

A CAMPAIGN FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

HOLDING GOVERNMENTS TO ACCOUNT



The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards the City by Canaletto.

Courtesy of the Royal Collection

This early view of St. Paul's looking along the Thames towards the City, consisted in those days of a beautiful low skyline with interrupting towers and spires with the dome of St. Paul's standing as a magnificent centerpiece; a view incidentally that remained more or less intact up until the early 1960s. And so let's go through the history and see how we arrived at what we have today.

It all really began with Winston Churchill when he decided to bomb the hell out of Berlin and in retaliation for that Hitler then bombed Central London, destroying residential areas and the mass killing of civilians on both sides, I'm not so sure as it wouldn't 've counted as war crimes these days. After that came Clement Attlee's post-war slum clearance programme, these 'slums' were in fact long established and tight-knit communities and were never were as bad as they were portrayed. With some albeit much needed renovation and sanitation they could've been made into not only habitable but highly sort after dwellings. Next came Harold MacMillan, the cold blooded serial killer, when he wasn't gunning down innocent life-forms on vacation, he too was busy chipping away at our heritage. Then there was Wilson, he destroyed much of our old building stock some thirty years before that thug Prescott got his clumsy great hands on things. Ken Livingston and the GLC., also destroyed their fair share of heritage. The uncaring Thatcher years followed by the even less caring Blair ones, and finally Cameron, who, like all of his predecessors, alternates from one crisis to the next.

Over the decades this arrogance assumed by governments, architects and developers has allowed them some God-given privilege to force whatever they like down everyone's throats. Whatever they wanted to throw up then up it went, from bland housing developments on the outskirts towns to the hellish in your face sky-rises of the inner-cities. We have quite simply not had a single government that has done the right thing. Thatcher, in her wisdom, introduced VAT. on all renovation work and that continues today to threaten many of our existing buildings. And what about those hideous new pavements, brought in by the Blair government, we now have to trundle about on. We once had respectable enough albeit concrete paving-slabs adorning our streets and now we've got these insipid little grey things instead. And now there's interest-free mortgages for all new-build properties brought in by Osborne, creating a housing bubble and threatening further the older housing stocks.

With politicians doing their level best to destroy everything in sight it's hardly surprising we've ended up with the pile of trash we're all familiar with today. None of this was inevitable either, in cities like Paris, Rome, Florence, Vienna and Budapest etc., etc., they all had very similar looking townscapes as the one above, the difference being they've still got theirs whereas we don't.



Unrecognisable, the above view as it is today

To be continued...