

It has been a little wet, around these parts, of late. The cocks drowned and their mannequin rags now buoy upon a nickel meniscus of Thames-water and sewage, gently wending its way past River Ock and Eynsham, past Abingdon and Little Wittenham; south and east, to the flatpack capital.



Other corpses too have surfaced, or, in the case of Blair, simply vanished. It is as if he never happened: Mr Broom has taken hold of the plastic rudder and seems quite content with his lot, despite all the terrorism and precipitation. He may still have a cueball-sized Gobstopper in his mouth when he speaks under pressure, but at least he doesn't, like Mr OnCamera, have a maw full of meal.

Whilst the inundation continued the streets were mercifully free of tourists, who thronged the doorways of Oxford St. novelty shops selling those 'London - I'm not perturbed' print t-shirts, waiting for the sun to bustle out from behind the ragged clouds and buff the wet pavements up to a shine. Life still went on and on. Shoreditch still teems with trustafarians. Somalian drug dealers still run the corners in Camden.

South London does not feel as much like America, or [one presumes] the Caribbean, as is habitual in the normally very hot summers here. One might think that this flooding would affect the murder rate in the very mainly Afro-Caribbean areas such as Peckham, Brixton and so on. Not so. There have been fifteen teenagers murdered here since January including several in the past few weeks, and the incidence of murder amongst young black people is now pitifully high. The Government has mooted action and may even consult a few black reverends about the yout's. Hussar! All the while, sixteen-year old boys in *bandannas* [and you can't make up the details] stab and shoot each other for pride and glory. There are now active and even more violent girl gangs too, community leaders allege. No-one knows what to do about it.

Helpfully, London Underground has now closed the Victoria Line, from 10pm during the week until the end of November at least. Said line provides the one reliable and quick means of conveyance from the South, up North of the river [where all the good jobs are]. This closure puts more people onto the buses, within which confines they can participate in the traffic jams on the Old Kent Road which so salve the soul. Aggressive rapMuzak is provided to all buses in the South now gratis, by MP3-enabled mobile phone-bearing teens who may or may elect to

mug someone; while fellow-passengers stare into their laps, or scan the free newspapers piled in sodden drifts on the floor, for celebrity ephemera and mongoloid 'Pet-of-the-day' snapshots.

If this sounds hellish, well, it might be. Yet the southern part of London has always been impoverished. The King's Men had the Globe on the southbank partly because the land was cheaper than Cheapside and the proliferation of taverns and whores in the area drew in a vast number of pleasure-seekers [including, later, Pepys], who might be persuaded to, while in the area, get in some culture other than that which has a fancy latin name and makes one's manhood turn mauve.

The huge wave of immigration in England which began after the Second World War saw Lewisham change overnight into a black steel. The English have been happy, as are now the Irish, to accept foreign nationals who shall do menial or manual work for them. In the case of South London it just so happens that such black communities have been largely ignored by investment, transport infrastructure planners and the law. One sees 'Bobbies', many and oft, strolling smilingly around wedding-cake Kensington. One could cry murder in Camberwell and see nary a one in a month. So, people watch their step and the streets empty after rush-hour. For outside, schoolchildren may be taking footage of their friends happy-slapping, or worse, to put onto YouTube, under user IDs like 'MurkahMizzle' [rough translation: murderer/ murderman]. Peachy.

The contemplative Travis Binckle opined, "One day a big rains gonna' come, and wash away all the scum and filth from the streets". The rain came and went, but some things you just can't wash away in water. Labour has in its tenure overseen a widening of the economic gap between those who cut coke and those who cut coupons; particularly in London. The poor have been left to rot and kill each other. 'Gramercy!', cry the cityboys, and order another spritzer. Broom has a great deal to do to tackle this legacy of neglect. If history is a nightmare from which we must try to awake, London must bestir itself. Once more, the sun has got his hat on - yet the kids are still killing each other. ■

Cian O'Neill is our regular London correspondent.

Swim, or die

Cian O'Neill

