

## HISTORY OF SEWERAGE SYSTEMS

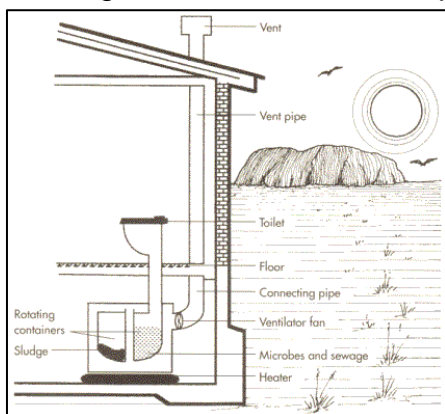
Prior to the establishment of sewerage systems, people simply got rid of their wastes by throwing them out the door. The waste or sewage from bathrooms, kitchens and laundries were emptied into open drains that flowed into street channels and out into the Bay via the rivers and creeks. (Can you see the street drainage channels in the picture of Elizabeth St dated 1880?).



All of these wastes mixed together made for a smelly place and Melbourne was nicknamed “Marvellous Smelboom”.

### Pit Toilets

The pit toilet was the first attempt to cope with these problems. Making a pit toilet was simple and involved putting a seat over a hole dug in the ground. The most important part of building a pit toilet was to make sure that you had a lid to keep the smells in and the flies out. When the hole was full, all you had to do was dig another one – the deeper the better.



Nowadays, a similar structure as the pit toilet can be found at camping grounds in National Parks. These toilets can be composting (bacteria break down the waste into soil) or chemical based.

### Thunderboxes

Pit toilets were not practical to cope with waste disposal in towns that began to grow in the area. Pan closet toilets (Thunderboxes) were introduced and consisted of a pan (bucket) that was placed with a new pan about once a week by a nightman, so called because he collected pans at night. Pan closet toilets were normally built outside, at the bottom of the garden.

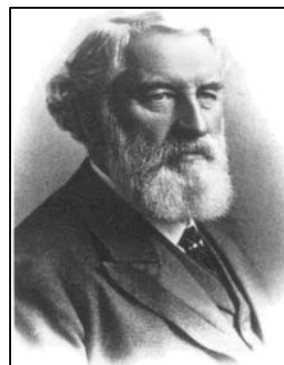


The pans were washed in troughs, visible in the shed in the background. The collected “nightsoil” was often dried and used as fertiliser in the outer suburbs

The nightman would collect the pan from a small door in the back of the toilet, empty it, and replace it unwashed. Pictured on the left is a modern nightsoil collection wagon.

### Reticulation

In 1889, Mr James Mansbergh (pictured on the right), an English engineer drew up plans for Melbourne's sewerage system and construction began in 1892. The system, based on a network of sewers carried sewage via a pumping station to a treatment plant at Werribee, where it was treated before its release to Port Phillip Bay.



Eventually, construction of the sewer system spread to all of Melbourne. The last three pan closet toilets in Frankston were removed in April 1991 and hailed as a small milestone in the city's history.

### Septic Systems

For the more spacious areas on the Mornington Peninsula, reticulation was not an appropriate choice in the early days. Septic systems, which had the same advantage as being flushed with water, were used instead.

Mornington was the first town on the Mornington Peninsula to build a reticulated sewerage system, with sewage being piped away from houses to a sewage treatment plant.

It was the only township on the Mornington Peninsula to have a reticulated sewage system until formation of a number of local sewerage authorities in the district in the 1960's.

Finally, as Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs developed it was decided that the Werribee Treatment Farm could not handle processing the full load of Melbourne's sewage. As a result, the MMBW built the Eastern Treatment Plant (ETP) at Carrum, which opened in 1975.

Today, South East Water operates 10 Sewage Treatment Plants located throughout its area of operation. However, the majority of all sewage generated in the area is processed at Melbourne Water's **Eastern Treatment Plant**.