

Grenfell Uncovered: A moving cry for justice for the mass murder committed by a money-mad ruling class

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27 June 2025

Directed by Olaide Sadiq, Streaming now on Netflix

Grenfell Uncovered traces the events and decisions in political and corporate circles that led to the 2017 inferno in London's Grenfell Tower that took the lives of 72 people.

A call for long-denied justice, the Netflix documentary is directed by Olaide Sadiq and features heart-rending testimony from bereaved family members and survivors. Sadiq knew Khadija Saye, a victim of the fire. Khadija, a photographer who had exhibited at the Venice Biennale, was just 24 when she died alongside her mother, Mary Mandy.

Marcio Gomes and his seven months-pregnant wife Andreia escaped the burning tower with their two young daughters, Luana, 12, and Megan, 10. But after escaping Andreia was placed into an induced coma and their son, named Logan, was delivered stillborn by caesarean. Logan was the youngest victim of the fire.

The film depicts the horrific situation that engulfed the residents of the 24-storey tower on the night of June 14, 2017. Harrowing scenes are shown as the fire spreads uncontrollably, becoming an inferno due to the building being encased in flammable cladding. The helplessness of the firefighters as they attempt to save lives and try to bring the fire under control is brought home in interviews with two of them, David Badillo and Chris Batchelder.

One of the firefighters shows that after they had put out what was initially just a small fire in a fourth floor apartment, they did a standard infrared check on the building. In footage taken from the scene we see droplets of fire coming down from the apartments above. Badillo explains that although this was "unusual", they had experienced fire spreading to adjacent flats in other blocks before and therefore thought they would soon be able to finish the job. But as both firefighters explain, they had no

idea Grenfell was covered in combustible cladding and just how quickly this material could produce an inferno destroying an entire high-rise.

Inside Housing News Editor journalist Peter Apps explains how Grenfell Tower—which had been a safe concrete structure for the previous five decades—was turned into a death trap as a result of corporate profiteering. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), whose disdain for the safety of their residents was key in setting off the chain of events, and the main companies whose profiteering caused the fire—Arconic, Celotex, Kingspan, Celotex and Rydon—are named.

The film details how the ACM panels on Grenfell were bent into an L "cassette" shape, as opposed to being riveted on. The L shape allows a pool of fire drips to accumulate and creates a massive fire at the bottom of the cassette, and this happens to every one of the cassettes. Apps explains, "It burns 10 times as quickly. It releases seven times as much heat and three times as much smoke."

There was a sense of "how could this have happened here. Because it shook people's sense of the country they live in". Grenfell has "changed my life. There was my career up until Grenfell and then my life since and it's completely different."

This was enabled by a political establishment, at national and local level, which was carrying out a war on all regulations that hindered the reaping of ever greater profits.

Grenfell Tower is located in North Kensington, literally yards from the most affluent areas of the Conservative Party-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). The documentary shows an email sent to

officials at the RBKC from Jane Trethewey, the housing strategy and regeneration manager at the council, which said that the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) were looking into “the opportunity to clad Grenfell Tower and replace its windows... This will have the advantage of addressing one of its worst property assets and prevent it looking like a poor cousin to the brand new facility [a leisure centre and school complex] being developed next door.”

Bernie, who speaks along with sister Jackie about their brother Raymond “Moses” Bernard, who lost his life, said, “The tower was an eyesore for the affluent who lived in the area and I think it just kept property prices down.”

Ed Daffarn, a 16th floor Grenfell resident, speaks of how his life was saved by receiving a call from a neighbour on the night. Daffarn was considering phoning the fire brigade, but a neighbour who had managed to exit the building called his mobile and shouted, “Get out! Get out of the building!”

Daffarn recounts how he and the Grenfell Action Group of tenants had fought months prior to the outbreak of the fire for the council and TMO to take on board the many safety concerns raised by residents.

Daffarn says, “Myself and others who stood up and questioned: we were labelled rebels. We raised concerns with one of the senior managers from Rydon [the main contractor on the Grenfell refurbishment, including the cladding] at that point and said, ‘How would you like it if this was being done in your home?’ And he turned round and said to us, ‘If I was getting it for nothing I wouldn’t mind’. That comment sums up the whole way that we were treated. By Rydon TMO, RBKC.”

The film explains that for the sake of saving just £5,000 a cheaper material was chosen to clad the tower, when a far safer option was readily available.

A powerful section reels off the statements of former prime minister David Cameron, who states, “One of the aims of this government is to massively reduce the number of rules, laws and regulations that frankly treat all of you like idiots.”

Another clip shows him boasting, “We’re going to have a new rule, which is that any minister in my government that wants to introduce a regulation has to scrap one first.”

Cameron then tells the Federation of Small Businesses this has been “changed to the ‘one in, two out’ rule.”

Apps points out, “So, effectively, what he did was ban new fire safety regulations being introduced, even if they were necessary.”

Cameron’s successor as Tory prime minister, Theresa May, is interviewed and, in her own defence, admits that the tragedy was the making of the Cameron government’s rush to deregulate. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-15) “was very keen on ensuring that as far as possible they were reducing the number of regulations.... I think what we see from the inquiry [into Grenfell] was that too many people just weren’t looking at those regulations.”

May acknowledges that council tenants and other workers were treated as “second-class citizens”. But this attitude to the working class and those in social housing was essential to the Thatcher mantra, “There is no such thing as society.” And May—as with every prime minister since Thatcher—worshipped her as the last word on everything.

May didn’t dare to visit the families because the local community was enraged not just at the deaths in the fire, but at the callous way her government and a flagship Tory council left the distraught, bereaved and homeless Grenfell community to fend for themselves. The documentary shows clips of a protest outside Kensington Town Hall demanding the “murderers” face justice.

That is why May was busy arranging an official inquiry that, along with a glacier-paced police “criminal investigation,” has worked to ensure the guilty have evaded justice.

Grenfell Uncovered shows how the Inquiry was used by those responsible for covering Grenfell in highly dangerous cladding—who would only testify if they were granted immunity—to blame everyone but themselves. This enabled a cover-up so that even eight years after the fire, not a single person responsible for these heinous crimes has even been arrested, let alone charged and prosecuted.

As Omar Alhaj Ali, one of the bereaved who lost his brother, says, “To be honest I’m sure this could happen again.”



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