let you know. In the meantime, should you experience issues with your internal facilities please let me know and I'll arrange mitigation.

Thank you for your patience. I'll contact you again with further information no later than 11 October 2024

It may be helpful to mention, for all email contact, we'll respond within a maximum of 10 working days. If you'd like to speak with me, the quickest way to contact me is by calling [Linzey's number]. I'm usually available between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. If I'm not available when you call, you can leave a message and I'll return your call as soon as possible, or one of my colleagues will be happy to help.

CONTACTING US IN FUTURE

You may be interested to know, for future reference, you can report some of the most common issues, such as blockages and leaks, on our website here. If no existing issues show up after searching your address, click on the map to start a new report.

For future reference, the quickest way to get in touch to report issues, or for any other advice, is to contact us on Twitter or Facebook. We're available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Alternatively, should you prefer to call us, our Customer Contact Centre is available on [Priority number]. Lines are always open.

Yours sincerely, Linzey, Senior Complaints Advisor



Meanwhile, on the Schplirt Front ...



24th September 2024



25th September 2024



26th September 2024



27th September 2024



28th September 2024

Interlude: A Sewage Pick'n'Mix

Raw sewage can contain an interesting Petrie dish of bacteria and viruses, which can have life-changing effects upon an unsuspecting body. I was that body, but somehow I seem to have avoided all of the diseases listed here.

Things you can catch from rats

Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease): The bacteria thrive in rat urine, infecting humans when contaminated water enters the eyes, mouth, or open cuts. Initial flu-like symptoms progress to fever and muscle pains. In its severe form (Weil's Disease), it can cause kidney failure, meningitis, and even death.

Hantavirus: Carried in rat urine, droppings, and saliva. The virus can become airborne in dust and inhaled into the lungs. Early symptoms include fever, severe muscle aches, and fatigue. Severe cases lead to Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), which has a high fatality rate.

Rat-Bite Fever: Transmitted directly through a rat bite or scratch, or by consuming food and water contaminated with the bacteria. Causes sudden fever, vomiting, headache, muscle pain, and joint swelling.

Salmonellosis: Salmonella bacteria in rat droppings can cause severe diarrhoea, fever, and abdominal cramps.

Murine Typhus & Plague: Very rare in the UK, both *Yersinia pestis* (the plague) and *Rickettsia typhi* (murine typhus) are carried from rats to humans by fleas. Both will cause severe illness and possibly death.

Things you can catch from human sewage

E. coli enteritis: Caused by *Escherichia coli* bacteria, leading to severe stomach cramps, bloody diarrhoea, and vomiting.

Cholera: Presents as a severe, acute watery diarrhoea caused by the *Vibrio cholerae* bacterium. Can be fatal.

Viral Gastroenteritis: Caused by highly contagious viruses like Norovirus and Rotavirus, resulting in vomiting and watery diarrhoea.

Hepatitis A: A highly contagious viral infection transmitted through faecal matter. It attacks the liver, causing fatigue, nausea, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

Leptospirosis: Cause by *Leptospira* bacteria, it is contracted from contaminated water and can lead to kidney damage, meningitis, and liver failure.

Skin Infections: Open cuts or sores exposed to sewage can develop painful bacterial infections.

Eye & Throat Infections: Viruses like Adenoviruses can cause conjunctivitis (pink eye) and severe throat irritation.

30th September 2024: Fishing for Red Herrings

Email to TW

I am writing as one of the pensioners in our husehold. I see from your recent correspondence with our neighbour that you still have no solution to the almost daily delivery of excrement to our back gulley. With the wet weather, the sewer line is filling even faster, and clearing the excrement is made more difficult. Where before we were clearing gloopy solids, we now have to scoop out and pour away excrement-filled water before we can gather the solids for bagging. I don't know why I am telling you this, Thames Water seems to have no interest whatsoever in it; but it is what it is, and pleasant is not part of it.

I see from your email to our neighbour that you are now uncertain about the location of the blockage. I presume this is because the "lavatory dye test" further down the line indicated there was no blockage (we are neighbours with a common cause, we are going to talk to each other). So let me suggest something radical to you: the sewer does not connect all the houses further down the line. In which case, our sewage must be delivered to the caring hands of Thames Water by a yet unknown route. Wouldn't it be good if there were a candidate for such a route? And, it turns out, there may be.

There used to be a sewer aeration pipe further down the line which was connected to the sewer main via the street manhole. When it was demolished by a lorry on Friday 26 May 2023, it was removed and the hole filled in with tarmacadam gravel. But ... what if the aeration pipe was actually connected at the other end to the our sewer line? (It was a proposal I made back in November 2023, but which was dismissed as improbable). Suddenly the gravel photographed near the blockage becomes significant (yes, we know snippets about the nature of the blockage, despite Thames Water's egregious use of Data Protection legislation to keep us in the dark). It would also place the blockage at the distance as measured by TW, but in a much more accessible place.

This can be tested simply by putting a camera up the sewer line from the street manhole to the aeration pipe. If the investigation finds a clear passage under the site of the aeration pipe then you have excluded another possibility, no harm, no foul. If, on the other hand, you find a blockage then you could maybe find you have got that elusive picture of

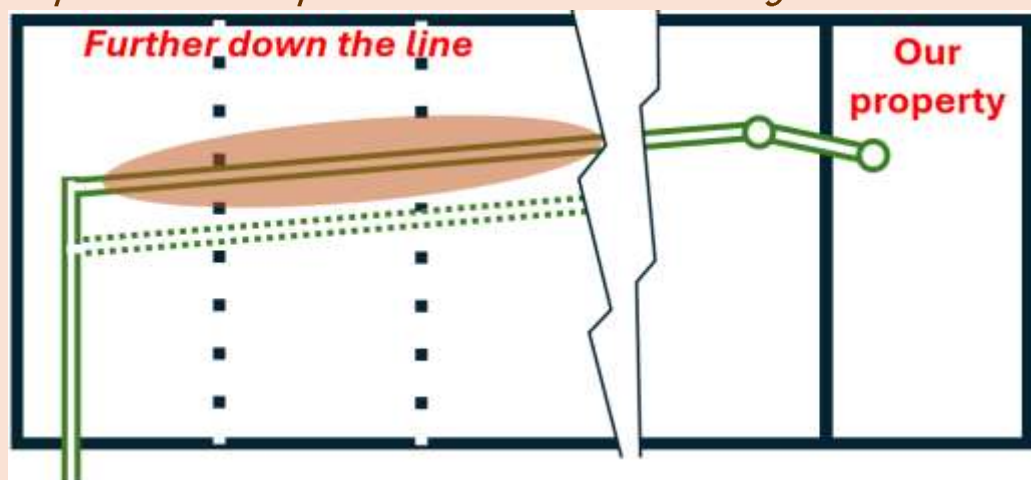
the other side. It also then becomes worthwhile to dig up the site of the aeration pipe and check out what is actually happening – which, compared to other solutions, is considerably cheaper and quicker for Thames Water and (more importantly, although probably not an issue for you) considerably better for the Thames Water customers.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had his character Sherlock Holmes say, “Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth”. It is impossible for further down the line to be blockage-free while we are blocked – unless the blockage is further down the line. But the distance measurement (made when we gave access via our private sewer line) indicates it is impossible for the blockage to be under our property. So what is there left? It may be improbable that the blockage is caused by the aeration pipe, but nobody (i.e. you) is attempting to test this either way. It is time to prove the improbable as false ... or true.

Let us know your response to this suggestion.



Jon, a TW engineer, showed me that the aeration pipe was not part of the sewage outfall, it was a side pipe of the main sewer and carried nothing except air in and gases out. The blocked sewer line from our property should link to the rest of the line before emerging into the street and joining the main sewer. The mystery is that, somehow, further down the line there is a separate link to the main sewer which we cannot access. The picture gives an approximate idea of the problem. The possible site of the blockage is indicated in brown.



26th May
2023

*Victorian sewer
aeration pipe
demolished by
builder's lorry*



***The aeration pipe
blockage solution
was wrong. But the
“missing link” theory
turned out to be on
the right track.***

Fighting the Hydra: Escalation

3rd October 2024: from Thames Water to Us

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you following our telephone call yesterday as promised. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I've provided a summary of our work below and our next steps as agreed.

To begin, I've received verbal authorisation from some other households to discuss any work from that property. However, I've not yet received this from all households. Once I receive this, I'll be able to discuss and provide more information for you.

OUR INVESTIGATIONS

As discussed, following our initial camera surveys, we know there is a defect or blockage within our foul water sewer (FWS). We know the location of this is situated under potentially two neighbouring properties. This is causing blockages, wastewater flooding and issues with internal facilities.

Despite numerous camera surveys we've only been able to camera survey the FWS from one direction. This is because our designated access point has been removed by a third party. Due to this we've been unable to confirm what is causing the operational issues. To explain, we need clear visibility of the opposite side of the defect/blockage from within our FWS.

This will allow us to understand if the issue is a blockage or a defect, for instance a broken or collapsed section of FWS or just debris. Once this has been established, we can review and decide the correct method of repair.

Our Field Operational Specialist (FOS) attended on 24 September and again attempted a camera survey from a smaller drain. However, due to the small diameter and layout of the pipework we were unable to see or confirm the operational issue.

Following this, an internal meeting has taken place to agree our next steps. I want to assure you we're doing all we can to resolve this as quickly as we can, and we'll continue to work with the neighbouring properties.

To reiterate, we're unable to confirm the cause of the wastewater issue and the full extent of this. Furthermore, whilst we've completed dye testing, following a review of this our field teams have advised these tests are inconclusive and further investigations are needed.

Further investigations are due to take place after the 9 October. We'll continue to attempt camera surveys and dye tests from other smaller drains and gullies until our access point is returned.

MITIGATION

I note the concerns with health and safety due to risks of raw sewage to homes and gardens. To prevent this, we can put mitigation in place for you. This would include checks of manholes/gullies and a pump out of wastewater if required. A clean-up of the area will also take place should this be necessary.

Whilst I appreciate this may be inconvenient and your concerned about damage to your wildflower lawn, mitigation would be highly beneficial. This would prevent the sewage issues you've mentioned. This would be in place until we can resolve the operational issue.

Our Network Engineer, Jon, is happy to speak to you and explain what mitigation will involve. If he's available, he'll meet with you today. However, to avoid further delay, if Jon isn't able to attend, please can you provide some convenient dates for him and I'll arrange this for you.

Please note should any damage to your garden occur as a result of our mitigation/work we'll certainly rectify this once our work is complete.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

[Standard Paragraph.]

AERATION PIPE

I've discussed the Aeration pipe with Jon. He's explained an Aeration pipe is not linked or connected to any issues within our sewer network. An Aeration pipe is a source of oxygen only and isn't something which requires investigation. It is not related to our investigations or the operational issues. In addition, this is not a pipe which we can complete a camera survey on. It isn't a sewer pipe and does not take waste water.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Linzey



4th October 2024: From Us to Thames Water

Linzey,

Thank you for your email. Jon came round today and we discussed mitigation. I told him that, as far as we are concerned, daily pumping out was the worst-worst option for us, while performing a daily (sometimes twice-daily) clean-up ourselves was the best-worst option. Mitigation is mitigation, and it cannot solve the problem. It may give the TW team a false belief that somehow the problem is being progressed and the customer helped, but the only help we need is a working sewer. We realise that Thames Water have their own problems, with the TW shares being reclassified as junk by the stock market and Blackrock closing in on Lanes for a takeover. This is actually no great surprise to us, however, and does not weigh into our need for the problem to be solved.

Regarding the blockage, Jon told us that TW and Lanes are as mystified as we are that houses further down the line can have a working sewer line if the blockage is where it appears to be. (He could not confirm where the blockage appears to be – Data Protection, of course. All he can tell us is that the blockage is not where it should be.) Apparently, access is not currently being granted further down the line, so we remain in limbo as to when the problem can be identified and then how long it will take to solve it. As far as we are concerned, it will be more a purgatory than a limbo; but sunlit uplands and all the rest of that.

Having got tired of waiting for a solution, we will, if necessary, resort to legal action. It is not an option we wish to take, so I suppose our next step will be contacting Ofwat.

I hope this problem can be sorted before we need to "go nuclear". But be assured that, unlike Putin, we will go nuclear if we need to.

Dr. Martin P.J. Edwardes, BSc MA PhD, FRAI AKC



7th October 2024: From Us to Our Neighbours

The last TW engineer I spoke to (last Monday I think) was called Jon. He came to persuade us to get mitigated on a daily basis, like that could be a real thing. He told me that the blockage was, as far as they knew, further down the line (yes, we're back to that). However, the property they thought had an access point has never had one, so they are looking elsewhere. As they haven't spoken to owners further down the line they cannot say where the criminally-concealed access point is - could be downtown Moscow, they can't tell. They are, however, seeking access to the criminal nonhole and will keep us informed. And when they find that nonhole then, by gosh, they will definitely look into it. Jon had no explanation for why the affected house's sewer is working while ours is blocked; it is upsetting all their plans. Perhaps the affected household could drop a bag of cement down the loo to help them out? In the meantime, if you hear that an explosion has destroyed a lavatory in Moscow it may not be the Ukrainians, it could be the Thames Water Obstacle Terminator Service. You never know where the TWOTS will strike next.

As you can see, I'm now beyond anger and into barely controlled hysteria.

Martin



8th October 2024: From Us to Thames Water

Linzey,

This is just to let you know that we are now clearing solids once a day, and liquids at least once a day. I see that our neighbours asked you to arrange for a sewer clearance via their sewer access point, offering you yesterday or today as times when they would be available (subject to parturition). I presume a team is coming today, or our neighbours have had to cancel.

Regarding mitigation, we have now tried it. On Sunday (our 52nd anniversary) we overslept, so we had not cleared the spillage when TW called to "inspect" it. The operative offered to clear it, so we gave him a chance to prove TW's worth. He did not disappoint. He swept all the sewage back into the drain, doused everything in disinfectant and left it to stew.

He ignored the stray turds which float up on the incoming tide and settle at high tide mark; and his 1m-wide brush was just too big to do any useful work (we use an 20cm-wide brush so we can get into the corners). I took pictures of the "mitigation" results. We later had to drain a pond which had formed, giving me the opportunity to take a photograph of what a cleared spillage actually looked like. Photos are attached.



11th October 2024: from Thames Water to Us

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you with a further update as promised and in response to your email of 4 October. I trust you find the below information helpful.

I'm sorry I was unable to speak to you when you called this week; due to the recent heavy rainfall I have been receiving a high volume of correspondence and telephone calls. However, I aim to reach all my customers as soon as I possibly can.

As previously mentioned, we can put mitigation in place to pump out the wastewater to ensure all facilities are fully working and to prevent wastewater flooding. I'm sorry to learn you were dissatisfied with our last pump out and clean-up. Please be assured, I've fed this back to our field teams. Please note, we completed a basic clean up. This includes either jetwash or scrubbing the affected area/s, applying disinfectant and manual removal of waste debris which is bagged up and removed.

OUR INVESTIGATIONS

I appreciate you are unhappy with the delays with resolving this matter, however we're doing all we can to complete this work.

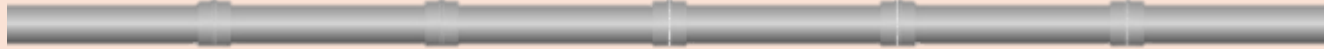
Our investigations are continuing, and we have arranged a further attendance on the 17 October. This is to attempt a further camera survey to inspect the damaged sewer and confirm the extent of repair required. We will keep all neighbouring properties updated to ensure consistent information and updates are being provided.

NEXT STEPS

Thank you for your patience. I'll contact you again with further information no later than 18 October 2024.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Linzey



11th October 2024: From Us to Thames Water

Linzey

Thank you for your email. A few points.

- 👤 I clearly did not explain the situation in simple enough terms in my previous email. Mitigation is not an act, it is the outcome of an act. In other words, what you described in your last email is not mitigation of flooding, it is TW's official response to flooding ("Please note, we completed a basic clean up. This includes either jetwash or scrubbing the affected area/s, applying disinfectant and manual removal of waste debris which is bagged up and removed"). I can say categorically that this approach provided no mitigation for the customer, especially as there was no jetwash, no scrubbing, and the waste debris was not bagged and removed; some of it was swept back down the drain, the rest was left in place.
- 👤 The advantage of email over phone calls is that it gives us a written record, which will be important if this becomes a matter sub judice.
- 👤 It is disappointing to hear that TW has been unable to advance this problem in any significant way for several months, and still no end to the problem is in sight. It is also concerning to us that we shall have no relief from the ongoing spillages for the foreseeable future.
- 👤 Thank you for the details of how to contact TW. For concision, please note that we are aware of these routes, and there is no need to repeat them in every email.

Martin Edwardes



18th October 2024: from Thames Water to Us

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you with a further update as promised about our investigations. Thank you for your recent emails. I trust you find the below information helpful.

We attended on 17 October to attempt a further camera survey to assess the condition of the foul water sewer. Whilst we were able to insert the camera into the sewer, we were unable to confirm the full extent of the defect and the sewer layout.

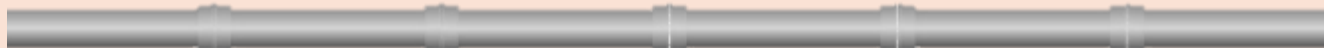
We are due to attend on Tuesday 22 October. During this attendance we will carry out further camera surveys to trace the sewer layout and to gain a clearer visibility and understanding of our next steps.

MITIGATION

Please note, mitigation is available whilst our work and investigations continue. I appreciate this does not repair the operational defect; however, it allows the wastewater removal service to continue until we can establish a viable method to gain visibility of the defect and complete the required work.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Linzey



18th October 2024: From Us to Thames Water

Linzey,

1. The investigations yesterday showed that the problem is further down the line from our property. In other words, you are no closer to resolving the blockage than before.
2. The "mitigation" of emptying the sewer line to give relief from flooding worked for less than 24 hours. I have just cleared our first post-flooding-solution flood.

Next steps

We continue to await meaningful action from Thames Water.

We continue to require written responses. After waiting nearly 12 months, a response time of 10 days meets the level of promptness we have come to expect from Thames Water.

Contacting us in future

We are available when we are available, and we will continue to give your representatives access to our drain area. Should you wish us to be present at a particular time, contact us and ask. Alternatively, should you prefer to solve the outstanding issue, we will be appropriately grateful.

22nd October 2024: From Us to Thames Water

Linzey,

Today we had a large flood which looked likely to overtop into the garden. I saw it as an opportunity to test the information you provided at the bottom of your last email: I phoned [Priority number]. They raised a new report number for me, 00779906, and told me that they would deal with the issue within 24 hours. I told them that, as TW were attending today anyway, it would probably be too late. I gave them our case number (33528028), but the operator was unable to find it on their system. So, once again, TW show that, like a Trappist Monastery, communication is not your strong point.



It turned out that the TW team had flushed the sewer, and all the muck – thick, black, greasy gunk – came to our gulley.



TW did mitigate the muck; and I then mitigated the mitigation. And it did give us five wonderful schplirt-free weeks!

Interlude: Maggie Thatcher Invents Pooh Scream

England and Wales are the only countries in the World to have privatised water industries. Scottish and Northern Irish water and sewage remain under public control.

The privatisation of water was a scheme planned and delivered by the Conselservative party under the fiendish control of the Wickedest Witch of Westminster, Dame Margaret Hilda Thatcher. Of course, she wasn't a dame back then, just looked and dressed like one. The rest of the pantomime was performed by a team of professional clowns, the finest minds available in the Cultservative party.



During the 1970's, governments of both parties continually reduced funding for the Regional Water Authorities. Then, when the Conjobertives under Thatcher took power in 1979, they quickly removed the RWA power to seek loans in the marketplace. The RWAs became increasingly underfunded until investment in 1980 had fallen to one-third of the 1970 level. When the European Union introduced stricter hygiene laws for water delivery and sewage removal, the Clownservatives tried twice to privatise the industry – in 1984 and 1986; but both times they met strong public opposition. They finally succeeded in 1987 by ignoring public opinion, and fully enacted privatisation legislation in 1989.

Since then, a series of bodies have been set up to deal with water supply and sewage.

- 🐼 The delivery of potable water and collection of sewage are responsibilities of the private monopoly companies.
- 🐼 *Ofwat* oversees the pricing of the services delivered by the companies.
- 🐼 *The Consumer Council for Water* is responsible for dealing with consumer issues.
- 🐼 *The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs* is responsible for water and sewage policy and for overseeing the whole process.
- 🐼 *The Environment Agency*, operating under DEFRA, is officially responsible for policing the companies; but, as they rely on the companies to self-report any problems, the EA role is mostly negotiating with the water companies over fines for self-reported infractions. It smells fishy to me, but that's because all the fish are dead and slowly floating down the river.

FUN FACT: on 1st January 2025, Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency from 2015 to 2023, joined the board of Glas Cymru, the not-for-profit company which owns Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water.

In 2025, the Water UK chief executive Michael Watts described privatisation in glowing terms – which is odd, because radioactivity is one of the few things that privatisation has not introduced to our water supply. He says, “Since privatisation, investment of nearly £160 billion has seen strong, steady improvement, giving customers world-class drinking water.”

The obvious question is, what on earth is *world-class drinking water*? It's water for drinking – an inert chemical which has one task: not to poison its drinker. It can be harmless or dangerous – there's nothing else. Or does *world-class* mean “considered drinkable somewhere in the World”?

Here are some websites which may be of interest in trying to untangle the web weaved around the vital services of water supply and sewage disposal.

<i>Surfers Against Sewage</i>	2023 Water Quality Report	https://www.sas.org.uk/updates/2023-water-quality-report/
<i>Environment Agency</i>	Water & sewerage companies in England: environmental performance report 2023	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-and-sewerage-companies-in-england-environmental-performance-report-2023
<i>Chartered Institution of Water & Environmental Management</i>	Thirty years on, what has water privatisation achieved?	https://www.ciwem.org/the-environment/thirty-years-on,-what-has-water-privatisation-achieved
<i>History & Policy</i>	Why Thames Water is Top of Sue Gray's Risk Register	https://historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/why-thames-water-is-top-of-sue-grays-risk-register/
<i>The Week</i>	Why broken water companies are failing England and Wales	https://theweek.com/environment/water-companies-failing-england-and-wales
<i>BBC News</i>	The water industry is in crisis. Can it be fixed?	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0qdev4vyl5o

Fighting the Hydra: Culmination

1st November 2024: from Thames Water to Us

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you with a further update a promised about our investigations. I hope you find this information helpful.

We attended on 22 October and completed a camera survey to establish the layout of the sewer and to understand the best approach with making a repair. Due to the third-party alterations that's been made to our sewer we're still unable to see the sewer connections clearly or the defect in question.

Because of this we need to excavate and expose the sewer pipes. This will take place at the neighbouring property. Access will need to be provided to us before our work can commence. Once the access is provided our work can take place straight away.

Please be assured property 2 and other affected properties will receive the exact same information to ensure we're providing clear and consistent updates.

NEXT STEPS

We're in communication with the neighbouring property to obtain the access. I'll continue to monitor this and update you again on 15 November. I will update you before this should I have information to provide. If you've any questions or if there is anything else I can do to help, please give me a call on [Linzey's number]; lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

You can also:

- Report some of the most common issues, such as blockages and leaks, on our website here.
- Contact us on WhatsApp or via our Web Chat.
- Call our Customer Contact Centre on [Priority number]. Lines are always open.

Find out more about our Priority Service Register here, if you or someone you know, needs extra support. You can call us on [Linzey's number]; 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Yours sincerely, Linzey, Senior Complaint Advisor

26th November 2024: From Us to Thames Water



Linzey,

After five weeks of peace, our sewer is playing up again. This morning's effort was quite spectacular, pictures are attached. We have cleared it up and reported a bag of sewage to be collected on the TW problems page.

I don't suppose you have a date for the next attempt to sort out this problem?

By the way, we celebrated the first anniversary of all this spillagery (11 November), but without an effluent discharge.



5th December 2024: from Thames Water to Us

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you with an update as promised and in response to your enquiry. I trust you find the below information helpful.

I'm sorry to learn you've experienced further flooding and you've had to clear the waste debris. I'll complete a case review to look at the service you've received once our work is completed. Where appropriate a gesture payment will be made.

I can confirm an internal meeting to discuss the scope of work and the access requirements is taking place today. Please note this is also under review with our legal team to ensure the correct process is followed with our approach with making the repair. I'll be better placed to advise you of our next steps once this has taken place.

NEXT STEPS

I'll contact you again no later than 11 December with further information.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Linzey, Senior Complaints Advisor

11th December 2024: from Thames Water to Us

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you with an update as promised. I trust you find the below information helpful.

This matter is still under review with our legal team. Once they've provided me their response I'll be better placed to advise of our plans of work.

NEXT STEPS

I'll contact you again no later than 2 January with further information.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Linzey, Senior Complaints Advisor



20th December 2024: From Us to Thames Water

Linzey,

Today we have had a flood of sewage coming out of our yard drain - as per usual. Isn't it about time you contacted our neighbours for another clear-out? We would do so ourselves, but Data Protection and all the rest; we thought we should go through the proper channel, which is you. I know that you have been keeping a close eye on events underground - every two days we have someone around to take a photo of our gulley; yet somehow the effect of the recent rainstorms has been missed.

I realise that Christmas is not a good time for this work: people are often away (as, I believe, are some of our neighbours), so we will probably have to wait until 2025 now. The TW team have just asked to come and photograph our drain at noon. I was supposed to be going to a Christmas dinner then, but maybe I'll get to the main course - or something.

Merry Christmas, Martin Edwardes



21st December 2024: From Us to Our Neighbours

Folks,

Just copying you in to my latest message for Thames Water. They remain as effective as tap shoes for snakes. Maybe they'll be able to get something done in 2025, or at least before the children begin secondary school. Still, it's fun to keep poking them with sharp sticks. As Voltaire put it, "I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: 'O Lord make my enemies ridiculous.' And God granted it."

The TW operative came around just before noon, took a photo and went forth. I got to the Christmas dinner in time.

Hope everyone has a great Yuletide.

Martin (and Philip)



The Tió de Nadal (Catalan Pooping Log)



For Advent, Catalan families take a tree log into their house for the children to look after until Christmas. On Christmas day, the children gently beat the log telling it to defecate. The log is thought to produce small presents for the children to thank them for their kindness. The Tió produces only small presents, like candies, nuts and small toys. It is usually about 30cm long and covered with a warming blanket and cap.

Like Father Christmas, the Tió is part of the local mythology of Christmas, but with added scatological significance. It may also have links to the Nordic Yule Log tradition.

Interlude: Songs for Schplirtualists

Bag Collection

Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Three bags full of what went down the lavatory.
Uncollected from Sunday to Wednesday –
Everyone smelled they were there.

Mitigation

I had a little drain hole, that had a little schplirt
Of pooh and pee and paper, and a little dirt.
The Thames Water engineer came to mitigate,
And brushed all the detritus back into the grate.

The Retirement Lament

My easy-as-pie retirement plan had nothing much to do,
Except for a bit of exercise and making a badge or two.
Then came a sewer blockage, revising my plan for me:
A new task every morning just to clear up poo and pee.
It wasn't the fact the assignment came completely unexpected,
It was more how the Fates decided that we two were the ones selected
To gather and fill and grade the bags and set them out for collection;
And get up at eight to open the gate for engineer's inspection.

Whyku

Every morning:
A little death of the soul.
Why, Thames Water, Why?

1st January 2025: Blockage in the Blockage Reporting System

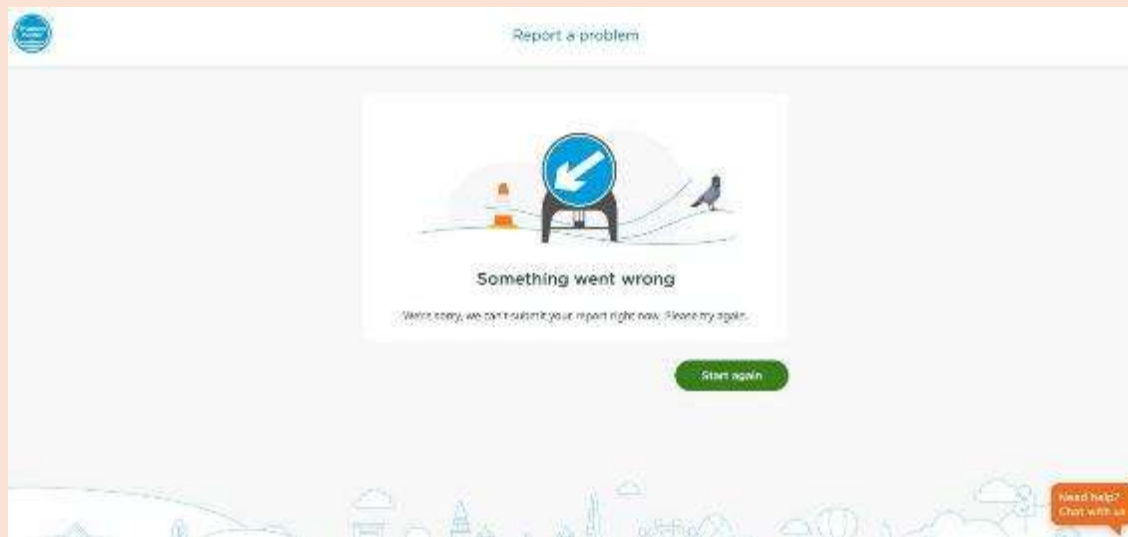


Happy Poo Year!

And, of course, we started the year with a Crappy Old Schplirt!



So, after the usual morning services, I sat down to report the latest delivery of Satan's toothpaste to TW. BUT ...



The report was rejected!

I had to book a collection via the Secondary Hydrological Information Technology Personal Interface Linkage Experience, or *Chat with us*. Some months later I discovered that TW had introduced a new online reporting system over Christmas, and none of the previous history had been copied over – not even the open queries. What the pigeon in the picture represents is far from clear, but I think it may indicate their plans for future customer communication. Or it may just be a dove of p*ss.

Fighting the Hydra: Review

2nd January 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Legal review

Dear Mr Edwards *[sic]*

I'm writing in response to your email of 20 December and with an update as promised. I trust you find the below information helpful.

REPORTING BLOCKAGES AND FLOODING

I'm sorry to learn you've experienced further blockages and flooding. It's important to explain that our complaints office isn't available 24-hours a day. Our working hours are 8am until 5pm. In the event you experience flooding or blockages you must report this to our Operational Contact Centre immediately. This allows us to respond accordingly.

It's also important to mention we've 10 working days to respond to all written correspondence. Whilst I aim to contact you before this, it's not always possible to do so. Furthermore, we don't instantly have visibility of written correspondence, therefore, to ensure I continue to support you and your neighbours correctly, if you're experiencing flooding or blockages within my working hours, please telephone me and I'll certainly do all I can to arrange an attendance for as soon as possible.

LEGAL PROCESS

Our legal teams are working on this case and are looking at all our options with how we can repair the sewer under the neighbouring property.

We know access has previously been provided by households, but due to the location of the defect we need access even further down the line to complete this work. Our legal teams are required to ensure this work can be completed as quickly as possible but we're following correct legal procedures.

I fully understand and appreciate this is taking much longer to resolve than we'd like, and the situation is both inconvenient and upsetting for all impacted. I'll continue to support you where it's possible to do so until the repair is completed.

In the meantime, if you're still experiencing sewage flooding or blockages, the option to have daily mitigation is still available and would continue until the work has been completed.

NEXT STEPS

Thank you for your continued patience I'll contact you again no later than 21 January. If you do have any other questions or if there is anything else I can do to help, please do give me a call on [Linzey's number]; lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

You can also:

- Report some of the most common issues, such as blockages and leaks, on our website here.
- Contact us on WhatsApp or via our Web Chat.
- Call our Customer Contact Centre on [Priority number]. Lines are always open.
- Find out more about our Priority Service Register here, if you or someone you know, needs extra support. You can call us on [Linzey's number]; 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Yours sincerely

Linzey, Senior Complaint Advisor



2nd January 2025: From Us to Thames Water

Linzey,

Thank you for your report. It's a pity that it is another "nothing has changed for the customer" report, but we'll put it down to the Yuletide period. Regarding the issues you raised.

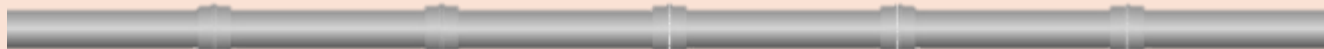
1. I do report any sewage overflow problems online when I am able. I inform you of issues that are (or, at least, should be) of interest to you as the person managing the ongoing problem. I realise that you cannot respond to my emails promptly, so any issues I raise with you (such as organising another pumping-out session - have you done this?) are about things which either need your later, not immediate, attention, or are for your records.
2. I'm sure that the lawyers have already informed you of the need for a paper trail in this case. The fact that you do not have the mechanisms to handle email correspondence in a prompt manner is probably something that your lawyers are (or, at least, should be) concerned about; sometimes email is the only documented route available. For instance, I was unable to report the multiple-bag spillage yesterday (1 Jan 2025) because of a fault with the

Thames Water online reporting system. Fortunately, a Veolia operative called to photograph our drain again, and he took the three bags of sewage away with him.

3. Your reasons for the delay in sorting the problem at source are bewilderingly inaccurate. Your legal team are not (or, at least, should not be) primarily concerned with the speed required to solve this problem, their job is to ensure the whole project meets legal requirements; accuracy, not time, is their concern. The time concern is a problem for your project team. You can use the lawyers' need for time as an excuse – but, considering the length of time this project has taken to reach the lawyers, it is a drop in the ocean.
4. Your offer of daily "mitigation" is misuse of the English language. To quote the legal definition: "The rule of mitigation requires a claimant to take steps to minimise its loss and to avoid taking unreasonable steps that increase its loss. An injured party cannot recover damages for any loss (whether caused by a breach of contract or breach of duty) which could have been avoided by taking reasonable steps. The claimant is said to have a 'duty to mitigate'. However, this is not a duty enforceable by anyone, rather it is a recognition that if the claimant fails to do so its damages recovery will be affected by that failure" (<https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/5-107-6850>). The only loss in our case is the loss of legal access to household sewage disposal, a loss the customer can neither minimise nor take unreasonable steps to increase. What you are referring to is compensatory action on your part, which carries its own arduous conditions: we would be unable to claim compensatory financial damages, we would have to accept collateral damage to our property (such as big boots destroying the lawn), and we would become subject to your schedule. We have our own lives to live, and your proposed compensatory action takes away that basic human right. Have you considered financial compensation instead? After all, we have paid Thames Water for over a year of waste water management which we have not received.

I realise, Linzey, that you are constrained by Thames Water in terms of what you can discuss with us. But please do not try to fob us off with inaccurate information. We, too, have our written and photographic records of this project; and we, too, have lawyers.

Dr Martin P.J. Edwardes, BSc MA PhD, FRAI AKC



20th January 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Legal review

Dear Mr Edwards

I'm writing to you with an update as promised. I trust you find the below information helpful.

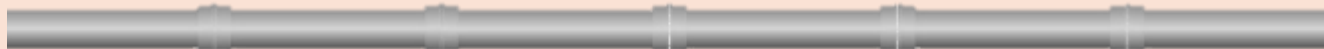
I'm pleased to confirm our legal review is complete. Notification of our intentions to work have been provided and we're now scheduling a suitable date to commence with our work.

Once I've received the full details and the date, I'll let you know more.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely

Linzey, Senior Complaint Advisor



20th January 2025: From Us to Our Neighbours

[TW email attached]

Folks,

Good news, things are beginning to move.

Martin



9th February 2025: The Feast of the Schplirtathon!

The initial schplirtation



So good it
schplirted twice ...



... filling just over three bags ...

The Schplirtathon!

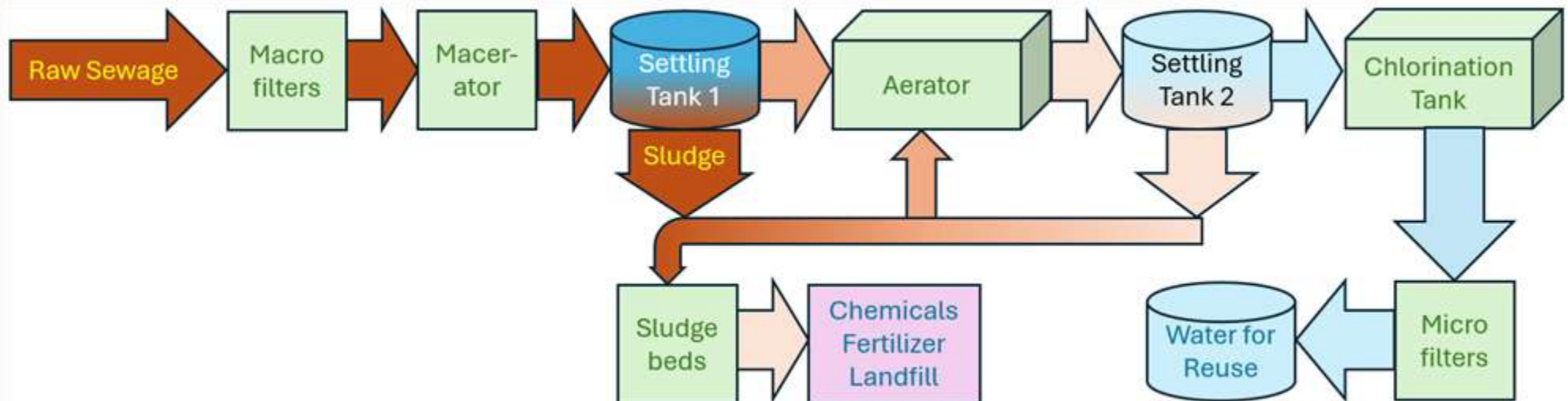


Interlude: How the Sewage Treatment Works Works

Ever wondered what happens to the solids after flushing? Welcome to what Philip calls my unhealthy preoccupation!

When the raw sewage arrives at the treatment works, it first passes through the macro filters to remove large pieces of plastic, glass, large stones and other large foreign objects. The sewage then passes into the macerator, where medium-sized objects are ground down to small objects. In the primary settling tank, most solids settle to the bottom, where they are removed as sludge. Grease and other lighter pollutants are skimmed off the top of the tank. The cleaner water passes on to the Aerator, which adds air and microbes to the liquid to encourage biochemical removal of organic material. The liquid is then passed to a secondary settling tank so that suspended particles can settle out naturally. The clean water then goes to the chlorination tank, where volatile chemicals neutralise the microbes and make the water pure enough for safe consumption, although not yet “clean”. Finally, the water passes through microfilters which take out suspended micro-solids, ensuring the water is acceptable in terms of taste and quality.

Meanwhile, the sludge dries out in sludge beds and is eventually put to use in a variety of ways. In the UK and Europe, sludge is tested before it is used as fertilizer; but this is a precaution deemed unnecessary in some countries.



Fighting the Hydra: Deadlines

11th February 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Our Work

Dear Mr Edwards

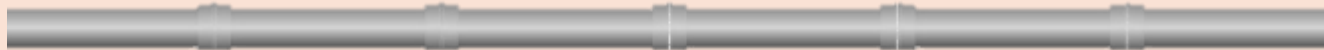
I'm writing to you with an update as promised. I trust you find the below information helpful.

As previously advised our scope of work has now been agreed and we aim to undertake our repair in March. Once the date in March has been confirmed I'll let you know.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely

Linzey, Senior Complaint Advisor



11th February 2025: from Us to Thames Water

Linzey,

Thank you for your email. As Douglas Adams said, "I love deadlines. I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by". Based on you last report, this "nothing happening" report is what I expected to receive.

Today is the 15th mensiversary of us opening this issue with Thames Water; 15 months without a working sewage outlet, and still no date for the solution. That is more than 1% of my current expected lifetime: more than 1 day in every hundred has been blighted by clearance of merdeliciousness, or being available for TW to come and photograph the drain, or expectation of another sewage disaster. It has affected my lifestyle - my next academic book is on hold, and I am concentrating on keeping a record of my dalliances with TW rather than looking at the sources of language grammar. On the plus side, "The Coffee Table book you don't want to see on a coffee table near you" is coming along nicely.

I am resigned to more waiting, more ordure clearance, more engineers wanting a picture with the famous Stratford drainhole, insufficient information, and generally encountering the fragmented nature of customer service within TW.

Building work we want done to the house is on hold; work on the garden is on hold; holidays and visits to friends and relatives are on hold. Individually, the engineers, the support staff, the clearance crews and other people I have encountered over the past 15 months have been exemplary (and that includes you). But you are all the sharp tip of a rather ramshackle operation, and it seems that the customer has no status beyond that sharp tip. By the time we get to the board level, customers seem to be treated at best as an inconvenience, and mainly as an undesirable drag on the inexplicable profit-taking by the already obscenely rich.

This seems to be what passes for life in the post-Brexit hellhole the Conselveservatives have left us with. We pay our money so that other people can make our choices for us. 'Twas ever so, I suppose. As Dorothy Parker put it: "Life is a glorious cycle of song, a medley of extemporanea; and Love is a thing that can never go wrong - and I am Marie of Rumania."

For the honour of the science of linguistics, I should take you to task for some of the things you say in your last email. First, "we aim to undertake our repair in March": no, if you are aiming you must have a target, and sometime in March is not a target. You HOPE to complete the repair in March. Second, "You can also report some of the most common issues, such as blockages and leaks, on our website here": no, we can't. Having typed in all the details, answered all the questions, and provided pictures, your system gives us the message "Something went wrong. We're sorry, we can't submit your report right now, please try again". It's a computer telling me it cannot store the information I have just given it. The computer is not submitting a report, it is accepting a report; but the computer does not have a mechanism to put the data in its memory onto a more permanent medium, like a disk drive. As for "please try again", it comes into the category of Einstein's supposed saying: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." All I want to do is organise a collection for the bags of Satan's toothpaste. Fortunately, your online "Virtual Assistant" knows its limitations, and connects me to a real person almost immediately.

Incidentally, we have recently passed two other milestones in this "project". An eruption which produces a bagful of mud pies is a schplirt; less than a bagful is a minischplirt; up to two bagfuls are a maxischplirt, and we encountered our first megaschplirt (up to three bagfuls) on 25 January 2025. Then on 9 February all expectations were surpassed: what to call a four-bag schplirt? It is currently labelled a schplirtathon, but this may have to change, especially if we get a five-bag schplirt. It seems impossible – but then that's what I believed about a megaschplirt.

So, we will continue clearing the dumpage and bagging it for collection. We will continue to allow tourist access to the Seventh Wonder of Stratford. We will continue to live in the hope that, one day before we die, we will see our lavatory flush properly, our gulley not covered in sewage, and our lives uncluttered by TW operatives. Our gardening can become a conventional war with Nature, not a Special Manure Operation; and I can get back to exploring the sources of language grammar.

Martin (and Philip)



29th January 2025 – The Megaschplirt!



6th February 2025



7th February 2025



9th February 2025 – The Schplirtathon!



11th February 2025



16th February 2025

Interlude: A page of Poophorisms

you aren't what you eat –
you are what you don't
poop.

Wavy Gravy



You have to accept the fact
that sometimes you are the
pigeon, and sometimes you
are the statue.

Claude Chabrol



I'm very happy and being raised
Catholic I assume it will end
tomorrow. The rug will be pulled
out from under me and someone
will say, now go to your real job,
shoveling poop somewhere.

Joel McHale



“People have been
using human waste as
fertilizer for centuries.
It's even got a pleasant
name: “night soil.”

Andy Weir

Even the smelliest poop
serves a purpose in the
grand cycle of life.

Taro Gomi



If all you do is follow the
herd, you'll just be stepping
in poop all day

Wayne Dyer



Pretty bows on a pile of
sh... only make it harder
to flush.

Kimberly McCreight



It is hard to get mad at Donald Trump for saying stupid things, in
the same way you don't get mad at a monkey when he throws
poop at you at the zoo... What does get me angry is the ridiculous,
disingenuous defending of the poop-throwing monkey.

Jon Stewart



19th February 2025: Irony with a Brass Neck

Our prices change in April – here's why

Hello Philip,

We're getting in touch to let you know our prices are going up in April.

On average, our bills for typical metered water and wastewater customers will increase by £16 per month in 2025-26. Remember, your bill change could be higher or lower based on your usage.

You can find all the details about our new charges on our website.

WHY ARE BILLS GOING UP?

Our water industry regulator, Ofwat, has finished their industry-wide price review. This is the basis for our charges over the next year.

For us to continue to deliver billions of litres of clean water and take wastewater away from millions of homes, it's vital that we invest in our network and infrastructure over the next five years. Despite our efforts to avoid price increases, extra funding is now essential to make improvements to our services.

WHEN WILL PRICES CHANGE?

As our new prices officially start in April, you'll start seeing changes on your next bill.

If you pay by a payment plan, your instalments may go up based on our new prices. We usually check and adjust your payments in line with how much water you've used and what we think you'll use for the year ahead. From April, we'll reassess your plan every six months instead. This will make sure bills are as accurate as possible and that we're not under or overcharging you.

If you don't already have one, you can set up a payment plan [here](#).

WHAT WILL WE IMPROVE?

We'll use the extra funding to invest in our network and maintain safe, high-quality drinking water. We'll fix leaky pipes and the ageing mains network so we can reduce wasted water. And we'll invest in upgrading our sewage works to improve river health.

Over the next few years, we'll also:

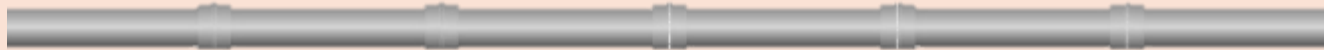
- ☛ Reduce pollution incidents and storm overflows
- ☛ Ready the water network against population growth and climate change
- ☛ Safeguard a clean, sustainable drinking water supply for generations to come

WORRIED ABOUT AFFORDING YOUR BILL?

We're already helping around 450,000 customers pay their bills, and we're here to find the best solution for you. Depending on your circumstances, we may be able to reduce your bill, provide a one-off payment or find a suitable affordable payment plan.

You can see all the support schemes we offer on our financial support page.

The Thames Water team



Back to the 'Good Old Days' ...



London's water supply monopolies in the early 19th century

<https://www.thehistoryoflondon.co.uk/londons-water-supply-monopolies-in-the-early-19th-century/>

Fighting the Hydra: Delays

20th February 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Our Work

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm sorry you've needed to take the time to write to us again on 11 February, in response to my email of the same date.

Please be assured, I've reviewed your second stage complaint, in line with our complaints procedure and I'm pleased to update you further.

Whilst I need to highlight some areas which we're unable to comment on further and are our final response on the matter, we'll of course keep you updated on the work going forward.

SUMMARY

I'd like to apologise again for the delays with our repair work. I fully understand the upset and frustration the wastewater issues have caused both you and your neighbours, especially with the length of time this has been on going.

I feel it's beneficial to reiterate, the damage has been caused by a third party, and is located beneath a neighbouring property. We've needed to follow the correct procedures before a repair could be agreed.

Furthermore, whilst some neighbours provided authorisation for you to discuss their cases, this wasn't provided by other affected households. Because of this we've been restricted with what information we can provide.

Our investigations did take time but were essential and are now fully completed. These investigations were needed to assess the scope of damage and the exact location a repair was required. Because our access point had been removed, we could only complete camera surveys from one side of the defect. We had to find other potential access points to inspect the defect from the opposite direction. Despite many attendances we were unable to gain the visibility we needed.

Due to this, we've been unable to confirm the extent of the damage within the foul water sewer. Furthermore, to add a further complexity, we identified alterations to the layout of our sewer. As a result of this, we'll need to excavate and expose the sewer before we can establish the scope of work needed.

It's also important to mention, because of this we've needed to consider where to undertake our work. To explain, because our work will be completed internally, we must consider the structure of the dwellings and the best way to undertake the work safely and effectively.

With situations such as this, whilst ideally, we'd like to complete our work quickly, this isn't possible due to the circumstances. We must follow the legal process, accordingly, demonstrating we've attempted to rectify the issues reasonably and amicably. This unfortunately can take time especially when internal work and access is required.

MITIGATION

When damage occurs to our foul water sewers loss of facilities and sewage flooding can occur. In instances such as this, we offer mitigation until the wastewater removal service has been restored.

Mitigation has been offered to take place every day or for times/days suitable for you, however you feel this is too disruptive and ineffective. Therefore, you clean the area following any waste flooding and our teams collect the waste debris.

You've previously mentioned you've experienced issues with reporting incidents online and arranging the collection of the waste debris. Because of this we arranged our contractors the Lanes Group to collect these twice a week and to also check if mitigation is needed. As we've advised, if this isn't taking place, please let us know so we can arrange the necessary.

SITE VISIT

Due to the ongoing concerns with both you and your neighbours, our Field Planning Specialist, Jon, and our Network Engineer, attended on 19 February, however I understand you weren't at home. As you know, Jon has been closely involved and will be able to answer any additional questions you have. Please let me know if you'd like him to return to discuss our work with you.

DATE FOR OUR WORK

You've expressed dissatisfaction regarding when our work is due to take place. As previously explained because the work is taking place within the neighbouring property, and this is a legal matter we have needed to provide an appropriate and fair time frame for the third party to accept and agree our scope of work and a convenient time. This isn't something I'm able to discuss with you or provide additional information or details for. However, I can confirm we're on track for the work to go ahead in March. Once the date of this is fully confirmed we'll of course let you know.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

I'd like to reiterate, I know this has been a very difficult, challenging and upsetting time for you and your neighbours. The impact on your daily lives is apparent and you'd understandably like the matter resolved as soon as possible. Our field teams will fully review the journey you've experienced once our work is completed. Where appropriate a good will gesture payment might be considered.

NEXT STEPS

I hope my response has demonstrated we're doing all we can to resolve this matter as quickly and as amicably as we feasibly can. I'll continue to update you with our progress and next steps. I'll update you again no later than 5 March.

However, if you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you have the option of asking CCW, the voice of the consumer, for an independent view on our position. You can contact CCW in one of the following ways:

Phone – 0300 034 2222 (between 8.30am and 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Online form – go to ccw.org.uk/online-form or [click here](#)

Letter – CCW, 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham, B2 4BH

Yours sincerely

Linzey, Senior Complaint Advisor

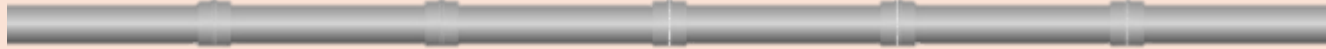


20th February 2025: from Us to Thames Water (cc our Neighbours)

Linzey,

Thank you for your explanatory email. I appreciate you taking the time to make things clearer. We look forward to hearing more on 5 March.

Martin P.J. Edwardes & Philip G. Rescorla



24th & 25th February 2025: Discussions with Neighbours & TW

After copying the TW email and our response to the neighbours, they raised several important issues with TW

1. An independent structural engineer or surveyor should be appointed by Thames Water to assess any risk of damage. This is not something covered by home insurance.
2. The surveyor should produce an independent professional survey to be made available to everyone with an interest in this case.
3. Of particular interest is possible damage to house foundations and any effects on the safety and structural integrity of our homes.
4. The survey should not delay the planned works scheduled for the 26th of March.



25th February 2025: from Us to Our Neighbours (cc TW)

Folks,

As you say, we need this "event" sorted soonest. If TW start making mewling noises about an independent surveyor, we are willing to pay for one. We will need TW to give us sufficient notice so that we can get the surveyor to attend on the chosen date - and, of course, we will need the surveyor. As some of you have more recent experience of surveyors, do you have any particular people in mind for doing the work?

Martin



28th February 2025: from Us to Our Neighbours (cc TW)

Many thanks for our chat. Anything that brings this to a conclusion soonest works for me. And if that means paying out some money, that's OK, I can afford it. When we have a date for the work we can ask the surveyor to attend and tell TW we are doing so. The surveyor can report to other households, and I will pay the bill - in advance if the surveyor is a bit chary about the possibility of getting paid.

My nightmare is that the problem will somehow not be solved by the work planned by TW. I just want this to be over.

BTW, a sample of the book is attached. It is early days, but I have planned the structure and I have most of the documentation needed. It shouldn't take too long to anonymise it and make it publishable.

Martin



Interlude: Nursery Songs to Count Bags by

THE SCHPLIRTETTE SONG

Today's pile of sh..'ll

Only be a little.

There is not quite enough

For a full bag of stuff.

THE SCHPLIRT SONG

Along our Road we cleared a load,

Enough to make a sackful.

They can't complain, it's sealed from rain,

But still smells bloomin' awful.

THE MAXISCHPLIRT SONG

We had a little spillage, and nothing did we lack:

A full-up Scheissetüte, and another sack.

The Engineer's assistant came to move the load

Spilling out the contents all along the road.

THE MEGASCHPLIRT SONG

Thames Water Customer, have you any sh...?

Oh dear, yes, Dear, three bags of it.

One for the engineers, one for the crew,

And one for the chairman Adrian Montague.

THE SCHPLIRTATHON SONG

One, two, three, four sacks,

All bagged up so I'll relax.

Thames Water take it all away;

But they won't come 'til Wednesday.

27th February 2025: The Independent Water Commission

When the newly-formed Independent Water Commission called for evidence, I was ready, willing and able. I was allocated the response identity ANON-XXU5-KJKV-G – but, as we're friends, you can call me KJK.

A lot of the questions were multiple choice rather than open response – which is OK for a magazine quiz, but somewhat inappropriate for an evidence-finding commission. If you therefore think some of the answers seem sarcastic, remember that I was working with the tools provided; but remember that some of the sarcastic answers are deliberately so ...

About you

- | | |
|--|--|
| Would you like your response to be confidential? | No |
| Do you consent to being contacted by the Independent Water Commission about your response? | Yes |
| If you consented above, please provide your full name. | Martin Peter James Edwardes |
| If you consented above, please provide your email address. | martin.edwardes@btopenworld.com |
| In what capacity are you completing this Call for Evidence? | As a member of the public with an interest |
| What is the name of the organisation or interested group that you are responding on behalf of? | Stratford Village Sewage Victims |
| Where do you live? | England |

Water System Outcomes Top Priorities

- | | |
|--|--|
| Thinking ahead to what you would like the water system to look like in the future (e.g., in 25 years time), what outcomes from the | Improved water environment (e.g., healthy habitats for aquatic plants and animals) |
|--|--|

water system are most important to you? (Please select your first priority here)

To what extent do you believe the overall water framework already delivers your chosen outcome: an improved water environment (e.g. healthy habitats for aquatic plants and animals)?

To some extent

Thinking ahead to what you would like the water system to look like in the future (e.g., in 25 years time), what outcomes from the water system are most important to you? (Please select your second priority here)

A water system which contributes to net zero

To what extent do you believe the overall water framework already delivers your chosen outcome: a water system which contributes to net zero?

Very little

Thinking ahead to what you would like the water system to look like in the future (e.g., in 25 years time), what outcomes from the water system are most important to you? (Please select your third priority here)

Water bodies being safe for swimming and other recreational uses (e.g. kayaking, paddleboarding)

11w To what extent do you believe the overall water framework already delivers your chosen outcome: water bodies being safe for swimming and other recreational uses (e.g. kayaking, paddleboarding)?

To some extent

Management of Water

12 Who do you believe should be responsible for making decisions about what outcomes to prioritise from the water system? This is

Water supply and sewage removal is essentially a public service and should be constituted as such. The system of limited-time monopolies has proved a failure. It turns out

not intended to be an exhaustive list. Apart from the above, please think about other bodies you consider to be relevant.

Do you believe there should be changes to roles and responsibilities for water management across local, regional and national levels?

If you selected changes are needed, please explain below. Consider how you believe roles and responsibilities should be better organised across local, regional, and national levels, including who you believe should be the lead authority at each level and why.

Do you believe changes are needed to help reduce the siloed approach to water management across different sectors? If so, what changes do you believe would be beneficial? (Please select up to 5 options)

Do you believe there are barriers to money being spent more effectively and efficiently across different sectors to deliver the

that classical economics was right after all: there is no such thing as an effective monopoly.

Changes are needed

For England, a nationwide public body is needed, as was the case before the privatisation fiasco. Wales and Scotland should have their own say about what they want. Local Government should return to being a lobbying organisation on behalf of their constituents, and the UK Parliament should resume its role of governance.

Government providing clearer national strategic direction and targets on water.

A regional or catchment scale systems planning authority.
*

Streamlining or aligning existing water plans and planning processes across the water system.

Streamlining or aligning water management planning and other plans such as flood risk plans, local nature recovery strategies, and local plans for development.

Aligning water management with democratic structures. **

There is no effective control over the short-term and long-term investment by the private companies who are putatively in charge of water delivery and waste water collection. It is all left to “the invisible hand of the market”

best outcomes for the water system? If so, what do you believe are the key barriers? (Please select up to 3 options)

– which, as we have long known, does not work in the case of monopolies. The privatisation model does not, and cannot, work.

In your opinion, is it more important that regional water system governance aligns with hydrological or local government boundaries?

Hydrological boundaries (e.g. water catchments, river basin districts)

Management of the Water Environment

Do you believe changes are needed to the WFD Regulations, including for 2027 onwards? If so, which areas would benefit the most from change? (Please select all that apply)

Governance and accountability (e.g. the duties of governments and organisations)

If you feel the WFD Regulations would benefit from change, please expand on where you feel changes are necessary and the reasons why.

See previous answers. We need water authorities which are responsible to the public, not their shareholders.

Measuring and Assessing the Water Environment

Do you believe changes are needed to improve how we monitor and report on the health of the water environment? If so, what changes do you believe could lead to improvements? (Please select all that apply)

Reporting on wider outcomes than ecological status (e.g. public health)

Data sharing platforms for government and third-party evidence/data

Expanding out from the water body level to report on a whole catchment

Full or partial integration with wider environmental/water monitoring

Strategic Direction for the Water Industry

What role do you believe the government can play in providing strategic direction for the water industry? By 'strategic direction' we mean, for example: the Strategic Policy Statement / the Strategic Priorities and Objectives Statement; Government targets (e.g. in the Environment Act 2021 and the Plan for Water in England only); the Price Review Forum (Wales only). This is not an exhaustive list.

What changes, if any, should be made to how the government provides strategic direction for the water industry?

If you selected that changes are needed, please describe what changes you feel are needed and why.:

Do you believe there are barriers to effective long-term water industry planning? If so, what factors do you believe are preventing effective long-term water industry planning? (Please select all that apply)

What changes, if any, would help water companies to use planning frameworks more effectively to fulfil their duties and deliver their functions?

Water affects so many different facets of society. It needs to be a responsibility of elected representatives – if not the Government then elected boards.

Changes are needed

Any strategic direction from the Government would be better than the no strategic direction of the previous administration.

There are currently no mechanisms for integrated long term planning in the water industry. The barrier is a large notice saying "here there be dragons". So, all of the above.

This question implies that the only solution is to continue the siloing of water services in private companies, which is economically unfeasible. So renationalisation would give the best help to the water industry, but not the individual water companies.

The Regulators

How would you rate the performance of the water regulatory framework? Performing very poorly

To what extent do water regulators coordinate effectively in the regulation of the water industry? Very little

What changes, if any, do you consider are needed to the framework of water regulators to improve the regulation of the water industry? Please consider both potential benefits and costs of any proposed changes. Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

CCW is a broken reed, severely limited by legislation and its own unadventurousness. Ofwat seems to be a club for the water companies which excludes customers with legitimate and serious issues. The regulators need to be scrapped. A responsive unitary public body would be better than the current nest of bureaucratic red tape.

To what extent do you think the water industry regulators have the capacity, capabilities and skills required to effectively perform their roles? Please provide information to support your views on the capacity and capability of regulators, including, where possible, supporting evidence and examples

CCW does not have the staff or purview to act as enforcers, and Ofwat is too cosy with the water companies. In our particular case (a sewer blockage which has remained uncleared for nearly 16 months, with regular unplanned deliveries of sewage to our outside drain), CCW has washed their hands of the case because the blockage is not in our sewer line, it is under a property further down the line; and Ofwat won't take the case. Our case number with Thames Water is 33528028, should you wish to enquire. I have also kept written and photographic records for most of the 16 months, should you wish to see them. If nothing else, I'll get a book out of this experience. But nobody should spend their twilight years doing medieval work.

Economic Regulation

To what extent do you think the economic regulatory framework is delivering positive outcomes? **Very little**

How do you think the Price Review process should balance the need to keep customer bills low with the need for infrastructure resilience? (Infrastructure resilience is the ability of an organisation's infrastructure, and the skills to run that infrastructure, to avoid, cope with, and recover from disruption in its performance). Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

I have no problems with the water charges or the current price rises, even though we are paying for a service (sewage removal) that is not being delivered.

What, if any, changes could be made to the Price Review process to better enable the water industry to deliver positive outcomes? Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

I have no problems with the price review process.

What, if any, changes could be made to the Price Review process on assessing and setting base expenditure to effectively support infrastructure maintenance? Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

I have no problems with the price review process.

What, if any, changes could be made to the Price Review process on assessing and setting enhancement expenditure to effectively support infrastructure improvements? Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

I have no problems with the price review process.

What, if any, changes could be made to the Price Review Process on assessing and setting the Weighted Average Cost of Capital

I have no problems with the price review process.

(WACC) to effectively attract investment in the water industry?
Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

What, if any, changes could be made to the Price Review process on assessing and setting performance incentives to effectively secure infrastructure delivery? This could be across Outcome Delivery Incentives (ODIs) to effectively deliver for customers, the environment and public health; and/or across Price Control Deliverables (PCDs), for example. Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

I have no problems with the price review process.

Customer Bills

To what extent does the economic regulatory framework deliver acceptable water bills for customers?

To some extent

What, if any, changes would help ensure customers are paying fairly for the water they use? (Please select all that apply)

Improve transparency for customers on how money from bills is used

Customer Protections

To what extent does the regulatory framework protect customers from poor service?

Very little

To what extent does the regulatory framework ensure that vulnerable customers are effectively supported?

Very little

What, if any, changes to the regulatory framework would better incentivise water companies to deliver and maintain high customer standards? (Please select all that apply)

Ensure customer matters are investigated and, where necessary, enforcement action taken,

	Greater accountability for water companies' handling of complaints, Make it clear to Water companies that the Data Protection legislation does not prevent them talking about a problem affecting a customer when the problem is not on their property. Thames Water seem to use DP as an excuse for treating us like mushrooms.
What, if any, changes to the regulatory framework would improve support for customers in vulnerable circumstances? (Please select all that apply)	Ensure a proactive approach by water companies in identifying customers eligible for additional support

Financial Resilience

To what extent is change required to the economic regulatory framework to support water companies' financial resilience?	To a great extent
Which of the following changes to the economic regulatory framework, if any, would improve outcomes for the water industry? (Please select all that apply)	Changes to the Price Review process to support financial resilience, Changes to the oversight of water company debt (for example, 'capping' company debt levels), Changes to financial oversight of companies (for example, moving to a more supervisory model as defined in the Call for Evidence), Changes to the way in-distress companies are managed (for example, providing the water regulators additional discretion in their enforcement regime), Changes to the Special Administration Regime (for example, providing guidance on the thresholds for the SAR)

Do you think there is evidence on the historical relationship between debt, dividends, and expenditure at water companies that the commission should be looking at? Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples and evidence, where possible

A public service, even when provided by a private company, cannot be governed by private economy rules. The extra rules (laws?) needed to govern privatised public services should be made explicit and regularly reviewed.

Investment

To what extent does the economic regulatory framework support or hinder investment into the sector?

Neither supports nor hinders investment

How do financial returns in the water sector compare to other similar sectors (for example, energy)? Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

I suggest you need to look at the Annual financial reports of the companies if you are really interested in the answers to this question. Asking a bunch of financial non-experts to give financial opinions just gives you hearsay, not evidence.

What options, if any, would incentivise investment in the water sector? Please answer and explain below, providing supporting examples or evidence, where possible

See previous answer. Although providing an ill-informed response is tempting.

How does the public and political portrayal of water companies in the media and elsewhere affect the attractiveness of the water sector to investors?

This is just getting silly.

Competition

To what extent should further competition in the water industry be encouraged through regulation? Please answer below and provide evidence and examples, where possible

This is turning into an exercise in boldilocks. Unitary public authority now!

Which of the following schemes, if any, have failed to provide effective levels of competition and efficiency? (Please select all that apply)

Don't know

Which of the following changes to competition schemes, if any, would improve outcomes for the sector? (Please select all that apply)

Fiddling while Rome floods?

To what extent would greater market tendering of infrastructure delivery projects improve outcomes? Please answer and explain below, providing evidence and examples, where possible

I'm not sure. If by "tendering of infrastructure delivery projects" you mean beating them with a meat mallet ... maybe? Perhaps this could have been de-jargoned before release.

Water Industry Public Policy Outcomes

Do you believe that legal and/or regulatory requirements would benefit from review or consolidation? Please answer and explain below, providing evidence and examples, where possible

Yes, I believe that thing. Belief requires no evidence or examples, that's why it's called belief.

Protecting the Environment

Do you believe that the system of environmental regulation, monitoring and enforcement is ensuring water company compliance with environmental standards?

Very little

Which of the following changes to water industry environmental regulatory requirements, if any, would improve outcomes from the sector? (Please select all that apply)

**A review and rationalisation of the water industry environmental legislative framework,
Legislative reforms to address current and emerging threats**

Which of the following changes to the water industry environmental regulation, monitoring and enforcement framework, if any, would improve outcomes for the sector? (Please select all that apply)

Enhanced monitoring, including reform of operator self-monitoring,
Swifter enforcement,
And more swingeing enforcement. A fine should not be an acceptable business expense.

Delivering Clean Drinking Water

What changes, if any, could be made to the drinking water regulatory system to maintain world leading drinking water quality? (Please select all that apply)

Addressing regulation 31 supply chain challenges to support innovation. {Regulation 31 is so much more regulatory than all the other 30.}

Securing Resilient Water Supply

To what extent is the overall water regulatory framework securing resilient long-term supplies of water?

Very little

What changes, if any, could be made to the overall water regulatory framework to ensure it can secure a resilient long-term supply of water? (Please select all that apply)

Changes to regulatory responsibilities or introduction of new requirements or standards to oversee delivery

Infrastructure and Supply Chain Resilience and Security

To what extent does the overall water regulatory framework support or hinder infrastructure resilience? When considering your answer, please think about future pressures including factors such as climate change and population growth.

Somewhat hinders infrastructure resilience

To what extent does the overall water regulatory framework support or hinder infrastructure security? When considering your

Neither supports nor hinders infrastructure security

answers, please think about evolving security threats such as cyber security.

To what extent does the overall water regulatory framework support or hinder effective management of supply chain risks? When considering your answers, please think about disruption in and constraints from supply chains.

What changes, if any, could be made to the overall water regulatory framework to better support infrastructure resilience? (Please select all that apply)

What changes, if any, could be made to the overall water regulatory framework to better support infrastructure security? (Please select all that apply)

What changes, if any, could be made to the overall water regulatory framework to better manage risks from supply chains? (Please select all that apply)

Innovation and technology

To what extent does the overall water regulatory framework currently support or hinder innovation?

Significantly hinders effective management

Changes to the scope and enforcement of existing infrastructure requirements (for example, strengthening requirements on companies to map assets),

Setting infrastructure resilience standards (for example, requiring companies to prepare for a defined level of disruption)

Changes to existing legislation, such as Security Emergency Measures Direction and cyber security regulations (for example, giving powers in relation to security of wastewater infrastructure)

Changes to cross-government policy on supply chain constraints (for example, agreeing investment plans with other sectors)

Neither supports nor hinders

Which of the following changes in the sector, if any, would enable innovation outcomes? (Please select all that apply)

Changes to the way companies and regulators approach risk (for example, introducing a regulatory 'sandboxing' tool)

What opportunities, if any, do new technologies present for companies and the regulators? Please answer and explain below, providing evidence and examples, where possible

I have no idea.

Ownership

What impact, if any, has consolidation of water companies had on their performance? Please answer and explain below

They are just bigger private monopolies.

What impact, if any, does whether or not a water company is listed on the stock exchange have on their performance? Please answer and explain below

About the same effect on their performance as being listed in Google. A stock market listing is not an indicator of probity.

What impact, if any, do complex company structures like Whole Business Securitisation have on water company performance? Please answer and explain below

No idea.

What impact, if any, does the type of investor (for example, private equity firms, pension funds) have on water company performance? Please answer and explain below

No idea.



What a long form! I have heard nothing from the Independent Water Commission, but I see on the Interweb that they have published their final report (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-water-commission-review-of-the-water-sector>).

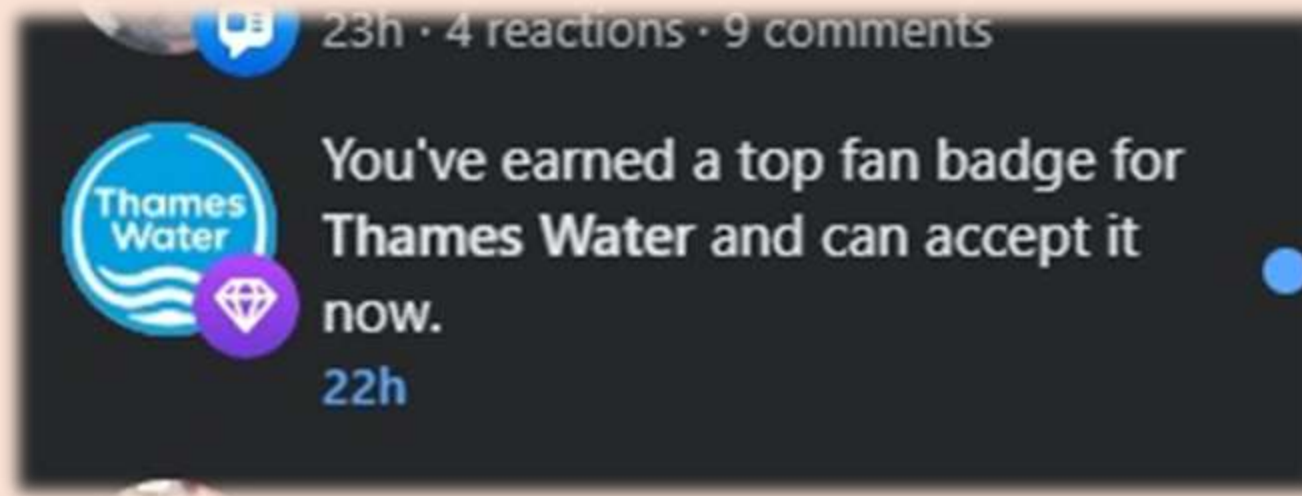
Recommendations include:

- ☛ *Clarity is needed from government on a strategic approach for the water sector.*
- ☛ *Strategic guidance to the water industry needs to be strengthened and clarified.*
- ☛ *Better planning is needed to deliver what people want where they live.*
- ☛ *A review and rationalisation exercise of the legislative framework for water is necessary to fix current problems.*
- ☛ *Legislative reform should include the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations.*
- ☛ *Reform is needed both to the Water Framework Directive framework, and how it is implemented.*
- ☛ *Monitoring needs to be adequately resourced.*
- ☛ *The Commission is clear that there has been a deterioration in public confidence in the ability of environmental regulators to deal with and enforce environmental non-compliance. [So their recommendation is ... ?]*
- ☛ *Changes to legislation are needed to safeguard the successful provision of quality drinking water for the future.*
- ☛ *Abstraction regulation should be strengthened and modernised.*
- ☛ *Water companies need improved sight of Local Plans and planning applications.*
- ☛ *Despite recent reforms, consumers are still not adequately protected and advocated for in the current system.*
- ☛ *Existing delivery monitoring frameworks are complex, onerous and limited in scope.*
- ☛ *Greater clarity and assurance in long-term infrastructure planning is needed.*

So,
clarity clarity clarity;
framework framework framework.
Nothing there we need sheet music to sing.



3rd March 2025: Recognition at Last!



Oh wow! A Facebook Top Fan badge! I wish I had prepared an acceptance speech!

I would like to thank everyone who has made this possible – especially the little people who have contributed behind the scenes to my success. Thanks must also go to Philip, who has acted as my understudy on several occasions; to the neighbours, who have listened and responded to my impassioned whining; and, of course, the biggest thanks must go to Thames Water, without whom none of this would have been possible. Or necessary.



Fighting the Hydra: Conclusions

3rd March 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Our Work

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you as promised with a further update and in response to the emails we've received regarding structural surveys. I trust you find the below information helpful.

STRUCTURAL SURVEYS

I note concerns regarding potential damage to homes due to the third-party damage. I explained in my email of 20 February, because our work is being completed internally, we complete our own structural surveys to ensure our work is completed safely and securely.

Please note, we don't provide independent surveys for structural damage. Should you believe the structure of your home has been compromised due to third-party damage or because of our work, we'd advise you speak to your home insurance company and request for a private survey to be completed. They'll contact our claims team directly should they have any questions for us.

Furthermore, we're unable to provide any further information about the repair, exact sewer alterations or damage until we excavate the area. We're aiming to begin this work at the neighbouring property on 25 March. We'll certainly let you know more once our work commences.

NEXT STEPS

I hope my response has demonstrated we're doing all we can to resolve this matter as quickly and as amicably as we feasibly can. I'll continue to update you with our progress and next steps. I'll update you again no later than 12 March.

I'll now close your case; but if you do have any other questions or if there is anything else I can do to help, please do give me a call on [Linzey's number]; lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Linzey, Senior Complaints Advisor



6th March 2025: from Us to Thames Water

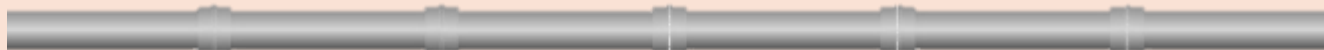
Linzey,

Good news that there is a date, 25 March, for the investigative work on the sewer blockage. However, as you point out, you are "unable to provide any further information about the repair, exact sewer alterations or damage until we excavate the area": quite right, we do not know what is going on down there – which makes your decision to close the case rather baffling. Is the problem solved? No. Is the problem in sight of a solution? Maybe, but nothing definite yet. It would seem, from a legal viewpoint, both ill-judged and inconsiderate to mark a problem as solved when it still has the potential to run and run. A customer could reasonably assume that closing the case means everything will be solved on 25 March, when you and I both know that is unlikely to be so.

I also realise that you cannot discuss the repairs with me, because our property is unlikely to have been structurally compromised. However, if the investigation discovers that the problem extends beyond the properties identified, I expect Thames Water to inform affected households and give them survey access. If the problem is even greater than currently believed then all affected properties should get access to the survey. This possibility cannot be ruled out before the digging starts because 16 months is a long time for water to be left to do its worst.

On a not-quite separate issue, I was informed on Tuesday 4 March by your Virtual Assistant that two bags of sewage would be collected before the end of the day. It is now Thursday and, with the warm weather, they are beginning to stink. Please have a word with someone about getting them removed. I would like to say this is a shocking way to treat your customers but, sadly, it is no less that we expect.

We look forward to your next report on 12 March and to the investigative work beginning on 25 March.



6th March 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Our Work

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you in response to your email of 3 March. I apologise for the error within my last email; your case is not closed. This was an oversight on my behalf and, as the email also details, I'll be contacting you on 12 March with another update. I apologise for any confusion caused.

NEXT STEPS

I'll continue to update you with our progress and next steps. I'll update you again no later than 12 March, please do give me a call on [Linzey's number]; lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Linzey, Senior Complaints Advisor



12th March 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Our Work

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing to you with an update as promised. I trust you find the below information helpful.

To confirm, our work is still on track to begin at the neighbouring property on 25 March.

Separate to this, following your telephone call regarding waste debris bags, these were due to be delivered Tuesday this week.

If these have not been delivered as agreed please let me know

NEXT STEPS

I'll continue to update you with our progress and next steps. I'll update you again no later than 1 April, please do give me a call on [Linzey's number]; lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Linzey, Senior Complaints Advisor



15th April 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Update

Dear Mr Edwards

I'm writing to you with an update as promised. I trust you find the below information helpful.

Our work will commence today at the affected houses. Once we've excavated we'll have more information to provide.

NEXT STEPS

Thank you for your continued patience I'll contact you on or before 29 April. If you do have any other questions or if there is anything else I can do to help, please do give me a call on [Linzey's number]; lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Linzey, Senior Complaints Advisor



27th June 2025: from Thames Water to Us – Sewer repair

Dear Mr Edwardes

I'm writing further to Linzey's email of 6 June 2025 in relation to the ongoing sewer repair. Linzey has moved to another role, so I'll be your point of contact going forward.

I'm pleased to confirm the daily look and lifts currently taking place at your property are due to stop no later than 30 June 2025, as the sewer will be fully operational. We aim to have the repair completed and the area put right within the next four to six weeks.

Once all work has been completed, we'll carry out a case review and confirm a goodwill payment to acknowledge the disruption this has caused to you and your family.

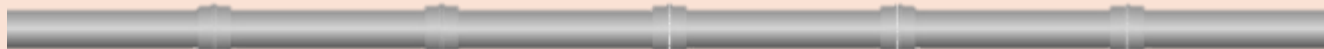


NEXT STEPS

I'll contact you no later than 15 August 2025, but if you do have any other questions or if there is anything else I can do to help, please do give me a call on [Amanda's number]; lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

[The rest was standard paragraphs.]

Yours sincerely, Amanda



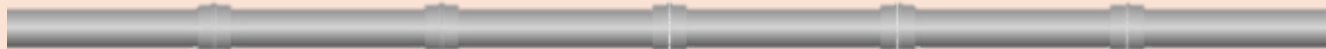
4th March to 11th March 2025 – Awaiting Collection

Eight Days

Tuesday's bags, both faeces-filled
There on Wednesday – we weren't thrilled.
Thursday came but still just grief,
Friday, Saturday, no relief.
Sunday, drunk on cheap chianti,
Monday, new bag ups the ante.
Now, once more the War God's day,
They've finally taken them all away.



Bags of Scheisseklumpen awaiting collection



16th March 2025: How to Clear a Damp Schplirt



1.

Assess the load



2.

Get the tools



3.

Gather the schplirt



4.

Half-fill the sieve



5.

Agitate until water is removed



6.

*Bag solids. Repeat steps
4-6 until dumpage is
bagged*



7.

Assess rest of clear-up



8.

*Wash surfaces & brush
water into drain*



9.

*Drain Lake TWiticaca -
created when TW dug up
the sewer pipe*



10.

Store tools

This was a small schplirtette, so useful as a demonstration. The procedure is the same for a schplirtathon, except with added bucket-emptying, bag-changing, and sobbing.

1st April 2025: The Final Schplirt

... and it happened on April Fool's day, somehow cosmically (or just comically) appropriate.



"I am big, it's the pictures that got small!"



"Alright, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up."



9th July 2025: WE'VE CLOSED YOUR CASE



Case number
00779906

We've closed your case

Hello Martin

We can confirm the issue you reported has been closed and no further action is needed from Thames Water. If you need to contact us again about a new issue, you can easily [report it online](#).

We're here for you

We understand it's worrying when there's a problem. If you need extra support in future and you pay your water bill to Thames Water, check if our free Priority Services could help.

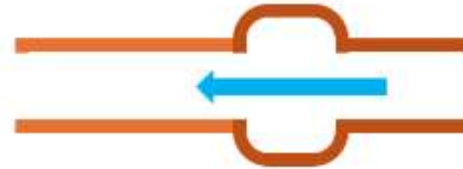
[Learn about Priority Services](#)

The Thames Water team

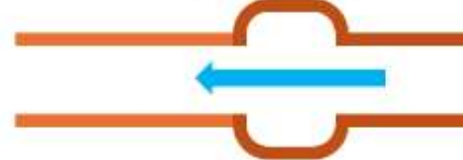
THE PROBLEM:

How the pipes should have been

From top



From side

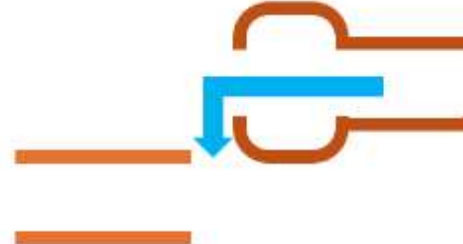


How the pipes actually were

From top



From side



Basically, the connecting sewer pipe in the affected house was plumbed in too low to meet the neighbouring sewer pipe.

For some reason, a new sewer pipe was installed to connect properties, but it diverted the flow away from the sewer line running from our property.

This resulted in the sewage from some other properties running into the main sewer, while our sewage ran into the ground.

It also meant that the repair work, when eventually carried out, took over three months instead of the anticipated one month.

The affected occupants were out of their homes from April through July.

Interlude: The Disposability of Wipes

First, let me make it clear that disposable wipes were not the cause of the schplirt blockage. However, several were found in the process of clearing and cleansing. When and where they came from we cannot say – they could have been in the pipes for a decade...

Here's the thing about disposable wipes: they are disposable in the same way that spent nuclear fuel rods are disposable. It is certainly possible to release them into the environment via the sewers, but that only makes things worse for everyone; because, while nuclear fuel rods have a half-life of 4.463 billion years, and toilet paper has a half-life of about a day, the half-life of “disposable” wipes is unknown. It is certainly long enough to render any found in the schplirt to be, like Jimmy Saville, undatable.

So please remember that, when the morals-free manufacturers of wipes call them “disposable”, they do not refer to sewage disposal. Perhaps it's time to call on our elected representatives to get these satanic squarelets relabelled. Just dropping the word “disposable” won't cut it, we need them to be honestly relabelled as NONDISPOSABLE.



*Nondisposables found amid
the brown stuff*



Appendix I: What is a Schplirt?

Schplirt is a novel word – I deliberately sought out a term with little or no usage. When asked, Google told me, “Your search – *schplirt* – did not match any documents”. This was not the case for other spelling variants. *Schplurt* turns out to be something sexual in the Sims online game, while *schplort* is in the Urban Dictionary as “the sound of a very large zit or boil suddenly erupting in a blast of sticky cheese, pus and blood”. Without a ‘c’, *shplort* is “The sound made when you get the last pump (of coffee) from the press pot, when the last of the liquid is pumped out and it starts to pull air with it”. *Shplurt* is the adopted name of a SoundCloud user who streams music, albums, and playlists; and *shplirt* is used in a book, *Bishop, the Birdman's Book on the Care and Management of Birds, Aquariums, Your Home and Yourself* (1887) – although the meaning of *shplirt* in this context is obscure. Without an ‘h’, *Splurt* is a boardgame, *Splort* is video game, and *splirt* is an eighteenth-century Scots word for a short spurt. *Schplirt* (pronounced to rhyme with *shirt* and *dirt*) was the only member of the word family still available.

Despite its sound, *schplirt* is not onomatopoeic – it is not intended to represent the sound of sewage escaping from a drain. From our experience, this is mostly a silent event, accompanied by the occasional glug from the loo; and, somehow, *glug* captures neither the smell nor the physicality nor the resignedly depressed feelings caused by a schplirt. Instead, *schplirt* is intended to be a metaphorical calligram – a word that is composed to feel similar to the thing it is. For instance, *bed* looks like a bed. Think of *schplirt* as initially a *euschplirtanoia*, where the prefix *eu-* is Greek and means “a good example of”; and *-anoia*, also Greek, means “as a cognitive representation”. However, just as most of the water (and a little pooh) drains away from an actual *euschplirtanoia* leaving a thick and muddy detritus, so most of the vowels (and one consonant) drain away from the word *euschplirtanoia*, leaving only smelly consonants and a residual dampness. I suppose I should really call a wet schplirt (where the water does not drain away) a true *euschplirtanoia*, but it's simpler to stick with wet schplirt.

Before I settled on *schplirt*, I did entertain alternative names for this book. One of them was *The Pooh at House Corner*, which seemed like a gratuitous slur on Christopher Robin. Other titles, such as *Bridget Jones' Dirty*, *To the Manure Born*, and *Tom's Brown Schooldays* were fun, but simultaneously too explicit and too obscure. So this book is about schplirt – as a noun (*a schplirt*), a verb (*to schplirt*), and adjectives (such as *schplirty*). But never as an adverb.

Appendix II: Shh ... You Know What

Early in our contact with Thames Water we were told that it was rude to use certain Anglo-Saxon words for deliveries into our overflowing drain; and, should we continue to do so, Thames Water would not talk to us. It's a bit like an accountant being allergic to the word "bankrupt"; but we toed the line and used euphemistic terms for the solids.

It reminded me of an old Irish story. A Priest decided to visit a farmhouse in his parish to check on the spiritual health of the farmer and his wife. He was greeted by the wife, who invited him in and said, "I'm afraid O'Neill is up working on the middle field, but himself will be down shortly. Do sit a while and have a cup of tea and a slice."

As they were drinking and talking the farmer came in, and the Priest greeted him with, "Hello now, O'Neill. And what have you been doing in the middle field this fine Spring day?"

"I've been manuring, Father," said O'Neill. "Yesterday I manured the top field, and today I'm manuring the middle field. I hope to have it all done before sundown, so I can start manuring the big lower field tomorrow."

They drank tea and conversed for a while; then O'Neill stood and said, "Well, that field won't finish manuring itself, I'd best be off."

After he was gone, the Priest turned to the wife and said, "Could you have a word with O'Neill about his use of the word 'manure'? Perhaps he could use the term 'fertilizer' instead?"

"Father," said the wife, "it's taken me twenty years to get him to call it manure!"

Here are some of the euphemisms we employed with Thames Water. They didn't improve the smell even a tiny bit.

Dumpage	Effluent	Merdeliciousness	Mud pies	New faeces
Ordure	Pooh, Poop	Satan's toothpaste	Scheisseklumpen	Shh-you-know-what
The brown stuff	The solids	The unnecessaries	TW delivery	Yesterday's lunch

Appendix III: Days of Whine and Rosaries

A List of the Recorded Schplirtation Events

9 th November 2023	13 th November 2023	14 th November 2023	19 th November 2023	23 rd November 2023
25 th November 2023	2 nd December 2023	17 th December 2023	30 th December 2023	31 st December 2023
2 nd January 2024	5 th January 2024	6 th January 2024	13 th January 2024	29 th January 2024
1 st February 2024	19 th February 2024	2 nd March 2024	3 rd March 2024	5 th March 2024
6 th March 2024	23 rd March 2024	26 th March 2024	29 th March 2024	30 th March 2024
3 rd April 2024	4 th April 2024	5 th April 2024	7 th April 2024	8 th April 2024
18 th April 2024	21 st April 2024	22 nd April 2024	24 th April 2024	25 th April 2024
26 th April 2024	27 th April 2024	30 th April 2024	3 rd May 2024	24 th July 2024
25 th July 2024	26 th July 2024	28 th July 2024	29 th July 2024	1 st August 2024
2 nd August 2024	3 rd August 2024	4 th August 2024	5 th August 2024	7 th August 2024
8 th August 2024	9 th August 2024	10 th August 2024	11 th August 2024	12 th August 2024
13 th August 2024	14 th August 2024	15 th August 2024	16 th August 2024	17 th August 2024
19 th August 2024	21 st August 2024	22 nd August 2024	23 rd August 2024	31 st August 2024
2 nd September 2024	3 rd September 2024	7 th September 2024	8 th September 2024	10 th September 2024
11 th September 2024	13 th September 2024	14 th September 2024	15 th September 2024	16 th September 2024
17 th September 2024	18 th September 2024	19 th September 2024	20 th September 2024	21 st September 2024
22 nd September 2024	23 rd September 2024	24 th September 2024	25 th September 2024	26 th September 2024
27 th September 2024	28 th September 2024	30 th September 2024	1 st October 2024	2 nd October 2024
3 rd October 2024	4 th October 2024	5 th October 2024	6 th October 2024	7 th October 2024

8 th October 2024	9 th October 2024	10 th October 2024	11 th October 2024	12 th October 2024
13 th October 2024	14 th October 2024	15 th October 2024	16 th October 2024	17 th October 2024
18 th October 2024	19 th October 2024	20 th October 2024	21 st October 2024	22 nd October 2024
26 th November 2024	2 nd December 2024	8 th December 2024	20 th December 2024	22 nd December 2024
1 st January 2025	5 th January 2025	6 th January 2025	7 th January 2025	9 th January 2025
10 th January 2025	11 th January 2025	13 th January 2025	19 th January 2025	22 nd January 2025
24 th January 2025	25 th January 2025	26 th January 2025	27 th January 2025	4 th February 2025
6 th February 2025	7 th February 2025	9 th February 2025	11 th February 2025	16 th February 2025
17 th February 2025	19 th February 2025	20 th February 2025	23 rd February 2025	26 th February 2025
26 th February 2025	27 th February 2025	1 st March 2025	2 nd March 2025	3 rd March 2025
4 th March 2025	7 th March 2025	11 th March 2025	13 th March 2025	15 th March 2025
16 th March 2025	19 th March 2025	1 st April 2025		



And now for the Statistics

There were 153 days with documented schplirtation out of a possible 508 days – which is just over 30%, or 2.1 days a week, or 9 days a month. The whole period of 508 days is nearly 2% of my life so far. In terms of life events it fits neatly into the running flush of Trump's first term, Covid-19, the Ukraine war, and Trump's second term. At a rough estimate, I have cleared about 750 kilos of dumpage, which, if it were all gathered together in a single pile, would smell awful.

I know the supposed Chinese curse is, “may you live in interesting times”; but I tend toward the idea that every time is an interesting time for someone. Maybe, however, the last few years have been more interesting for us than we expected them to be. In the immortal words of that great philosopher, Victoria Wood, “that’s life that is, so think on’t”.

Appendix IV: Mathematics for Schplirtualists

How big is a schplirt? Does Schplirtualism lend itself to mathematical analysis, or is it purely a philosophical matter? If you have personally encountered a schplirt, you will be very aware that it is not a topic for dispassionate contemplation: Stoics have run away, screaming “someone is gonna suffer for making me do this”; Epicureans grumble about too much void; Utilitarians are far from happy; and Ayn Rand forcibly inserted corks – and not in the drains.

Thames Water has their own mathematical relationship between the concept and reality of schplirt, which makes schplirt both measurable and chargeable. However, TW's measure, based on clean water usage, is not suitable for our purposes; so, I have instead used a measuring scale based on weight rather than volume. The scale has only four points.

Schplirt: the standard measure of a bagful of merdeliciousness. It is about four to six kilos in weight, a sufficient volume to fill the bottom 10cm of one sack. Unfortunately, this means that *schplirt* is both a measure and a general description of a drain regurgitating. Where confusion may arise, the word *schplirtation* will be used for the regurgitation event.

Schplirtette: sufficient brown stuff to require a clean-up, but not enough to fill a sack. Schplirtettes are added to a bag until it amounts to a full Schplirt.

Maxischplirt: a schplirtation that requires more than one sack, but no more than two sacks.

Megaschplirt: a schplirtation that requires more than two sacks, but no more than three sacks.

Schplirtathon: a schplirtation that requires more than three sacks. A very rare occurrence – but not unknown.

Appendix V: A trip to the Crossness sewage works

On 17th August 2025 we went with our friends, Roger and Viv, to visit Bazalgette's Sewage outfall at Crossness.

By Elizabeth Line to
Abbey Wood



By special bus to
the Crossness Railway



By Crossness Railway to
the Pumping Station



Crossness Pumping Station



Giant beam engine



"Cathedral of Sewage"



"The Cistern Chapel"



Prince Consort pump

Appendix VI: Things might have been a whole lot worse

In March 2026, Channel 4 produced a three-programme docudrama about the corruption introduced to the UK water industry by privatisation. It is not easy viewing, but if you live anywhere in the World with privatised monopolistic service industries, it is well worth the effort.

The series covers a decade-long investigation carried out by two neighbours, Ashley Smith, a former police detective (played by David Thewlis), and Peter Hammond, a Professor of Computational Biology (played by Jason Watkins). From an initial sighting of dying fish in the Windrush river, they discover unreported sewage contamination throughout Britain, and their investigation becomes an indictment of the private water companies and their supposed overseers, the Department for the Environment. People are made ill by the illegal sewage spills, some become permanently invalided, and some die. It is a scandal that has remained largely unexamined by the many Gummments in power since 1989, when the Wicked Witch of Westminster, Margaret Thatcher, introduced water company privatisation.

After watching the series, I proposed digging up the old baggage and reburying her in sewage; but it turns out she was cremated – presumably practice for her afterlife – and her ashes are in the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea. One hopes that the Chelsea Pensioners keep her final resting place well-watered.

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/dirty-business>



Finale: Sunset over Lake TWiticaca



31 October 2025

*As the Autumn sun sets over the newly-refilled lake,
we say goodbye to our time in the land of Caca.
With nothing but our recurring nightmares to remind us of our strange adventure,
we return to our normal life as London pensioners,
secure in the knowledge that it was never this bad in our young days.*

Schpeirt!

The Coffee Table book you don't want to see on a coffee table near you

This book lifts the lid on sewage. It also lifts the seat and squats over the cold, cold porcelain, paper at the ready to wipe away the tears.

The story tells of a series of events which hopefully will never be part of your personal experience: sewage, sewage everywhere, nor any drop to drink. It is a sticky, smelly testimonial to the essential bleakness of existence, a busted flush, an unmitigated outflowing of detritus, a long, drawn-out flatus into the dark and dank night-time of life.

Sometimes life delivers less than roses; but more, much more, than disappointment.

Be grossed out by the pictures, appalled by the tales, vaguely amused by the bureaucratic moronocracy, as the story inexorably and inevitably slimes its way onward – from an inept and rapacious Gumment's very, very, very bad idea to its inevitable conclusion in a group of unsuspecting East London back gardens.

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