

Kicking Up Yet Another Stink

What, if anything, do we learn, or reaffirm, from the 2021 double rerun of The Great Stink of 1858? The events are not, of course, directly comparable. The Victorian version directly offended the *nostrils* of Parliamentarians. The 2021 versions offend the *nostrums* of the governing Party.



The [1858 stink](#) led to great reforms – the creation (eventually) of the Public Works Loans Board to fund long-term infrastructure investment and Joseph Bazalgette’s designs for the Embankment.

This year’s more-political stinks were first triggered by the Tories refusal to oblige privatised water companies to stop dumping raw sewage – as intended by a Lord’s

amendment to a long-awaited Environment Bill. The stink set Downing Street on a voyage around the u-bend – to find some way of cleaning up the mess. But that was merely a precursor to the next stink – a 3-line whip to wreck the Parliamentary Standards regulation. That stink was belatedly recognised as unwise – not least because Tory MPs felt they’d been dumped upon.

But both stinks directly affect Fareham for two reasons.

- Firstly, our [Hill Head residents](#) are campaigning for better beach signage to warn bathers and sailors of the untreated effluent dumped by Southern Water. This pollution stink coincided with COP26 – further damaging the government’s ‘green’ credentials. Their much delayed ‘Environment Bill’ is still being bounced around Parliament – with common sense being championed from the Lords only to be rejected by those concerned more to protect profits.
- Secondly, our MP (Right Honourable, apparently) is the government’s top law officer. The legality of wrecking the system for ensuring Parliamentary Standards (last beefed up following the ‘Duck House’ MP expenses scandal) is probably a question that didn’t trouble the Attorney General’s office – and she voted with the wreckers. Even the Daily Mail objected! Maybe, with the offending MP now dumped, the Party will hope the stink blows over - aided, no doubt, by copious volumes of hot air from Downing Street and a propaganda machine tick-tocking away on overtime at the ‘Full Facebook’ level.

But there is good news.

Not only will there now be a by-election to test the nose-holding tolerance of voters in North Shropshire, but we can also expect far tougher scrutiny of that ‘Environment Bill’ with its oh-so-clever construction of five seemingly harmless themes which now turn out to be worth less than the toilet paper they were written on. Students of [‘Enabling Acts’](#) will

recognise the 1933 policy brand when future PhD's next revisit the decline of democratic government.

It is not difficult to understand why the Lord's amendment *and* the Standards Committee report triggered such dogmatic determinations to defeat them – they both edged uncomfortably close to anti-capitalist sentiments. In this COP26 season every opportunity has been taken to laud 'open competition', 'free markets', and deregulation – just three more spins of the 'smart motorway' revision of plain speaking.

Privatising water companies, like all privatisations before, was supposed to deliver efficiencies and vast performance improvements – freed from the imagined yoke of public service obligations. In the event it turns out that wealth extraction from sewage is a doddle – assuming no-one wants to swim in the stuff. And much the same could be said of a willingness to dump Parliamentary Standards into the recycling bin.