



SMOKE & MIRRORS





Day 275. Polaroid (Detail) 2019

INTRODUCTION

In the early hours of 14th June 2017, I began to receive text messages on my phone, there were reports of a fire near me. I made my way to the bathroom window but could not see the fire – just a thick column of foul billowing smoke, shifting slowly side to side in the dark air. I went instead to the front room and opened the window. What I saw will stay with me forever: Grenfell Tower – three blocks down – seemed to have leapt forwards, alive, burning and pungent – it felt like I could reach out my hand and touch it. The air was full of distant sirens and the chugging of helicopters. Everything had changed in a moment.

I am an artist who lives in London W11, I primarily use photography and photographic materials to explore notions of community, neighbourhood, and local identity. In doing so I hope to reflect the effect that infrastructural change, national policy and local activism has on the general ‘health’, capital, assets and resilience of (these) social structures and the populace. My previous work in this arena has been the publication of a book, “The People and Histories of the West Eleven Housing Cooperative” (2012) and “Orphans” (2014) a photographic installation under the Westway Flyover (in collaboration with Adam Ritchie and RBKC Libraries Archive) which focused on the people of the W11 area, whose lives were changed forever with the building of the Westway Flyover.

This exhibition, “Smoke & Mirrors” is concerned with the aftermath and events surrounding the Grenfell Tower disaster of June 14th 2017, which happened a few hundred metres from where I live. As time passes and media attention waxes and wanes, I am attempting to use photographs as questions, reminders and challenges; to record and mark time; using the physical and metaphorical qualities of surface, exploiting analogue materials, alternative processes, graphic communication, time-based media and installation to chart the collective trauma and dignified activism among some of the most economically deprived people living in the richest London Borough; people who are frustrated and angry that such a preventable tragedy could happen.

The Grenfell Tower fire broke out at the 24-storey Grenfell Tower block of public housing flats in North Kensington in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, West London. It consumed the building, racing up 20 storeys in 25 minutes. Built in 1974 Grenfell Tower was refurbished in 2016 and wrapped in highly flammable cladding, installed in contravention of building regulations and as a cost-saving measure. £300,000 was removed from the cladding budget in an exercise known as ‘Value Engineering’. Low combustibility zinc panels were replaced with ACM - panels with a flammable plastic core. During the refurbishment process there was blatant collusion amongst a whole host of companies, whose incompetence, greed and sheer lack of due diligence meant that 72 people needlessly lost their lives. Countless families, friends and members of the wider community had their own lives changed forever in that terrible night. The fire killed 72 people and caused

over 70 injuries. Occupants of 23 of the 129 flats died. An estimated 223 people escaped. Police and fire services believe the fire started accidentally in a fridge-freezer in flat 16 on the fourth floor, which is of a common type in widespread use. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry held its first hearing on 14 September 2017, and evidential hearings started in October of that year.

In the immediate and ongoing aftermath of that event, the dignified activism demonstrated by the local community has kept this issue in the public realm; alive where many would rather it were forgotten. People are (still) frustrated and angry that such a preventable tragedy could happen. The lives of the 72 victims closely mirror the make up of a complex modern Britain. More than half the adult victims had arrived in the country since 1990, choosing to find work in the UK and start families. The Tower housed more recent refugees who came to live in the UK after abandoning their lives, careers and sometimes loved ones. They escaped countries where life had become intolerable and even life threatening. They sought anonymity here, starting again in relative safety. Young families juggled working lives and childcare. There were elderly people (seven of the victims were aged over 70) and children (17 of the 67 children living in Grenfell Tower died, plus one who died before he was born).

The first discussions around refurbishment of the Tower (in 2008) included demolition, because it was thought to be a ‘blight on the area’. Although these plans were later dropped many believe that a core motivator for the council’s eventual refurbishment of the Tower was to assuage private householders concerns over the ‘unsightly appearance’ (of the Tower). The manner in which the survivors group Grenfell United was treated was seized upon by Grenfell United spokespeople at a meeting with Theresa May in August 2017 - two months after the fire. “If this happened on the posher side of the borough, money would not be an issue, emotions would not be an issue and you would totally relate to them.” Another said: “We are quite dignified and quite civilised people, and there’s nothing wrong with social housing.” 3.

Kensington and Chelsea is the wealthiest local authority in the UK. It is also by population the smallest of the 32 London Boroughs but has the fourth highest density of population in London. Over a quarter of residents do not speak English as their first language. RBKC ranked 122 out of 317 authorities by the level of relative deprivation in England. Levels of deprivation vary vastly by ward with the North more deprived than the South. RBKC has a higher migrant population than some other boroughs, with over 50% being born abroad and 1 in 3 residents in the borough identify as BAME. Compared to 2011/12 RBKC residents now report to have lower life satisfaction levels, lower levels of feeling worthwhile and lower day-to-day happiness. The level of anxiety has also increased since 2011/2012. In 2017, there was a sharp decline in all four well-being measures, following the Grenfell tragedy. The level of anxiety and day to day happiness has seen the highest rate of deterioration since 2017. The above information was sourced from the RBKC ‘State of the Bor-

ough' report, January 2021.

The tower now stands as a brutal symbol; wrapped in white plastic and starkly visible from all around the area, it waits along with the survivors, bereaved relatives, friends, and the wider community, for the outcomes of the Grenfell Tower inquiry. We are at the 5th Anniversary of the fire and it will likely be late in 2023 before the report from the 2nd phase of the inquiry is published. Five years has passed and no one has yet been held accountable.

In the days that followed June 14th, the whole area seemed caught in a kind of somnambulism. It was as if a sickness had descended and cloaked the buildings, creeping along the streets. People moved in a sleepy vacant manner; neighbours and friends would greet each other with eyes unfocused and bodies slack, as if still in a dream they'd had, and couldn't quite believe was true. Quickly people woke up and mobilised. A Facebook page, The Grenfell Tower Volunteers Page was set up in an effort to co-ordinate assistance at several donation centres springing up in the area. These included centres in the carpark at the foot of Trellick Tower, at Acklam Village under the Westway Flyover, Kensal Community Centre, the Tabernacle Centre, Mode Nightclub, Bay Sixty6 Skatepark, The Dalgarno Centre, Lancaster Road Youth Club, the Venture Community Centre, the Rugby Portobello Trust and Hewer Street. The Westway Sports Centre became a Humanitarian Assistance Zone offering a variety of services to the survivors and those affected, including counselling and childcare. The Red Cross set up a helpline dedicated for Grenfell and St. Clements and Notting Hill Methodist Churches opened their doors for people to meet and to take in donations. The sheer practical and administrative effort involved in coordinating hundreds of people sorting thousands of donations into labelled boxes and bags was simply breathtaking. The community mobilisation was doubly effective as many remarked how much it helped to be doing something, it brought people together under a common cause, focusing the pain disbelief and despair into positive action. The spontaneous rallying of the community, supported by many who came from around the country, showed effective planning and coordination in marked contrast to the silence and absence of the local authority, who seemed confused and uncommunicative - lacking a clear response to the relief efforts. Throughout those days, all around the area people were asking, "Where is the council?"

Almost £3 million was raised for victims of the Grenfell Tower fire in less than 48 hours. On 26 January 2018 the BBC Reality Check website stated, "There were about 40,000 boxes in total, enough to fill three full-sized football pitches. More than 600 volunteers eventually sorted through every item. The proceeds of the donations that were sold were passed on to survivors via the British Red Cross's 'Shop for Grenfell' Fund, which raised £226,000 in total". Money was also donated via several charitable foundations. The majority of this was managed by the Rugby Portobello Trust, a local charity helping survivors of the fire, and the London Emergencies Trust. The 140 households in Grenfell Tower itself received approximately £82,000 each from the Rugby Portobello Trust, while the 26 households in the nearby walkway blocks received about £30,000 each. ¹.

Ed Daffarn a resident of the Tower who lived on the 16th Floor co-

wrote the Grenfell Action Group blog with Francis O'Connor. The blog (is) committed to defending the rights of the residents of Lancaster West Estate, a sprawling, inner-city, social housing complex of nearly a thousand dwellings, mostly working class, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. The blog's 'About' page states that it 'will remain as evidence for future generations of how this community has resisted continual mis-treatment arising from the dictatorship of the Conservative led Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and (its now defunct) social housing management agents the Kensington & Chelsea TMO (KCTMO). Daffarn via the blog and in public meetings had repeatedly raised safety concerns over the refurbishment plans and the maintenance of the Tower in general. Daffarn and other residents complained of the incompetent handling of 'shockingly poor workmanship' which was 'allowed to happen unchecked' including fire barriers being installed upside down and back to front, lifts frequently stopped working, fire doors ceased to function and a repairs programme seemed non-existent. Daffarn had repeatedly asked for minutes of meetings held to discuss the refurbishment but was turned down on the grounds of 'commercial insensitivity'. Eventually the TMO blocked access to the Grenfell Action Group blog on its servers, so that staff could not view the blog posts.

Promises to consult with the Grenfell residents were broken and freedom of information requests were refused. When the non-combustible zinc cladding was turned down in favour of the cheaper, flammable, ACM plastic-filled panels the residents of the Tower were not informed. The TMO considered Daffarn as one of a group of 'rebel residents' who was 'vitriolic, 'a problem' and even 'libellous'. Seven months before the fire, Daffarn wrote on The Grenfell Action Group blog,

"It is a truly terrifying thought but...only a catastrophic event that results in serious loss of life of KCTMO residents will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord...and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of health and safety legislation that they inflict upon their tenants and leaseholders." He warned that the tenant management groups' 'sordid collusion' with the council is a 'recipe for a future major disaster'.

The days following the fire saw the emergence of 'Grenfell United' who - as their website states - are 'Survivors and bereaved families from the Grenfell Tower fire. We have come together to demand justice and change in memory of 72 of our families and neighbours who died. We are fighting for everyone to be safe in their homes and for justice for our loved ones'. 35 residents gathered at Rugby Portobello on 22 June and established the goals and aims of Grenfell United. This vision was that survivors create a strong, unified, dignified and independent voice to reflect the hopes and aspirations of the survivors. This aim and goals were ratified by a further 50 survivors over the following days. Oliver McTernan a local religious leader and conflict manager said, "We asked the simple question: 'What are your needs?'" recalled McTernan. "I was very struck by what the very first lad said: 'Dignity.'" People weren't screaming for revenge, or demanding money. They talked instead about being strong, independent and unified. ². Natasha Elcock was a resident of Grenfell Tower and survived the fire along with her daughter and is current Chair of Grenfell United says, "It has thrust us into a world none of us ever envisaged we would be in," she said. "It's given us a different outlook on how

things have been done.”

Another group sprang up quickly after the 14th. Justice4Grenfell (J4G) is a *‘Community-led organisation, focused on the long-term goal of obtaining justice for the bereaved families, survivors, evacuated residents and the wider local community, collaborating with representative organisations. J4G was set up a few days after the Grenfell Fire disaster and officially launched on June 19th 2017 with a silent walk. Together with many other local groups and individuals, J4G stepped into the void left by the authorities, to try to meet the urgent needs of those impacted. Our work continues because of the on-going failure of the authorities to respond adequately to the disaster. J4G’s ultimate aim is to ensure that such an event never happens again’*

Moyra Samuels a local teacher and activist is one of the co-founders of Justice4Grenfell and describes the day she became involved:

“I remember here in the car park (under the Westway) they had put up a stage and Ishmahil (Blagrove) was speaking along with others. I was standing back watching and Ishmahil turns to me and says, ‘I need you up here on the stage, come up now’. So I’ve got up on the stage and it’s like every bit of bitterness, rage, anger and humiliation that you feel on behalf of your community just came out. When I finished speaking Ishmahil said, ‘I need you to join Justice4Grenfell’.

(Moyra Samuels is interviewed on page 12)

The organisation became proactive in reaching out to Trade Unions, Housing Charities and campaign groups. They continue campaigning for truth, accountability and change and build broad alliances with a range of campaigning organisations and social justice movements.

One regular, striking and moving event to come out of the tragedy is the monthly ‘Silent Walk’. The walk first happened on June 19th 2017 and then shifted to become a monthly event occurring on the 14th. Participating in the walk is a humbling, meditative experience. It’s a marker of time and a way to feel connected with the community, walking silently in each others company is both powerful tribute and tacit protest. The walk generally begins at Notting Hill Methodist Church where survivors and bereaved families take the front and a queue forms behind. The walk progresses up Lancaster Road to Ladbrooke Grove, turning left it moves under the Westway Flyover and turns left into Cambridge Gardens all the way down to Bramley Road. The circle is completed after turning left and left again under the flyover to congregate in the carpark area in front of the Peoples wall to break the silence and talk and catch up with friends. Speeches are made and thanks given to those who have come - often groups from around the country have come in support. We are encouraged to face the Tower - visible in the near distance and to hold a minutes silence to remember the dead. A call of ‘Justice!’ is repeated several times and then the crowd chats, embraces loved ones and slowly begins to disperse.

Zeyad Cred, the Silent Walk manager remarks:, *“The Silent Walk has kept us peaceful, its a time for gathering, a fixed date in the calendar where everybody knows we’ll come together. I get people saying its their therapy, people who travel in for it leave feeling changed, counted. And as the numbers grow it shows the authorities that were so absent that we’re still here, we’re not going anywhere,*

we’re getting stronger”

So what is to become of the Tower itself? A report in September 2021 published in The Sunday Times suggested that, after a recent structural engineering report the Tower could be demolished soon, due to ‘health and safety reasons’. This angered many in the community who point to the Grenfell Memorial Commission, which was set up by Government in collaboration with representatives of the bereaved, survivors and Lancaster West Estate residents to be guided by the community, with the voice of the bereaved given the most weight. Michael Gove the appointed secretary of state for housing apologised for the upset that this report caused, being published before it was communicated to the survivors of the fire. Some in the community wish for the Tower to be removed, some to have it remain covered, still more would like it to be uncovered and let it act as a stark reminder, another option suggested by bereaved families is a vertical garden tower based on an idea by Italian architect Stefan Boeri. There has been a strong consensus among the bereaved families that they are not yet emotionally ready to have the tower removed.

Memorialising the tragedy of Grenfell has taken many forms over the last five years. The above mentioned Silent Walk is a notable example and there are others. The Memorial Wall is essentially temporary hoarding erected around the Tower and repurposed as a surface for messages and posters, flowers and memorial candles, plus The Grenfell Community Memorial Mosaic coordinated by the Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art (ACAVA) and the Al-Manaar Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre. The Wall of Truth sits underneath the rumbling of the Westway flyover and sports an ever-changing display of messages, wall paintings, poems, graffiti, prayers, a piano and written testimony. In front of the Wall of Truth is a garden which has transformed the space in another example of community action where people came together to dig, plant and discuss and the space came to be known as the Grenfell Garden of Peace. From this initiative came ‘Grow2Know’ whose garden designs represent and commemorate both social and climate injustices. 37 mosaic stepping stones designed by artists Emily Fuller and Tomomi have been installed along the route of the Silent Walk.

The pieces are circular, feature a green mosaic heart – a symbol now synonymous with Grenfell – and depict the word ‘Justice’ in the various languages that were spoken in Grenfell Tower. Each one is set with 72 flecks of gold. Underneath the Westway in empty spaces and inside local churches, are stored the banners which are held aloft on the Silent Walks. Green hearts and scarves appear all around the area - painted on walls and wrapped around lampposts and trees. These memorials have appeared unsponsored, via the creative efforts of community itself who have made good use of temporary spaces. As yet there has been no fixed physical space to host a memorial that will last for generations, it will be interesting to see what memorial of remembrance will be designed, and how it will honour the lives of the 72 and all those affected by the fire. It surely must act as a reminder to all, now and in the future, that lessons must be learned from the tragedy so that it can never happen again. On the back page of this paper there appears a list of organisations and resources that can help with community action

W Z E E Z E T

I have compiled this timeline from a number of sources, including Inside Housing, BBC News Website, The Grenfell Tower Inquiry website, 'Value Engineering' (book by Norton-Taylor, R. and Kent, N.) Ifsec Global. Any timeline will inevitably suffer from omission of important and relevant detail.

1960s – Aluminium composite material (ACM) is first developed for use in Germany, use of it spreads in the 1990s.

1962 – A new British Standard Code of Practice introduces the 'stay put' policy the essence of which is that, in buildings, purpose built flats and apartments, residents not in an area directly impacted by the fire should stay inside their flat with doors and windows shut

1973 – Despite a fire killing 50 people at leisure complex in the Isle of Man, a subsequent recommendation that a named person take responsibility for fire safety in design is not adopted.

1974 – Grenfell Tower built, part of Lancaster Estate – The Department of the Environment warns about the use of combustible cladding though no change in regulations is made.

1991 – Fire at a tower block in Merseyside that has rainscreen cladding on it.

1995 – compulsory competitive tendering for local authority housing services is introduced. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) transfers control of its housing stock – 9,000 homes – to Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO).

1997 – testing lab, Building Research Establishment (BRE) is privatised and more private building inspectors enter the market.

2000 – Select Committee recommends that cladding products are 'entirely non-combustible' but ministers opt for 'large-scale testing'.

2003 – government scraps the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council. Local forces now set their own policies.

2005 – Fire risk assessment of buildings moves from the fire service to building owners after the implementation of The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Update to Approved Document B relaxes a restriction on the use of combustible insulation on tall buildings.

2008 – KCTMO's repairs performance criticised by residents. An independent auditor is appointed to assess and is highly critical in their report.

Aluminium company Arconic obtains 'Class 0' certification from construction industry approvals body, the British Board of Agrément. An expert at the Grenfell inquiry later describes the certificate as "factually inaccurate."

Lakanal House fire, another tower block fire, spreads via window panels and because of flawed compartmentation. Six people die after being told to 'stay put' by the emergency services.

RBKC plans refurbishment around Grenfell including the demolition of the tower itself, which,

it says, "blights" the area. The idea is later dropped.

2010 – Tenant Services Authority axed. Homes and Communities Agency is established in its place. Industry and fire sector bodies call for sprinklers in high-rise buildings.

2011 – The Government announces a 'red tape challenge', asking all government departments to reduce regulation. Local Government Association recommends the 'stay put' policy.

2012

January – David Cameron announces plans to "kill health and safety culture". Any new regulation requires cutting existing regulations – a 'one in, two out' rule.

February – Residents of Grenfell Tower are consulted on refurbishment, including being asked about cladding. A fire-resistant zinc composite material is chosen.

14 May – Fire destroys ACM cladding in a high-rise building in Roubaix, France.

2013

March – the coroner investigating the deaths at Lakanal House recommends: a review of Approved Document B "with particular regard to external fire spread"; retrofitting of sprinklers in social housing tower blocks, and clarification of the 'stay put' advice.

May – Communities secretary Eric Pickles says Approved Document B will be reviewed by 2016/17. Documents from KCTMO later reveal government assurances were given that no mandatory actions would be required.

2014

February – 'stay put' policy questioned by government's 'Generic Risk Assessment 3.2' guidance on high rise fires.

April – Rydon appointed to carry out the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower.



June – £300,000 removed from the cladding budget after discussion between KCTMO and refurbishment partner, construction consultancy Artelia UK. Zinc panels replaced with ACM with a plastic core.

June – The Building Control Alliance advises that cladding systems with combustible materials do not need to pass a large-scale test.

July – the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology warns government of dangerous ACM cladding being used and makes recommendations that are not taken up.

November – ACM cladding on the Lacrosse Tower in Melbourne, Australia catches fire. No deaths, with residents evacuated and sprinklers in use.

2015

February – Another major ACM cladding fire, this time at the Marina Torch tower in Dubai.

July – following a fire in Canterbury, local MP Julian Brazier asks government to consider sprinklers but is told the matter has been looked into already.

July – An Inside Housing investigation reveals that just 18 of 2,925 social housing tower blocks have sprinklers installed inside flats.

September – government declines the suggestion from a cross-party group of MPs calling for updates to Approved Document B to toughen the 'Class 0' requirement and reconsider the case for mandatory sprinklers, which is meeting resistance because of the 'one in, two out' red tape policy.

December – a local councillor presents a petition to an RBKC council to

investigate the Grenfell refurbishment. An investigation follows, but it is by KCTMO itself and comments favourably on KCTMO and Rydon.

December – another massive ACM cladding fire in Dubai, this time at the Address Downtown Hotel.

2016

March – government plans to cut “a further £10bn of red tape”.

May – Grenfell Tower refurbishment ends. It used both Arconic’s ACM cladding and Celotex RS5000 insulation, neither of which has undergone full-scale testing.

July – The National House Building Council (NHBC) says that, if used with certain ACM cladding, Celotex RS5000 no longer requires a desktop study to demonstrate compliance.

19 August – fire at Shepherd’s Court, Shepherd’s Bush, London for which combustible materials in cladding blamed.

November – a Grenfell Action Group blog warns that KCTMO would only undergo proper scrutiny if a serious incident “results in serious loss of life of KCTMO residents”.

November – KCTMO written to by The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority with a number of issues flagged, including non-closing fire doors to the staircase and compartmentation breaches.

2017

April, The London Fire Brigade writes to local authorities advising them to check cladding materials for fire safety in light of the Shepherd’s Court fire.

May, housing minister Gavin Barwell, defends ‘stay put’ policy.

14th June, the fire.

00.54 Behailu Kebede calls 999 to report a fire in Flat 16, floor 4 Grenfell Tower.

00.59 First firefighters reach the tower.

01.09 Fire breaks out of Flat 16 into exterior cladding and starts to climb the east facade rapidly.

01.14 Firefighters enter the kitchen of Flat 16 for the first time.

01.21 First 999 call to the control room from an occupant in the tower (Naomi Li, Flat 195, floor 22).

01.25 First 999 call to report smoke coming into flat from lobby (Denis Murphy, Flat 111, floor 14).

01.26 MPS declares a Major Incident.

01.27 Fire reaches the roof and starts to spread horizontally.

01.29 WM Michael Dowden, the LFB incident commander, makes pumps 20 (having made up from 4 to 6, to 8, to 10 and to 15 between 01.13 and 01.28).

01.30 First 999 call reporting fire penetrating a flat (Mariem Elgwahry, Flat 196, floor 22).

01.31 WM Dowden makes pumps 25. By this time 110 out of 297 occupants have escaped; the fire starts to spread to the north elevation of the tower.

01.42 The LAS declares a Significant Incident.

01.45 First NPAS (police) helicopter arrives at the scene.

01.50 WM Dowden hands over incident command to SM Andrew Walton. By this time

168 of 297 occupants had escaped.

01.58 SM Walton hands over incident command to DAC Andrew O’Loughlin.

02.00 Flames travel across the north and east elevations of the tower, and start to spread around the crown and diagonally across the face of the building, affecting flats in the south-east and north-west corners.

02.04 GM Richard Welch declares himself incident commander, not knowing that DAC O’Loughlin has already assumed command.

02.06 GM Welch declares a Major Incident.

02.11 DAC O’Loughlin takes handover from GM Welch.

02.15 SOM Joanne Smith arrives at the control room.

02.17 Bridgehead moves from floor 2 up to floor 3.

02.20 Flames start to spread to south elevation.

02.26 The LAS declares a Major Incident

02.35 Control room decides to revoke the “stay put” advice and tell all occupants calling 999 to leave the tower.

02.44 AC Andrew Roe takes over incident command from DAC O’Loughlin.

02.47 AC Roe revokes the “stay put” advice.

02.50 Fire spreads horizontally across the south elevation at the crown. Commissioner Dany Cotton arrives at Grenfell Tower.

03.00 Fire starts to spread across the west elevation of tower, from north to south.

03.08 Bridgehead relocates to ground floor lobby.

03.20 First Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG) meeting.

03.30 Flames continue to spread across the south and west elevations of the tower.

04.02 Fires on the south and west elevations start to converge at the top of the southern corner of the west face.

08.07 Elpidio Bonifacio, the last survivor to leave the tower, is evacuated.

Fires continue to burn in the building for the next 36 hours, while survivors gather in hastily established ‘rest centres’ and community buildings such as local churches, mosques and pubs. A lack of co-ordination leads to days of uncertainty over the whereabouts of survivors, and people are forced to hunt hospitals for their relatives. The provision of relief and accommodation is chaotic. Some residents of the estate surrounding the tower are forced to sleep rough.

15th June, a public inquiry is announced by Prime Minister Theresa May, saying: “Right now people want answers and it’s absolutely right and that’s why I am today ordering a full public inquiry into this disaster. We need to know what happened.”

Volunteers numbering over 600 - mainly members of the local community - gather at centres set up to contain, store and sort thousands of donated physical items such as clothing, toys and food. Over the next few weeks over 40,000 boxes (200 Tonnes) of goods are donated and sorted.

16 June, Theresa May makes second visit to the site, meeting some survivors on this occasion, and announces £5m fund for fire victims. The government orders social landlords to carry out an audit of their tower blocks – reporting on how many they own and details of any refurbishments. It is confirmed that aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding was used on Grenfell Tower.

17 June 2017, at a behind-closed-doors meeting at what was then the Department for Communities and Local Government, it is agreed that polyethylene-cored ACM cladding, the kind used on Grenfell, does not comply with Approved Document B – the official guide to building regulations. This claim is repeated by chancellor Philip Hammond the next day.

18 June, more aid measures announced. Government hands responsibility for survivor support from Kensington and Chelsea council to Grenfell Fire Response Team (GRT) led by a group of chief executives from councils across London.

19 June, national minute’s silence for the Grenfell Tower victims. The government orders social landlords to send in samples of ACM cladding on their tower blocks for testing. The first ACM panels are identified on towers in Barnet the next day.

22 June, After Theresa May apologises for a “failure of the state, local and national” in responding to the fire, Nicholas Holgate, chief executive of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, resigns. Camden Council reveals that it is urgently stripping cladding from five towers on the borough’s Chalcots Estate. A day later it is revealed that cladding from 11 tower blocks have so far failed tests.

23 June, Camden council order evacuation of Chalcots Estate, comprising of 5 blocks and 800 flats after it was revealed that it was covered in flammable cladding. Construction firm Saint Gobain announces it is ceasing to supply RS5000 for use in rainscreen cladding systems in buildings over 18 metres (59 ft) tall.

23 June, The first formal meeting of Grenfell United took place on Saturday 24 June 2017. The minutes read: “Residents are not present as individuals. They must organise and they must establish a structure.”

25th June, sixty towers from 25 local authority areas have now failed tests, accounting for 100% of the samples tested as the scale of the building safety crisis begins to become clear. A day later, the government convenes an independent expert panel to advise on fire safety, chaired by Sir Ken Knight.

28th June, with 120 cladding samples having failed tests, the National Housing Federation calls for a halt to the testing programme and a move to work to remediate the buildings. Retired judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick, appointed to chair the inquiry.

30 June, Robert Black, chief executive of Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), steps down, as does Nicholas Paget-Brown, then-leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

20 July, After Sajid Javid tells the House of Commons that no councils have yet asked for financial support for fire safety measures, Inside Housing identifies six that had in fact written to government requesting assistance. Mr Javid says he was not aware of them when he made his statement.

27 July, police say they have “reasonable grounds” to suspect the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation of corporate manslaughter.

28 July, the government announces an independent review of fire safety in high-rise buildings chaired by Dame Judith Hackitt and the first large-scale test result is revealed – a mock-up of the system used on Grenfell, which failed in seven minutes.

15 August, Theresa May announces the terms of reference of the inquiry: the cause and spread of the fire; the adequacy and enforcement of building regulations and fire protection measures; the actions of the council and KCTMO prior to the fire, and the responses of the London Fire Brigade, council and national government. Sir Martin Moore-Bick, the retired judge appointed to chair the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, sets out his terms of reference and promises an interim report on the causes of the fire by Easter 2018.

23 August, government announces that Lancaster Estate would pass from KCTMO to direct council control.

30 August, the Department for Communities and Local Government publish the terms of reference for the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, led by Senior Engineer and Civil Servant, Dame Judith Hackitt. It’s main aims are to: a) develop improved building regulations for the future, with a focus on residential high-rise blocks, and b) to provide reassurance to residents that their homes are safe.

27 August KCTMO’s contract to manage social housing in Kensington & Chelsea is terminated by the council.

1st September, the ACM testing programme concludes, and only three

combinations of ACM and insulation pass. The government confirms that all failed systems will need to be stripped from high rises and promises to commission testing on non-ACM cladding materials.

6 September, Sajid Javid, communities secretary at the time, reveals that out of 89 privately owned buildings that have had their cladding tested, 85 have failed tests.

13 September, A leaked letter reveals that the government has been refusing to fund work to install sprinklers in tower blocks, branding the work “additional, not essential”.

14 September, inquiry opens

19 September, Mr Javid announces that the government will publish a “wide-ranging” Social Housing Green Paper, aimed at reforming the sector to make it more accountable to residents.

13 October, in one of the first assessments of the cost of fire safety work, it is estimated that post-Grenfell works will cost councils £402m.

4 December, Mr Javid tells private building owners not to pass on costs to leaseholders and announces increased funding for the Leasehold Advisory Service.

12 December, ahead of the six-month anniversary, three survivors give an address in the House of Commons, the first public appearance by representatives of Grenfell United. More than 100 Grenfell survivors are still in temporary accommodation.

18 December, Dame Judith Hackitt unveils the conclusion of her interim report, describing the system of building regulation as “not fit for purpose”.

19 December, the first statistical release on dangerous cladding shows that 284 tower blocks have been identified. It says 26 have had cladding removed and only one has completed replacement.

22 December, Ms May rejects a request by survivors to have additional panel members to assist Sir Martin at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

2018

10 January, a mortgage lender refuses to lend on a building in Southend because of fire safety issues – the first evidence of what will become a huge crisis for the sector.

18 January, as leaseholders of Citiscape in Croydon are told they face a £2m bill for cladding removal works, warnings are issued that tens of thousands of other residents across the country will be in the same position.

20 February, with only three of 299 blocks with ‘Grenfell-style’ cladding to have completed remediation work, Ms May faces serious questions about the government’s lack of action in the House of Commons. A day later, rapper Stormzy attacks her response to Grenfell at the Brit Awards.

23 February, the government reveals that it plans to alter building guidance to formally include the use of ‘desktop studies’ (the term ‘desk study’ or ‘desktop study’ refers to a study that is carried out purely through research, rather than physical investigations, that is, it can be done sitting at a desk). The move sparks criticism from groups calling for an outright ban on combustible cladding.

15 March, the Metropolitan Police reveals that fire doors at Grenfell Tower failed to provide adequate resistance, permitting fire through after 15 minutes rather than the required 30.



2019

16 April, a leaked report prepared by the Building Research Establishment hammers the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower, including windows stuffed with combustible material and ineffective fire barriers as well as the dangerous cladding.

11 May, Prime Minister Ms. May U-turns on her refusal to allow extra panel members at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, announcing that two extra panel members will be added for the second phase of the inquiry. Inside Housing reveals that the Hackitt Review will not recommend a ban on dangerous cladding or desktop studies, despite huge pressure from expert groups, survivors and MPs to do so.

16 May, under mounting pressure from survivors for tougher action, Ms. May announces £400m to directly fund the removal of dangerous cladding for the social housing sector only. Removal work has completed on just seven buildings, with 317 identified.

17 May, The Hackitt Review is published, recommending against an outright ban on dangerous cladding. After survivors say they are “saddened and disappointed” by this omission, the government immediately U-turns, launching a consultation on a ban. The rest of the report recommends an overhaul of the regulation of tall buildings.

21 May, as phase one of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry opens, residents share emotional tributes to the victims of the fire.

14 June, thousands join a Silent March in Kensington to mark the one-year anniversary of the fire.

26 June, the first incident commander Michael Dowden is left emotional after tough questioning at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

3 July, leaseholders in a block in Manchester lose a tribunal and are ordered to pay £3m for the replacement of dangerous cladding.

14 August, The Social Housing Green Paper is published, but its proposals are widely condemned as too limited.

27 September, giving evidence to the inquiry, Dany Cotton, then-commissioner of the London Fire Brigade, sparks anger by saying she would change nothing about the fire service’s response and drawing an analogy with a space shuttle landing on the Shard.

30 September, the government announces their plan to ban all combustible cladding for all new schools, hospitals, care homes, student accommodation and residential buildings in England above 18m. The Fire Brigades Union respond that there should be an outright ban and that it apply to existing buildings.

3 October, the government goes ahead with its cladding ban, but limits its impact to tall buildings only – despite calls for it to apply to other properties such as care homes.

28 November, research estimates that a further 1,600 buildings have dangerous cladding materials on their walls.

1 December, the government publishes Advice Note 14, requiring building owners to confirm that there are no combustible materials on the walls of their properties, or to carry out a large-scale test showing that the materials they use comply.

7 December, new powers giving councils the ability to force the removal of dangerous cladding from private buildings are criticised as they contain no provision to prevent leaseholders from being forced to pay.

11 December, as the first phase of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry concludes, Sir Martin reveals that the second phase may not begin until early 2020.

14 December, as the 18-month anniversary of the fire arrives, there are calls for deadlines to be put on rehousing, with 54 families still without a permanent home.

10 January, figures show the remediation of buildings with Grenfell-style cladding stalling. Just 67 completions out of 437 identified towers have happened.

14 February, almost 18 months on from announcing plans to test a range of cladding materials, the government announces the materials it will test and says the programme will begin in March.

26 April, with private leaseholders facing huge bills for remediation, Inside Housing and several groups of leaseholders launch the End Our Cladding Scandal campaign.

9 May, as an open letter is published calling for government action to fund cladding removal in the private sector, the government gives in to pressure and announces a £200m fund to pay for it.

7 June, police announce that they have carried out 13 interviews under caution in relation to Grenfell.

10 June, a huge fire rips through timber cladding at Samuel Garside House in Barking. It later emerges that ‘Class D’ rated timber cladding had been used and that a fire risk assessment had warned of the issues.

13 June, ahead of the second anniversary, Inside Housing publishes letters sent pre-Grenfell to a series of housing ministers – including Gavin Barwell, at the time chief of staff to the prime minister – urging the government to toughen regulations on fire safety to protect those living in high rises.

21 June, Inside Housing research shows that there are still tens of thousands of non-compliant fire doors in use in social housing around the country that are yet to be replaced.

24 June, despite previously ignoring warnings that guidance did not cover balconies, the government publishes an advice note telling building owners to remove any combustible materials from them. It declines to offer funding.

26 July, a high-pressure laminate cladding system passes the official test under the government programme – but the test is criticised for using materials that are far less combustible than those on real-world buildings. The government advises the removal of any combinations that are more combustible.

9 August, a timber-framed care home in Crewe burns to the ground.

9 September, a timber-framed apartment block in south-west London burns to the ground.

12 September, residents warn that difficulty accessing the £200m fire safety fund is making it “feel like a PR stunt”, with forms required from all leaseholders before an application can be processed.

28 October, a leaked version of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry report is picked up by the national media, with a focus on the failures by the fire service.

30 October, the full Phase 1 Grenfell Tower Inquiry report is published, with strong criticism

of the adherence to the ‘stay put’ policy and a conclusion that the cladding did not meet building regulations and was the primary cause of the rapid external fire spread. It recommends that building owners should develop evacuation plans for blocks of flats.

16 November, with the crisis over stalled flat sales getting worse, industry figures warn that the market has come to a complete standstill as a result of government advice notes. An estimated 600,000 people are believed to be living in unsellable flats.



18 November, a fire seriously damages student accommodation in Bolton that is clad in high-pressure laminate panels.

22 November, leaseholder groups relaunch the End Our Cladding Scandal campaign for the general election, calling for a wider building safety fund and more proactive government action in identifying and remediating dangerous buildings.

3 December, Grenfell survivors write to the leaders of all major political parties calling for proactive action on cladding remediation and warning of a repeat disaster if action is not taken.

6 December, accused of “remarkable insensitivity” by the Chairman of the inquiry and after a meeting with London Mayor Sadiq Khan by bereaved relative of the victims, Dany Cotton, The London fire commissioner in charge of the response to the Grenfell Tower fire, resigns.

13 December, Labour’s Emma Dent Coad loses her Kensington seat after the Conservatives won back the constituency home to Grenfell Tower. The seat was returned to the Tories after the shock upset in 2017 when Emma Dent Coad secured the seat by just 20 votes - the smallest majority in England.

16 December, in a bid to unstick the sales market, industry bodies agree a new process to allow buildings to be sold, which involves a surveyor signing off the building as safe.

2020

20 January, the government announces that the threshold for the combustibles ban and sprinklers will be lowered to 11m and consolidates all its advice notes into a single document.

27 January, the second phase of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry opens with the revelation of a series of explosive emails revealing that several corporations involved in the tower’s refurbishment knew that the cladding posed a risk.

3 February, the start of evidence sessions at the inquiry are delayed as corporate witnesses seek immunity from prosecution based on their testimony.

25 February, the government belatedly fulfils its promise to name and shame building owners, listing five companies that have not yet put plans in place for cladding removal.

26 February, the Attorney General agrees to protect witnesses from self-discrimination after their lawyers warned that they might refuse to answer questions without such an assurance.

11 March, following continuing pressure from leaseholders, the government announces a £1bn fund for the removal of dangerous cladding of all types from private buildings.

17 March, the outbreak of coronavirus leads to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry being suspended.

30 March, the government publishes advice encouraging building owners not to suspend cladding removal work during the lockdown.

2 April, non-ACM testing is finally released, although it is criticised for not being comparable to ACM tests. The government claims that the “lower peak heat release” of non-ACM products confirm that they pose a lower risk.

June 14, the third anniversary of the fire. The past two anniversaries have seen crowds assemble for a silent walk but lockdown has prevented in-person gatherings from taking place in 2020. To observe the date Grenfell United, along with the organisers of Grenfell Silent Walk ask people to

‘Remember, Reflect and Unite’ and join them virtually for a day of remembrance.

July, resumption of inquiry with limited attendance and some witnesses appearing by video link.

November, decision to give some evidence by video link.

December, inquiry suspended due to positive Covid test.

2021

February, Inquiry resumes with video evidence. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea – the council that owned Grenfell Tower – apologised for putting profits before people’s safety. The leader of the council, Elizabeth Campbell, said: “Before 2017 the council did not find the right balance between financial benefits, and social benefits... We fell below the bar on consultation, transparency, scrutiny and policy... and for that we apologise.”

29 March, the Inquiry heard that the London Fire Brigade (LFB) warned Grenfell Tower landlords about dangerous cladding two months before the fire, but that the council had taken no action other than to forward the letter to its tenant management organisation, KCTMO, saying: “FYI”. Lawyers for the bereaved said in opening statements that “RBKC prioritised cost over safety” and the council displayed an “ethos of indifference or hostility”, to the safety of residents, particularly lacking in a duty of care for vulnerable and disabled people, often dismissing resident requests.

April, limited attendance hearings resume with much of April’s findings from the Inquiry focused upon concerns that Grenfell residents’ concerns were not listened to by the landlord and KCTMO in the months and years before the fire. Residents who raised fire safety concerns were labelled as “troublemakers”, while it was also revealed that the landlord blocked staff computers from accessing a residents’ blog which raised concerns over the building’s refurbishment work.

May, The Fire Safety Bill was passed as an Act of Parliament, becoming The Fire Safety Act 2021, designed to clarify who is accountable for reducing the risk of fires for multi-occupied residential buildings.

June, On the fourth anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Government was accused of playing “Russian roulette” with people’s lives by survivors, as they highlighted hundreds of thousands of high-rise homes that continue to face fire safety defects.

July, a court in the US ruled that US shareholders in the cladding firm, Arconic, can proceed with a lawsuit against the company after witnesses said

managers knew the cladding performed badly in fire safety tests, yet continued to be used on high-rise buildings. Their claim hinges on whether the company knew the cladding could be dangerous and should have warned investors of the risks involved in selling it – two anonymous former Arconic employees have said that managers did know the risks. The revelations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry have also been cited as evidence.

September, after a summer break, the Inquiry reopens and moves on to module 5, which specifically examines firefighting, where representatives from the London Fire Brigade and Fire Brigades Union are expected to attend. With COVID restrictions easing, the Inquiry is

now open for all to attend.

10 September, expert witness Barbara Lane gave evidence on the fire risk assessments carried out at Grenfell Tower. She described the fire risk assessor’s behaviour as ‘professionally reckless’ for signing off the building’s cladding as safe without evidence. She also deemed it ‘not acceptable’ that



residents with disabilities weren't identified.

17th September, “Truly a case of donkeys led by donkeys”, was how a lawyer for a group of the bereaved, survivors and residents described lead contractor Rydon, the firm of architects Studio E and specialist cladding contractor, Harley Facades. Adrian Williamson QC said that RBKC ‘failed at every stage of the building control process’

24th September, the inquiry heard new evidence about the management of the LFB and how it trained its staff ahead of the Grenfell Tower fire. A lawyer representing a group of the bereaved, survivors and residents said his clients did not want heroes in the LFB, “but well trained professionals working to a well-structured plan”.

October

November

December, In early December, Michael Mansfield QC, representing the bereaved and survivors, told the inquiry that evidence would show that “there was a deliberate policy by the government... to facilitate a hostile environment in which health and safety is diminished”. Mansfield claimed that the inquiry needed to cross-examine David Cameron in person because of his policy deregulation. Consecutive governments were also accused of “deliberately covering up” the dangers posed to combustible materials before the Grenfell Tower fire. The hearings adjourned for the Christmas period on 16th December.

As at 26 April 2022, the Inquiry has disclosed 20,752 documents in Phase 1 and 298,453 in Phase 2, making a total of 319,205.

I am grateful to the following sources:

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2022



MOYRA SAMUELS

**JUSTICE
4 GRENFELL**

Moyra Samuels

Moyra is an activist and teacher who has lived in North Kensington for over 40 years. She has participated in and organised hundreds of protests and campaigns. She is a co-founder of Justice4Grenfell, a community-led organisation which was set up a few days after the Grenfell Fire disaster. It is focused on the long-term goal of obtaining justice for the bereaved families, survivors, evacuated residents and the wider local community and it collaborates with representative organisations and individuals.

SM: I just wanted to start at the beginning and ask you about your involvement with activism and community justice, and how far back that goes. Had you always been an activist? Where did you get that spirit from?

MS: I was kind of a student activist back in South Africa where I was born – I say ‘kind of’ because it was dangerous; I lived partly in fear because they can just lock you up and throw the key away. I was on the student representative council at the University, I was at a white tribal college because we were all expected to go to our different tribal colleges if we wanted to go to university. Even though the white tribal college was in Durban, where I was living, I was expected to go to Cape Town because that’s where the university for ‘coloureds’ was. The language they spoke in Cape Town was Afrikaans, and although I was a fairly confident Afrikaans speaker I didn’t think I was I could do a degree in Afrikaans. I wanted to stay in Durban so I went to the university there and then in my first year it was discovered that the student president was a B.O.S spy (Bureau of State Security) the whole student body was in uproar and I thought this was such a liberty, given the fact that I had to beg I had to write letters I did all sorts to come to this university and then we have spies at this level spying on students, reporting to the state. So I got ‘*The Gees*’ as they say in South Africa – I got the spirit in me! And I thought – right I’m going to stand. The whole student council was disbanded and dissolved and there had to be new elections. So I stood and decided that my slogan was, in the words of some Rasta guy somewhere, ‘Wipe the sleep out of your eyes and vote for Moyra Samuels’ and I thought, is anybody going to take me seriously? I’m the only black person standing, anyway I got elected so now I became part of the student council however it was a white union, part of the National Union of Students, and of course the more radical were the medical students like Steve Biko in Durban who would never have anything to do with the white campus, that was the position of the black consciousness movement. So there was lots of stuff going on politically - I was a student activist and that was my experience, also my life experience you know, you just got used to being stopped by the police and questioned, being told you’re not allowed to get on the bus because you’re not white, can’t come in the restaurant because you’re not white, can’t go to the toilet cause it’s a white toilet. I developed a kind of deep sense of anger and frustration

I came here in 1979 my mom died in 1977 and I think I just wanted to be with my family; a wider family because the rest of my family had left South Africa in the 1960s, my father and siblings came

here to be with my Grandmother so I think I wanted to be here. I’d already spent a year teaching as I finished my degree, there were no jobs really for black people with degrees, I think the only two routes were teaching or some accounting degree - to go work in a bank, but I didn’t want that. So during my year of teaching I got into a lot of trouble teaching the wrong thing to students and getting pulled into the headmaster’s office, “I believe this is not on the curriculum”. It was very funny when I think of it on reflection; South Africa was just introducing television - it got television very late, I think that was the year that they introduced it, and so whoever was buying in the programmes just didn’t know what they were doing; there were random programmes that might be complete rubbish or they’d be Brecht one night! One night there was a debate, now at the time of course there would be one family who had a TV and everybody would be going, standing and watching and one night they had this debate on whether you should have sex before marriage and of course the students watched it. They came in to school the next day and I was their English teacher and I started my lesson but they’re just not settling, because they were having this discussion the whole way in to school. So I said what is going on? ‘Oh, miss, miss, did you see this programme!?’ They were getting quite heated and arguing the issues so I said, what we’re going to do is this: I’m going to teach you how to have a debate so we’ll have a motion for, and a motion against and I put the rules up and we had the debate, which was very good; quite civilised with very strong ideas one way or the other. The students were all very happy and they’re into their break but of course they were all chatting about it to the other students in the playground. After the break and in another class, the teacher hadn’t turned up as they were sick, so a cover teacher was coming in and the students are waiting and waiting for this teacher to turn up. So while they were waiting they thought they’d have the debate themselves and the next thing there were chairs flying across the classroom and the head came running and asked why are you having this debate? And of course the students say Miss Samuels had the debate, so then I’ve got summoned to the Headmasters office. South Africa’s curriculum was very strict and anal; at 10:00 o’clock every coloured student would be doing history across the whole country, not just the region. This is how authoritarian the Afrikaans Apartheid Government was you know, so of course I was completely off curriculum, so in the end I think I was far too student focused. You were given a cane and a register when you started, and I just put the cane in the cupboard. I thought I will never, ever hit a student, that’s just the most barbaric thing. In the end I thought I’m just going to get the sack if I carry on like this. I thought what do I do? I better come to the UK because I have nowhere else to go. So, that’s why I came here in 1979. The only thing I knew about the area of North Kensington was coming to carnival every year, but also I worked in Chelsea and lived in Earls Court. London’s just a whole number of villages isn’t it? Because I was living South in Crystal Palace before that so when I got here to the West I thought, ‘Oh this is all very different’

Can you describe your experience of the fire?

On the 13th June I was supply teaching and we all remember how hot it was, I had done a whole afternoon of PE with these children

running around and thinking to myself I'm a bit old for this now really. I came back home and my daughter who was five months pregnant had been housed by the Borough in their wisdom on the Isle of Dogs, had popped home because she wanted to go to the hairdresser here and she was going to stay overnight. My son was also staying with me because he was back from University so both children were living here. I went to bed because I was so tired from the PE but before I went to bed I spoke to Ed Daffarn (1) (a local activist and resident of the Tower, who lived on Floor 16) Ed and I were going to meet to discuss various housing campaign issues and also Westway23 (2) which we were both a part of. We were going to have a coffee and a catch up, then my son woke me up at about midnight saying 'Mum there's smoke from the balcony', we couldn't see where it was coming from, there's another block in the way, so you can't see (Grenfell Tower). So I said oh don't worry the fire brigade will sort it, and I went back to sleep. Then both my son and daughter got a lot of phone calls from their friends, they went out and both came back at about 1am. My daughter was hysterical and they were both shouting Grenfell's on fire! Grenfell's on fire! and I woke up and suddenly I think, "Ed!", oh my God! I threw clothes on and just ran out the flat and was there thinking, God I don't know if he's alive or dead, I was ringing him, and I stayed there 18 hours and didn't go to sleep. He rang me at about 4.30am saying 'I've made it out'. I was standing there watching the fire and I just wept. I think I wept for two weeks you know, I was permanently in sunglasses because every time I went out of my door I just started crying, the pain was palpable in the air. During that first day I was wandering around just trying to find out what was going on and Victoria Derbyshire was there on the street opposite by The Latymer Christian centre. A friend from one of the flats on the fourth floor of the Tower came along and said hello, and we were both crying. Victoria Derbyshire interviewed us both. I remember her saying 'Well, we think it might be a terrorist attack' and I said, don't be so bloody stupid woman, why would a terrorist bomb Grenfell? At that point everything was about terrorism, islamophobia. So I gave this interview and I can always remember the feeling of absolute cold rage...I was so angry I just said how absolutely fucking dare you do this...especially because we had been campaigning about the proposed gentrification of Silchester Estate and Grenfell Tower was not even on the radar. Yes there were issues about the refurbishment at Grenfell but certainly our focus in terms of activity had been Silchester, we just thought first of all you want to demolish and get rid of us, now you're burning us down! That evening I went to Acklam Village as there was a gathering there. I was so angry and beside myself that I said we've got to call a demo. There is a level of sexism amongst the more vocal men in this area, they just said, 'yes dear, yes dear', that kind of attitude. I didn't get any support from any of them, so I think right I'll wait till Ed comes because we all knew Ed was coming. He arrived and I said I'm calling a demo, in central London, is that okay? He said, 'yes, go for it' So, I turned to the men and said, 'See, see!' The next thing was "Hmm, how do you make one of those Facebook things, you know, when you call an event?" I'd never done anything on Facebook, I didn't know how to do it, but I managed it and called the demo. A day later I got a call from the police – confirming that it was me who had called a demonstration. I looked at my phone

and already 2'000 people had responded to the event! So, then it was all systems go, I had to do interviews for the BBC, explain why we were calling the demo, do all the liaison with the police, get all the stewarding together. I saw a picture of that first demo the other day, there were lots of different Justice for Grenfell type banners before the official 'J4G'.

“What Grenfell did was show us that we had to really step onto the national stage. Whether we liked it or not, whether we were up to it or not”

The demo went from the BBC down Oxford Street, however there was another Kensington demo organised by the youth and it met ours at Notting Hill. I left and went home – I couldn't walk anymore – the Youth demo went down into Kensington and that was when Ishmahil Blagrove (3) and Niles Hailstones (4) had to stop them trying to mash up the Town Hall, that's an infamous event. I remember coming back, I don't know if it's the same day or the day after, and here in the car park they had put up a stage and Ishmahil was speaking along with others. I was standing back watching and Ishmahil turns to me and says, 'I need you up here on the stage, come up now'. So I've got up on the stage and it's like every bit of bitterness, rage, anger and humiliation that you feel on behalf of your community just came out. When I finished speaking Ishmahil said, 'I need you to join Justice4Grenfell'. But in the mean time I'd been doing what everyone else had been, you're just running around trying to find things out, the survivors were trying to find out what's going on at the Red Cross, directing people doing donations, what we all did in those days after the fire. Then I joined up with Ishmahil and Yvette Williams (5) and we had a meeting the week before the people's assembly demo on the Saturday. I was chairing the meeting but lost control of it, we had Natasha Elcock (6) who was now the chair of Grenfell United (7) sitting there looking absolutely shell-shocked as we had all these speakers come up, and she stood and said 'Who on earth are you, why haven't you got a survivor speaking?' But of course the last thing we would have done two days after the fire was ask a survivor to come and speak. There were the 'Man Dem' snatching the microphone; shouting and screaming. I mean we had all the days and days of meetings with 'Gold Command' (8) in the local Methodist Church, after which I used to come out with my head just reverberating, the pain, we'd be

crying, angry, feeling every single emotion in those meetings. I know we had to do it but as I reflect on it now I remember the sheer level of emotional turmoil in that room, with the bereaved, the survivors, crying and shouting and the gaslighting from the local authority and Public Health England and the government and us having to ask the questions you know all the time being gaslighted. It was a maelstrom you know, there was not a single issue that we didn't have to tackle head on. All in the face of a sheer lack of support from the local authority. I remember after the demo a friend of mine who used to work for Hammersmith Council, a senior administrator who organised all the council meetings, was driving me from somewhere and it was the day of the first council meeting scheduled to be at Kensington Town Hall. We had heard they had refused to have any journalists or any public there, it was to be a private meeting and she said to me no, according to the law it's a public meeting open to everyone, you can't just change the law, and I thought I don't know, this is Kensington and Chelsea – they can do whatever they want- they've been doing whatever they want all this time! But by now the barred journalists had challenged, stating that the meeting should be a public one and a decision was made by the High Court but when I got there they wouldn't let me in and I remember turning around and seeing 18 cameras at my face! I spoke and I felt consumed by rage – it was like it took over my whole body! You know, all of us were local people engaged in activism, very much community activists, what Grenfell did was show us that we had to really step onto the national stage. Whether we liked it or not, whether we were up to it or not. You just had to step up no questions asked you just had to do it.

Could you tell me about how the Silent Walk came about?

After the youth tried to destroy Kensington Town Hall Ishmahil's position was that the state are looking for a reason to arrest a load of black people so they can write the narrative that we are just a bunch of hooligans. So what we're going to do is we're going to have a silent walk so then they've got nothing to say, it was a tactic. I think it was Ishmahil's way of protecting a lot of very angry young black youth. He always said was that it was going to be just a one-off, the next month there were about 30 of us. That walk didn't really take off as much, the first one was bigger than the second, Ishmahil said he just wanted to calm everyone down, and then it took a life of its own. Zeyad Cred a local resident was asked by Justice4Grenfell if he could manage the walks and in time Grenfell United came to him saying give us the walk (to manage). We basically said 'feel free', it's a fucking walk, you think you're taking the family silver? So then Zeyad became part of Grenfell United and they took over the walk. But it's really important to get this right historically, the walk was started by Justice 4 Grenfell not Grenfell United. We thought if they want to do it at a local level we wanted to spread it further around the UK so in 2018 we had sixteen silent walks across the country which we thought was a massive achievement, everybody seemed to be looking inwards and we thought we need to go out. I'm a member of Socialist Workers Party and I felt we needed the Trade Unions on our side so after I joined Justice4Grenfell the first person I called was Matt Wrack (9) general secretary of The Fire Brigades Union and he said absolutely...no problem. I remember Matt speaking at the Home Office or somewhere and he was so tearful and upset. I

went around the country speaking to Trade Unions asking for their support. I recruited Tasha Brady who was part of Justice 4 Grenfell because we needed somebody to do our social media. We organised a coach to go up to the protest outside the Tory Party conference in Manchester, there must have been about 20 people on this big coach and we arrived and unfurled the banner and the whole of the crowd rose saying 'Yes!'. We thought, Wow! There's so much support for us, I think that people recognised our pain and I think that event really gave people an understanding that we need to keep going out. Tasha and I went to Ireland – she was like 'Whoa the Irish can speak!' I was on the platform with Eamonn McCann (10) and Paddy from the Birmingham 6 and these people don't mess around, they have a serious history. Some women came up to speak and they were so articulate, so impressive! We went to Ireland, Scotland, Liverpool, Manchester, all sorts of different places to take the message and asked for support. It was my job to take the campaign to Trade Union conferences I spoke at Unison, CWU, FBU. The FBU one, oh my God, to my dying day I will remember that conference; standing on stage with Matt Wrack on the main platform with the whole room wearing T-shirts saying 'Justice4Grenfell'. There was a whole section on Grenfell in the afternoon and one of the control officers (from the night of the fire) came up and spoke about the situation; where they had taken a real beating from various people because they (the fire control room operators) were telling people to 'Stay Put', which was the policy at the time. She spoke about that night and explained the situation and she put forward a motion and then she just burst into tears. She cried, "I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, its not my fault" and I tell you I could see these beefy firefighters crying, I feel emotional just talking about it now. We went out to drink with those huge firefighters with them just weeping, weeping, saying it was the most traumatic thing that they've been through and how so many of them couldn't go back to the frontline; they had to be put on office duties because they just couldn't do it, they literally were traumatised. It was tough for them because they were also taking a beating from the bereaved at the same time.

I was kind of trying to straddle the two, to hear what the bereaved needed to say, to understand their pain, to understand that they may think the firefighters should have done something different; told people to get out earlier, but at the same time having to make the argument that the building was a death trap before the firefighters even set foot in it and they didn't put the right cladding on the bloody building! But you can't have that, that's too rational a discussion to have at that time. Everybody was so emotionally ripped apart and they wanted somebody to blame and the firefighters seemed a safe place to put the blame. I felt bad for them; the media, the inquiry, everyone else were giving them a kicking. It was tough but they were amazing, they came into the community - Matt Wrack had meetings with the bereaved and the survivors to encourage them to ask any questions they wanted an answer to. The thing is everybody thinks they know everything about everything, especially this community, sometimes I think this community is the most opinionated community I've known, and sometimes the most ignorant. My partner was a paramedic when I met him and there are protocols of how you must work, just as there is a protocol for firefighters. They cant just think, 'I'm going to go off the map here'. Look what happened to David

Badillo (11) when he did that.

Grenfell ripped us all apart, everybody who was involved, it impacted heavily on our personal lives and our professional lives. There were accusations that we were doing a PR exercise for the firefighters and I had to have the argument with bereaved and survivors to say there's a difference between the Fire Brigades Union and the London Fire Service, they are two different bodies but nobody could see the wood for the trees. So yes it did become quite tricky. I think Grenfell United, (and I'm being really honest when I say this and would only tell you things I would say to them) lacked the experience of campaigning, why would we have expected them to? They were survivors and bereaved, no one expected them to be. Ed Daffarn was an experienced campaigner but he was traumatised. With Grenfell United it became, "Its our pain, its our experience, we lost our homes and you're not telling us what to do", they didn't seem to have the ability to say well actually you've got distance and your distance lends you a view and a different perspective. I said to them in one meeting (and I know this is over-exaggerating the nature of this, but...) it's like the relationship between the ANC and the South African Communist Party, where the Communist Party were the battering ram of the ANC, they could call on the troops and they were the great fear of the white regime. I said 'just use us', use Justice4Grenfell however you want, for whatever you want, if you feel you can't say something we will say it. But it became, 'it's all about us; we will do it for ourselves', and the problem is they spent too much time in the offices of Theresa May and Nick Hurd, Brokenshire, Raab, Sajid Javid and all those clowns. I remember Joe Delaney (12) said you've had more bloody housing ministers then we've had implementations of the recommendations!

What do you think about the process of the Inquiry?

First of all we, and when I say 'we', I mean the members of the Justice4Grenfell campaign, feel it is very clear that Inquiries are created to kick the issues into the long grass, we see this from Aberfan to Hillsborough. We had no faith in the Inquiry, you know what they say, 'you trade a truth for justice', I could have told you from the get-go who was involved and where the fault lay, I don't need an inquiry for that. But we've got the Inquiry and its dragging on, we've obviously had Covid which didn't help matters. The Inquiry spent its opening months looking at the events of the night, where in my opinion they should have looked at what led up to the fire and the aftermath first, followed by what happened on the night. It was convenient because of course you put the firefighters in the frame first and that's what stuck in people heads. This is all political, the ministers were called to the Inquiry and they were allocated five days on the stand. You've got Eric Pickles (13) who just doesn't know which way is up, he has his junior ministers brief him because he's so busy eating puddings, it was beneath him you know. You had Barwell and the others, they all of them combined had five days when the firefighters were in that stand for weeks on end. That tells you really about the balance and the way that they want us to perceive this issue, because we all know the implications of the fire at Grenfell is that it has opened up the curtain to the absolute corruption in the construction industry and its develop-

ers and the fact that the developers are huge donators to the Tory Party and the regulations were made to suit their mates. When you see the BBA (British Board of Agreement) who are supposed to be the body that test materials not disclosing that (Aluminium Polyethelene Panels) were so dangerous the test was shut down as it all went up in flames in seconds - that Brian Martin (14) didn't clarify what was meant by 'filler material'. This is a prime example of 'Smoke and Mirrors' tactics, you just think, 'Whoa, if anybody wants to see how the ruling class operate, here is an example' I think there's been some brilliant reporting on this, people like Peter Apps (15) from Inside Housing - his consistency and clarity in unpicking and peeling it open for everyone to see. We still have 1500 places covered in cladding, no fire breaks, poor insulation, one staircase and they are carrying on, the developers are carrying on; designing these dangerous buildings. People having to challenge the design of a block in East Action, thirty storeys with one staircase, and you think: have they learned nothing from Grenfell? So this really has laid bare the nature of housing in this country, the impact of the financialisation of housing, that for so long we've been talking about the 'housing market', its not a fucking market! Everyone needs somewhere to live, why is it a market? But this goes to the heart of what Grenfell was about. Cost cutting, money grabbing and corporate greed, its all there to see.

What do you see as the legacy of Grenfell?

Well I think the legacy is manifold. What worries me is that there is no sense of justice being done, we as a community need to heal because we were already a damaged community before Grenfell. We do need some sense of justice and for some people that means that someone has to go down, someone has to go down for something related to Grenfell, before people can feel the 72 people didn't die in vain. There are those issues of what justice actually means but also the legacy for the next generation; what they inherit in terms of going forward, what's come out of all this pain? Is there something positive that we can talk about? Can the next generation get a sense of their own power? If so, there needs to be a change, more young people sitting at the table and decision-making. Basically for so many decades the Council ignored our voices - you know we're just the bloody village down the road, so there's the need to work in a different way and it's going to be a challenge because they are hoping Grenfell will go away, and they can go back to business as usual. So those issues are part of an ongoing fight but there is also the overall key issue of housing, we are now after Grenfell part of a national picture, with a better understanding of a crisis in housing, because we live in the wealthiest Borough in Europe and there is such a divide and a struggle for homes. I think the future has got to be about starting to shape what we want to see North Kensington look like; what housing provision should there be, thinking of the environmental impact, thinking of retrofitting existing stock rather than building new thirty-five storey blocks. I think all these issues will become key and if we can start shaping that and stop some of the worst excesses of the Tories, then that would be something positive we've done. Other than that...off with their heads!

Notes:

(1) **Ed Daffarn** escaped from his flat on the 16th floor eight months after warning on his blog of the risk of a “serious fire in a tower block”. He had raised the need for an evacuation plan, problems with a faulty fire door and changes to floor numbers ordered in the refurbishment, all of which the inquiry has already found led to increased loss of life. However, he said he had been “stigmatised as a troublemaker”.

(2) **Westway23** community protest group was born as a consequence of the Trust’s dubious ‘Destination Westway’ strategy. Many members of the local community were unhappy with the decisions being made to satisfy that strategy. Through a period of open meetings, discussion and in-depth research, it was concluded that now was the time to take a closer and sustained look at the Trust and the twenty-three acres of community land.

(3) **Ishmahil Blagrove** is an activist writer and film-maker. He is the author of *Carnival — A Photographic and Testimonial History of the Notting Hill Carnival*

(4) **Niles Hailstones** is a local musician, community activist and educator

(5) **Yvette Williams MBE** is a lead campaigner on the Justice 4 Grenfell campaign. She has lived in North Kensington for over 30 years she previously worked with the Mangrove Community Association and has served tenure as a Trustee for the Tabernacle Community Centre and the Pepper Pot Club. She is also a founding member of operation black vote – a national campaign encouraging BME communities to engage in the democratic process to get their voices heard and has worked with a number of campaigns including those for Stephen Lawrence and Frank Critchlow. Yvette has a professional background working in Education and Criminal Justice. Both Yvette and her daughter witnessed the fire at Grenfell Tower; after being alerted by a family friend who was evacuated from one of the walkways.

(6) **Natasha Elcock** was a resident of Grenfell Tower and survived the fire along with her daughter on 14 June 2017. She is Chair of the bereaved families and survivors group Grenfell United

(7) **Grenfell United** are a group of survivors and bereaved families who formed in the days following the fire and came together to demand justice and change in memory of 72 families and neighbours who died. They continue to fight for everyone to be safe in their homes and for justice for their loved ones

(8) **Gold Command**, the Government Grenfell Response team

(9) **Matt Wrack** (Matthew D. Wrack) (born 23 May 1962) is a British trade unionist and former firefighter. He was elected General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in May 2005.

(10) **Eamonn McCann** is a People Before Profit politician, journalist, political activist, and former councillor from Derry, Northern Ireland. In the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly election, he was

elected as an MLA for the Foyle constituency. He served for nearly nine months before losing his seat in 2017.

(11) **David Badillo** has served at North Kensington fire station for 20 years and was one of the first firefighters to enter the tower. He attempted to save a resident from the 20th floor of the building not knowing that other residents were trapped inside the neighbouring flat

(12) **Joe Delaney** – resident of Lancaster West estate and representative on the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee

(13) **Eric Pickles**, former Conservative cabinet minister, complained to the Inquiry that he had an “extremely busy day” and so the inquiry should ‘use its time wisely’ while being questioned over the Grenfell Tower fire – he then got the death toll wrong.

(14) **Brian Martin** the civil servant previously responsible for building regulations and guidance on fire safety, had been asked to publish a frequently asked question (FAQ) clarifying that combustible aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding should not be used on tall buildings following an industry summit in July 2014. Mr Martin told the inquiry that producing such an FAQ would not have been “unreasonable... or disproportionately difficult”. But he said he “forgot” because he was “busy on other things”.

(15) **Peter Apps** is Deputy editor of Inside Housing which publishes news, analysis, and comment about the social housing sector in the UK

Interview by Steve Mepsted. May 2022



THE COMPANIES

a 'merry-go-round of buck-passing'

Arconic, are a large US conglomerate previously called Alcoa, whose French subsidiary made the ACM panels and designed the PE cladding with a flammable Polyethelene (PE) core used on the tower. Arconic was warned a decade before the fire that the cladding had the same 'fuel power' as a 19'000 litre truck of oil and released lethal toxic smoke. The company took no action. A 2004 fire test had to be stopped after 850 seconds because it was emitting too much heat. Arconic has now stopped selling the PE panels.

Celotex, manufactured and sold RS5000 insulation made with highly flammable polyisocyanurate (PIR) fitted between the ACM panels. However the Celotex insulation failed safety tests. The Inquiry heard that like those tests done on Arconics ACM panels - they were rigged with magnesium oxide boards hidden to strengthen the panels. Jonathon Roper, a young Celotex manager, admitted he, 'went along with a lot of actions at Celotex that were completely unethical'. Celotex withdrew RS5000 insulation foam from the market nine days after the fire.

Rydon, a Sussex-based company was the main contractor on the £10m refurbishment of Grenfell Tower, completed in 2016. It also delegated responsibilities to Studio E and Harley (now Harley Facades) saying these two companies were contractually responsible for ensuring products were compliant with building regulations. It emerged during the inquiry that Mark Dixon, a former manager of Rydon, was hired to install Rockwool non-combustible insulation fibre on the Tower. Dixon's company **SD Plastering** instead installed combustible foam board made by Celotex. He (Dixon) said the work was giving him a 'headache', adding, "I need to find ways of making it quicker and easier". Simon Lawrence, Rydon's contracts manager said, "We knew and trusted Dixon well"

Studio E, were the architects who oversaw the refurbishment of the building. They had no previous experience in working with cladding, also none in the refurbishment of a tower block. In another round of 'buck-passing', Studio E witnesses said the building regulations were not fit for purpose, that it was Harley who was responsible for the cladding façade, and that it was up to Rydon to decide whether or not cladding materials were suitable for the Tower. It said that materials manufacturers had provided safety testing data that 'misled designers'. Studio E went into liquidation in 2020.

The British Board of Agreement, the BBA provides services and certificates that help clients create accountability and mitigate risk. It wrongly issued a certificate assuring that Arconic's panels were safe. The inquiry heard that Arconic had threatened to 'stop all dealings with the BBA unless a satisfactory solution was found'. The BBA has changed its procedures and now suspends the issue of certificates when a company has declined to respond to its questions

The Tenants Management Organisation (TMO), was set up as a devolved body - to operate at arms length from the Borough in managing housing. It was responsible for commissioning the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. Robert Black, then CEO of the TMO admitted keeping his board in the dark regarding fire brigade warnings of failures in fire safety at the Tower. Edward Daffarn, a sixteenth floor resident of the Tower wrote in a now infamous blog post in November 2016 that, "Only an incident that results in a serious loss of life...will shine a light on the practices that characterise the malign governance of this non-functioning organisation" Black responded, telling a colleague, "We should do nothing".

Artelia UK, are a French owned company who were originally hired by RBKC/KCTMO to consult on the management of the Grenfell Tower refurbishment project. It stressed that (Architects) Studio E were the lead consultant, and that it (Artelia) was not responsible for design matters or the materials used in the Grenfell Tower refurbishment

Kingspan, supplied insulation foam to the building industry, under test conditions the K15 foam being sold turned into a 'raging inferno'. The results of the tests were kept secret. On being warned that the K15 foam could fuel a fire, one Kingspan executive responded, "They can go f**k themselves". After further complaints that Kingspan had not substantiated on what basis its product was suitable for buildings of 18m and above, Philip Heath, the company's Technical Manager told a colleague that the complainants, "are getting me confused with someone who gives a dam" (sic). Kingspan's founder and his son sold millions of pounds of company shares after the fire and before the inquiry.

Harley Curtain Wall (later Harley Façades), secured a 2.6m contract to install the cladding (supplied by Arconic) on the Tower. In its defence it argued that Arconic did not say its ACM panels were unsuitable for tower blocks in Britain. Harley stated that they were chiefly concerned with the 'aesthetics' of the panels. Harley went on to say that it was Studio E's responsibility to ensure that the façades complied with building regulations. Harley said they were not aware of fires abroad involving ACM panels, or that the cavity barriers around the Tower's windows were 'completely ineffective' and badly installed. They admitted their own inspections (of the cavity barrier installation) were 'ad hoc'.

Exova, drew up an initial fire safety report on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment but they were not consulted about the type of cladding so this was not included in their report. Although Exova were not asked to continue working on the Grenfell Tower project the Inquiry heard that a senior consultant knew that combustible cladding should not be used in high rise buildings and did not pass the warning on, stating he was not asked about it. Arconic, Celotex and Kingspan have denied cheating the market.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), admitted failures on the part of its building control department. Rock Feilding-Mellen, then the cabinet minister responsible for housing, was informed of the plan to save money by swapping zinc panels for cheaper ACM panels in 2014. According to statements he told police he only knew about the plan after the fire. Feilding-Mellen resigned a fortnight after the fire. Nicholas Paget-Brown said that he believed fire safety strategies were being 'taken care of' because of the presence of a fire safety officer on the team. After a report commissioned by the council in 2009 concluded that Grenfell Tower was a 'blight' on the area, Rock Feilding-Melling questioned 'the sense' in refurbishing the Tower. Paget-Brown also considered demolishing and rebuilding the council estate which included Grenfell Tower. Paget-Brown, resigned at the end of June 2017 saying he accepts a "share of responsibility" for the "perceived failings". In January 2020, an apology was delivered to the Inquiry by James Maxwell Scott QC, RBKC counsel, "The council has identified a number of failings in the way its building control services processed and considered the application for building control approval during the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. On behalf of the council, it apologises unreservedly for those failings. Grenfell Tower is a tragedy which should never have happened. This council could have done and should have done more to stop it happening." Grenfell United responded, "There is no confession here, barely any honesty and certainly no true remorse."



The names of the corporations, companies and council organisations involved in the doomed refurbishment of Grenfell Tower represented here in the colours of the cladding that ere available on their websites. As witnesses at the first phase of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, they were accused of a “*merry-go-round of buck passing*” by Richard Millett QC, leading council to the Inquiry. He said that the other corporate participants and management company Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) were engaging in an effort to shift the blame. “One finds within these detailed and carefully crafted statements no trace of any acceptance whatsoever of responsibility for what happened at Grenfell Tower,” he said. “Any member of the public would be forced to conclude that everybody involved in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower did what they were supposed to do and nobody made any serious or causative mistakes.”



'72 memorial Candles found discarded at the foot of the Tower'. 2019

THE SILENT WALK

“The Silent Walk has kept us peaceful. Its a time for gathering, a fixed date in the calendar where everybody knows we’ll come together”

Zeyed Cred

In the early hours of 14th June 2017, I began to receive text messages on my phone, there were reports of a fire near me. I made my way to the bathroom window but could not see any building – just a thick column of foul billowing smoke, shifting slowly side to side in the dark air. I went instead to the front room and opened the window. What I saw will stay with me forever: Grenfell Tower – three blocks down – seemed to have leapt forwards, alive burning and pungent – it felt like I could reach out my hand and touch it. The air was full of distant sirens and the chugging of helicopters. Everything had changed in a moment.

In the immediate and ongoing aftermath of that event, the dignified activism demonstrated by the local community has kept this issue in the public realm, alive where many would rather it were forgotten. People are (still) frustrated and angry that such a preventable tragedy could happen.

The tower now stands as a brutal symbol; wrapped in white plastic and starkly visible from all around the area, it waits along with the survivors, relatives, friends, families and the wider community, for the outcomes of the Grenfell Tower inquiry. We are approaching the 5th Anniversary of the fire and it will likely be late in 2023 before the report from the 2nd phase of the inquiry is published. Five years has passed and no one has yet been held accountable.

The Grenfell Tower fire broke out at the 24-storey Grenfell Tower block of public housing flats in North Kensington in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, West London. It is estimated it caused 72 deaths and over 70 injuries. Occupants of 23 of the 129 flats died. An estimated 223 people escaped. Inquests for 70 victims were opened and adjourned at Westminster Coroner’s Court.

Police and fire services believe the fire started accidentally in a fridge-freezer on the fourth floor. The rapid growth of the fire is thought to have been accelerated by the building’s exterior cladding, which is of a common type in widespread use. An independent review of building regulations and fire safety is in progress. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry held its first hearing on 14 September 2017, and evidential hearings started in October of that year.

The collective trauma and dignified activism among some of the most economically deprived people living in one of the wealthiest London Boroughs; has kept this issue alive, people are frustrated and angry that such a preventable tragedy could happen. The tower now stands as a brutal symbol; clad in white plastic and highly visible from all around the area it waits along with the survivors, relatives, friends, families and the wider community for the outcomes of the Grenfell Tower inquiry, the second phase of which was halted because of coronavirus restrictions. This exhibition and publication marks the 5th Anniversary of the tragedy. It comes at a time when the broken promises of the government means that 700’000 people are still living in tower blocks clad in ACM panelling.



'Silent Walk'. 2019



The Inquiry Facts and Figures, As at 26 April 2022, the Inquiry has disclosed 20,752 documents in Phase 1 and 298,453 in Phase 2, making a total of 319,205.

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DISCOUNT

10 000 000 - 300 000 = 72 14 06 2017

Fathia Ali Ahmed Alsanousi

77 years old
Sudanese

Esra Ibrahim

33 years old
Sudanese

Fethia Hassan

Five years old
British

Hania Hassan

Three years old
British

Mohamed Amied Neda

57 years old
Afghan

Raymond Bernard

63 years old

Rania Ibrahim

31 years old
Egyptian

Hesham Rahman

57 years old
Egyptian

Gloria Trevisan

26 years old
Italian

Marco Gottardi

27 years old
Italian

Anthony Disson

65 years old
British

Mariem Elgawahry

27 years old
British

Yaqub Hashim

Six years old
British

Hashim Kedir

44 years old
Ethiopian

Nura Jamal

35 years old
Ethiopian

Eslah Elgawahry

64 years old
Egyptian

Sirria Choucair

60 years old
Lebanese

Yahya Hashim

13 years old
British

Nadia Choucair

33 years old
Lebanese

Bassem Choucair

40 years old
Lebanese

Fatima Choucair

11 years old
British

Mierna Choucair

13 years old
British

Zainab Choucair

Three years old
British

Firdaws Hashim

12 years old
British

Mehdi El Wahabi

Eight years old
British

Yasin El Wahabi

20 years old
British

Logan Gomes

0 years old
British

Faouzia El Wahabi

42 years old
Moroccan

Abdulaziz El Wahabi

52 years old
Moroccan

Ligaya Moore

78 years old
Filipino

Nur Huda El Wahabi

15 years old
British

Leena Belkadi

Six months old
British

Jessica Urbano Ramirez

12 years old
British

Farah Hamdan

31 years old
British-Moroccan

Omar Belkadi

32 years old
British-Moroccan

Alexandra Atala

40 years old
British

Mary Mendy

52 years old
The Gambia

Malak Belkadi

Eight years old
British

Victoria King

71 years old
British

Khadija Saye

24 years old
British

Amal Ahmedin

35 years old
Eritrean

Maria del Pilar Burton

74 years old
Spanish

Amaya Tuccu-Ahmedin

Three years old
British

Sakineh Afrasiabi

65 years old
Iranian

Vincent Chiejina

60 years old
Unknown

Isaac Paulos

Five years old
British

Hamid Kani

61 years old
Iranian

Berkti Haftom

29 years old
Eritrean

Biruk Haftom

12 years old
British

Komru Miah

82 years old
Bangladeshi

Mohammed Hamid

27 years old
British-Bangladeshi

Rabia Begum

65 years old
Bangladeshi

Husna Begum

22 years old
British-Bangladeshi

Mohammed Hanif

26 years old
British-Bangladeshi

Khadija Khalloufi

52 years old
Moroccan

Deborah Lamprell

45 years old
British

Marjorie Vital

68 years old
Dominican

Ernie Vital

50 years old
British

Sheila

84 years old
British

Joseph Daniels

69 years old
Indian

Steven Power

63 years old
British

Denis Murphy

56 years old
Irish

Zainab Deen

32 years old
Sierra Leonean

Mohammed al-Haj Ali

23 years old
Syrian

Jeremiah Deen

Two years old
British

Abdeslam Sebbar

77 years old
Moroccan

Ali Yawar Jafari

82 years old
Afghan

Gary Maunders

57 years old
British

Abufiras Ibrahim

39 years old
Sudanese

Mohamednur "Mo" Tuccu

44 years old
Eritrean

Fatemeh Afrasiabi

59 years old
Iranian

Amna Mahmud Idris

27 years old
Eritrean

In memory of the 72 people who lost their lives.

This paper is free - please take one and pass it on to someone else.

Should you wish you can make a donation to one of the following organisations who would be grateful for your help, thank you.

Grenfell United

Justice4Grenfell

List of websites and community organisations

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