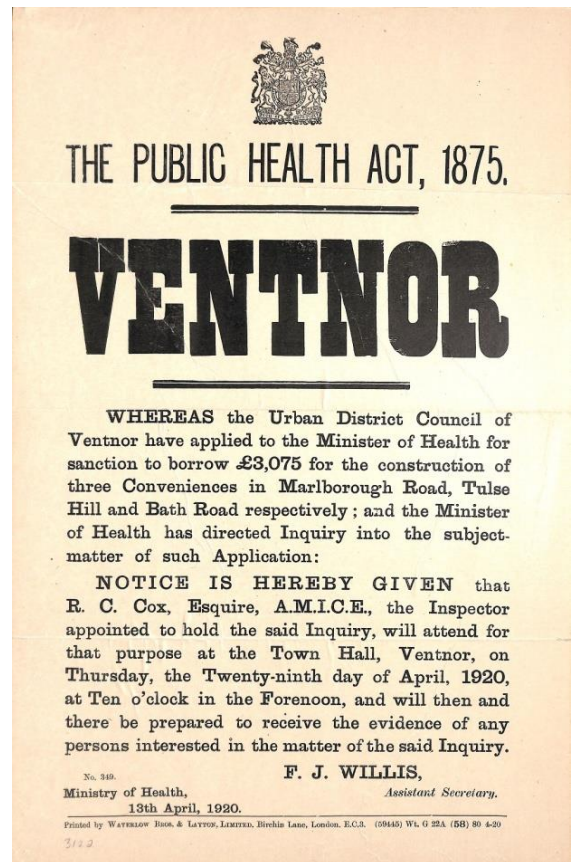


Public conveniences are part of our heritage.

At Queen Victoria's Great Exhibition in 1851, George Jennings introduced recent sanitary technology, the flush toilet, to public conveniences, and during the Exhibition 827,280 visitors paid one penny to use them. For the penny they got a clean seat, a towel, a comb and a shoe shine, and by the 1890s his company had established 36 public conveniences in British towns. To 'spend a penny' became a euphemism for going to the toilet, and some people still remember when the lock on cubicle doors was operated by the insertion of an old penny.

The poster here shows that in April 1920 the Ventnor Urban District Council applied to the Minister of Health to borrow £3,075 to build three conveniences. The site in Marlborough Road was previously the stable block for James Corbould, wine merchant, who operated from what is now the Blenheim, and who also had extensive cellars extending into Marlborough Road. 1920 saw horse-drawn transport losing its importance as the automobile gained ground, which may have been why the stables were no longer needed. The Council loan seems to have been granted, as the public conveniences were built.

Sadly, according to the British Toilet Association, over the last decade local authority funding cuts have meant that up to half of public toilets in this country may have been closed - we are fortunate that Ventnor Town Council has taken on the running of ours.



I was responsible, some years ago, for getting those in Marlborough Road added to the Isle of Wight Council Local List project as something of architectural and design merit. This does not mean they are 'Listed' by English Heritage, but it allows the Conservation and Design Team at the Council to give them some protection, and when the toilets were refurbished a few years ago their status on the Local List helped to secure a sympathetic upgrading.

The toilets in Marlborough Road are amazing, as shown here by my photos of the ladies cubicles, the gents urinals and the corridor leading into the gents. During my heritage walks in Ventnor I encourage those walking to go in and take a look around. And of course, if they wish, 'spend a penny'!

