

Families of the dead mark one year of the UK's National Covid Memorial Wall

Our reporters
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Five hundred people attended the one-year anniversary of the National Covid Memorial Wall in central London yesterday.

The 500-metre wall, adjacent to St Thomas's Hospital, faces the Houses of Parliament across the River Thames. Over 180,000 individually painted hearts, most with names, dates of death and messages from loved ones, each represent a life lost to the virus.

Families from across the country gathered by Lambeth Bridge before staging a silent march along the length of the memorial. Many held photos of their loved ones killed by COVID-19, some with the hashtag #NamesNotNumbers. Banners demanded, "The National Covid Memorial Wall must be made permanent". One banner read, "186,094 men, women and children have died in the UK with COVID-19 given as a cause of death on their death certificates".

The procession crossed Westminster Bridge, passed through Parliament Square and arrived at Downing Street. In an expression of the determination of the families to achieve justice and for those responsible in the political establishment to be held to account, one woman shouted towards Number 10, "They have to know we are not going away!"

Representatives of the campaign group Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK were allowed in to present a petition with over 100,000 signatures. It calls on the government "to support us in our efforts to have the wall made a permanent memorial, a place of reflection and contemplation and remembrance that will stand as a reminder of the horror and grief so many have endured."

A crowdfunding to maintain the site explains, "Each week volunteers help keep the memorial alive whilst we wait for the Government to commit to helping make it a permanent feature of the Southbank, dedicating

hours to keep memories of loved ones from across the UK alive."

For the anniversary, volunteers and family members had strung photos of those killed by COVID along the length of the wall, powerfully affirming the cross-section of population affected by the disease—predominantly the old, but with people of all ages, including children, and of all ethnicities. Below these a row of miniature lights the length of the memorial added to a poignant atmosphere.

Another moving procession was held from 8pm covering the distance back from Westminster Bridge to Lambeth Bridge, with people carrying candles and roses to remember their loved ones and all who have died. Many paused to leave candles under the pictures of their relatives on the wall and to take photos of the scene. The flowers were thrown into the Thames at the end of the walk. Some were in tears, consoling one another.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* circulated copies of the article "UK COVID memorial wall anniversary: The pandemic still raging, the criminals still at large".

The Stephens family came from Birmingham to pay respects to Teval, who died from COVID, aged just 44. Teval passed away on February 21, 2021, after fighting COVID for around six weeks. He was a yoga expert on the internet and went to the gym every day.

His sister Tervina said the wall is "a great place where everyone can come together who's lost a loved one. Other than that you'd just have no way of contacting other people and sharing stories. And I think for us, my brother's ashes were scattered in the sea, so it's somewhere we can go and remember him.

She said of the Johnson government, "I think they knew exactly what they were doing. Johnson's playing

the role of a buffoon, but he knows exactly what he's doing. It's just so obvious, for example the care homes scandal. They were full of elderly, frail people, probably with a lot of health conditions. So why are you going to put people with COVID in there? Even a 5-year-old would know that that's wrong. They don't care."

Teval's mother Tina, agreed, "Yes, it's obvious they don't care. Not acting to protect meant people got COVID from work, or from kids bringing it into their mum and dads."

James is a small business owner whose mother, Jacqueline, died of COVID aged 77 in January 2021. He said the wall "is to remember the huge swathe of the population that have died from a preventable disease and to keep it in everybody's memory, and of those who are supposed to be running the show and how they failed."

James said that questions must be answered, "Who was aware of the previous planning for a pandemic? Who ignored it? Who decided they were just going to wing it? To add insult to injury my mother died because she was infected with COVID in hospital. This was 10 months after the start of the pandemic, the second wave. There were well known prevention vectors and it could have been prevented.

"In my company, the father of one of our staff died in April 2020. She was seriously ill, and her father died. That was in the first wave. Two people out of a company of 25 to have relatives die is a high proportion."

The government wasn't concerned, James said, because "it's killing the elderly, who are a drain on the public purse anyway. Who cares, to put it bluntly?

"I've taken as many precautions as I can. and I've still had Delta and Omicron. The latest information is that the latest variant is as infectious as measles, which is the most infectious disease there is. It's just going to get more and more infectious as it mutates. Whether or not it will be less deadly as a result, who knows. But for those people who will end up dying from it they are now far more likely to catch it."



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