

So, the city's white-castled playground is gone, to return in perhaps another eighteen years when next winter encamps in the capital. While it lasted, the place was different and it's not difficult to see why. For Beauty is transformative.

Snowplay

Cian O'Neill reports on a brief snowy respite from the chill winds of inequality and recession.

► Manhattanites refer to commuters who use some of the 2,000 bridges and the tunnels that connect the city to the mainland or Long Island as 'tunnel people', a term which smacks of a very un-American snobbery as befits that most European of US cities. It is so expensive to live on Manhattan that residents are on average much higher wage-earners than those found in outlying districts such as Queen's and few Upper-East Siders ever use the city subway system. Generally speaking, those who can afford to avoid going underground do so. Yet that island's dimensions mean that it can be traversed by a yellow cab fairly painlessly, whereas in contrast, London's former city gates and walls stand adrift in a sprawling morass that renders road-journeying arduous. So the 'tube' is the quickest way around.

Famously unplanned, London is therefore a more superficially 'democratic' city than NYC in that the lines, such as those between rich Manhattan and poor New Jersey, aren't as clear. Class abrades class. Western tracts of London's underground railway are sufficiently less busy than those in the poor East to make clear to all but the most unsubtle dunce that how folk travel still bespeaks their means to a degree, yes, but still a lot of people travel almost exclusively underground here and consequently very many Londoners, regardless of class, spend markedly little time out of doors. This means that aside from the occasional line-closure sparked by a leaf being observed looking suspicious around the mouth of Stockwell station, the weather doesn't seem to have any bearing on daily life.

Then, every once in a long while, everything gets preposterously fluffy and white and the gods tempt men out of doors to play as children in the streets. Many will take up any

opportunity at all to 'bunk off' work gleefully. But even for the churl, a heavy mantle of snow lain across high-rise rooftops has the same emotional effect as a white fur draped across a femme fatale's shoulders. You know that what's under there is uncertain good; but it looks pretty appealing and makes one smile. Everyone was out building their own snowwomen and men – even Lily Allen, that mockney popstar possessed of the physiognomy and etiquette of a Pug, was mixing it up with the plebeians in Primrose Hill Park. At least she was, until a bunch of aesthetic youths mobbed her with snowballs and the police were called. Boris skipped another day at the office, strapped on his fatsuit and went for a jog for the benefit of ever-fawning Evening Standard snappers, the published images of which corpus giganteum no doubt occasioned a surge in ovulation amongst the well-spoken ladies of Kensington.

Transport was hit hard. All buses were pulled from the roads, which caused great consternation amongst loyal bus passengers. Yes, every cosmopolitan delusional, every media-savvy paranoid schizophrenic was shut up for the day, bored, with nothing to do but empire-build using navel lint. A Cyprus Airways plane slid off the runway at Heathrow but mercifully no passengers were kebab'd. Luton Airport was closed, though the eyes of the civilised world are ever closed to anything connected with Luton so you may not have noticed. All overland train services were cancelled, just to keep things fresh, and there was a shortage of salt for the roads until the good salt-mining folk of Carrickfergus and Spain stepped into the breach to offer respite to local authorities. No doubt the 'Broon was also glad to get temporary respite from the economic blizzard, as Parliament stood untenanted, skeletal and H.R. Giger-like against the torpid Thames. After a few days, though, the snow fell away

into the gutters, like the last guest leaving the party, and life resumed.

Without the snow, it now seems a more chill wind that runs from Parliament Hill down to Whitehall. In fact, the recession perception is become reality and people have come to think that their salaries are made but of mere paper as might blow away on a zephyr. It is true, to an extent – but not much more than it has been. The credit culture that girt the Babel England of the Blair years like so much bronze-plated copper has corroded and the country is looking rather green about the gills. However wealth is, like often love, about illusions. London doesn't look any more socially unjust now than it did a year ago, or five. Which may be mere opinion, mind, but this is certain fact, that while the white cotton candy lay about its mean streets this early February, well, it looked like a place awfully close to beautiful. ■

