

# Northern

BRINGING YOU THE LATEST NEWS  
FROM OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS  
AROUND THE WORLD

*news*

JULY 2008



# Editorial Ramblings

*At last! The Great Escape has been achieved!* What a great feeling it is to be out of the Philippines and back in a (relatively) civilised country again - Hooray! How sad it is that the Filipino people have made me loathe their country so much that I never want to return. As I said to a Filipina who tried to sell me a souvenir: *"The only souvenir I want of the Philippines is a 'plane ticket out."* This should be my adopted country and the place where I should feel at home - after all, my wife is

a Filipina, and I have spent more than five years in this country since 1997. But I really have had enough of this dreadful place. This is made even more sad for me because I have many good friends who are Filipino, as well as my family there, and I hate to see them struggle to obtain even the

most basic of their needs. Since I first arrived in the Philippines in February 1997, all I have seen is a country in decline - very largely caused by the high levels of corruption at every level. Of course, the system encourages this high

level of corruption because most people are paid so little that they have to do something just to scrape a living, and, as reported in an earlier edition, more and more people are living below the poverty line. At the other end of the spectrum, there are so many politicians who are utterly greedy, they just want more and more and do less and less for their communities. A case in point is the city of Olongapo near where we lived. In all the years I've know this place, there has been NO improvement. The Gordon family has had the city in its grip for many, many years and have done nothing to improve it or the lives of the people in the community. Meanwhile, they have become extremely wealthy from the money they have been stealing from their own people and the businesses in the area which have had to pay a high price, under the table, for their permits to operate. There has been no overseas investment to speak of and no improvement. This in an area of high population density where there should be a huge level of economic growth. Contrast this with San Fernando, Pampanga where some progress has been made because corruption is less and the demands on businesses to pay bribes is less and what do you see? Foreign businesses such as Marks and Spencer and HSBC, as well as all the major makes of car manufacturer being represented there. And this in an area where there is nothing and nobody compared to Olongapo. Why? Because the mayor there is less greedy than the Gordon family and actually spends some of the government budget on projects for the community instead of putting most of it in his pocket. The strange thing is that the people accept this high level of corruption by blaming the government and do nothing about it themselves. They keep re-electing the Gordon family (I wonder how much it costs the Gordon family to buy votes?), and refuse to take action themselves to get rid of their corrupt leaders. All I can assume is that the Filipino people must like their country this way - or they'd change it. In fact, most Filipino's will tell you that they are proud to be Filipino. I just wonder what it is they are proud of.



*People living in many communities here, struggle to get even their daily fresh water. This is NOT a rural community from anywhere. It is alongside the main highway, very close to two quite large cities, not far from our former home. Sadly, the much advertised Mayor Bong Gordon doesn't seem to be doing much to help them! In fact the Gordon family who have run the area for at least 2 generations are only interested in putting money in their pockets - they are NOT interested in improving the lives of their countrymen. Supplying basic needs like water and electricity is hardly rocket science in the 21st century, but in this country, it's like taking a trip to Mars.*



**Cover photograph:** We haven't flown quite this far! The Moon, from our garden in the Philippines

**Back cover photograph:** One of Britain's wild flowers; a Foxglove, that we saw on Cannock Chase in Staffordshire.



## Baby thrown out of cruising taxi

Police investigators were puzzled over a strange phenomenon of the killing of three infants in separate incidents in Manila for two consecutive days since Sunday.

On Tuesday, a newborn baby girl mysteriously survived after she was thrown from a moving taxicab by her 15-year-old mother in Sta. Ana, Manila.

A commuter initially thought the infant to be a doll. However, she was surprised when she found the baby who still has umbilical cord. She immediately hailed a passing police mobile car which chased the speeding taxicab with license plates TVG-767.

Police found a 15-year-old girl with blood between her legs, accompanied by her grandmother and an uncle on board the taxicab.

The young mother was rushed to the Ospital ng Maynila, together with the baby girl. Except for bruises, the baby is alive and healthy.

Police are presently questioning the mother's companions to determine their participation in the attempted killing of the baby.

Earlier that day, another newborn baby girl was found in the roof gutter of a warehouse in Binondo, Manila.

The baby was given first aid treatment but later expired at the Gat Andres Bonifacio Hospital.

Police said an electrician of the Crown warehouse located beside the Gold Rich Mansion condominium heard a loud thud at the roof of the warehouse. When he checked it out, he saw a baby girl and a placenta placed inside a plastic bag at the roof.

A 21-year-old single mother was charged with infanticide for the death of her newborn baby girl whose body was found half-submerged in a shallow canal in Sta. Mesa, Manila on Sunday morning.

Police said the baby's cause of death was "asphyxia by drowning," indicating the baby was still alive when placed at the flowing water of the canal.

Ivy Belvis admitted giving birth to the baby inside the comfort room of the boarding house at around 2 to 3 a.m. Sunday. She claimed she thought the baby was dead when she was born since it did not cry.

- Nestor Etolle

Anyone who thinks I'm being somewhat harsh about the Philippines has only to read the Filipino press to see that what I have to say is not only true, but frequently understated!

As a random example, the article (*left*) describes the killing (or attempted killing) of THREE babies in TWO days, in just one city, Manila - by their own mothers!

What is particularly sad about these cases is that the mothers concerned should feel so desperate that to kill their baby (or try to) was their only option - even when other family members are around - such as in the first case where the mother's grandmother and an uncle were present.

Life here is very cheap!

Soon after I first arrived in the Philippines in 1997, a young lady, still a teenager, was murdered in a Jeepney so the robber could steal 30 Pisos - at that time worth about \$US1.

*Near the Clouds in the Mountain Province*







### BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF CHARITY

LOCATED IN LA UNION'S OLDEST TOWN, AGOO. PARISH AND TOWN FOUNDED IN 1578 BY FRANCISCAN FR. JUAN BAUTISTA LUCARELLI AND SEBASTIAN DE BAEZA. ORIGINAL CHURCH IN BARANGAY NAGRUGCAN. IMPROVED BY AUGUSTINIAN FR. SATURNINO FRANCO; BELFRY BUILT BY FR. CASIMIRO MELGOSA AND AQUILINO GARCIA. ALL DESTROYED BY 1892 EARTHQUAKE.

BUILT ON THIS SITE WAS THE NEXT CHURCH WHERE THE LONG-VENERATED IMAGE OF OUR LADY OF CHARITY WAS CANONICALLY CROWNED BY APOSTOLIC NUNCIO SALVATORE SINNO ON 1 MAY 1971 BY RESCRIPT OF POPE PAUL VI. DEMOLISHED IN 1975 FOR A NEW SHRINE. CORNERSTONE LAID ON 8 SEPT. 1975, FEAST OF OUR LADY'S NATIVITY, BY ARCHBISHOP MARIANO A. MADRIAGA, NATIVE OF THE TOWN. CONSTRUCTION STARTED 8 JAN. 1976 FROM DONATIONS BY THE FAITHFUL LED BY A SON OF THE TOWN, TOURISM MINISTER JOSE D. ASPIRAS AND HIS FAMILY AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF BISHOP VICTORINO LIGOT OF SAN FERNANDO DE LA UNION DIOCESE.

CONSECRATED MARIAN SHRINE ON 8 DEC. 1978, FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION BY SEBASTIANO CARDINAL BAGGIO, PREFECT OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF BISHOPS, WITH PRESIDENT FERDINAND E. MARCOS AND FIRST LADY IMELDA ROMUALDEZ MARCOS IN ATTENDANCE.

ELEVATED TO RANK OF BASILICA MINORE BY POPE JOHN PAUL II, ON 15 JULY 1982, ON PETITION OF BISHOP SALVADOR LAZO THROUGH ARCHBISHOP BRUNO TORPIGLIANI, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE PHILIPPINES. DEDICATED AS SUCH BY SEBASTIANO CARDINAL BAGGIO ON 8 DEC. 1982.

MSGR. BENITO P. SISON, FIRST RECTOR; MSGR. JOSE C. TONGSON, PRESENT RECTOR; TOMAS M. ASPRER, PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR; JOSE LUIS M. ASPIRAS, MUNICIPAL MAYOR; IGNACIO PALMA BAUTISTA, ARCHITECT; BERNARDO M. VERGARA, EDMUNDO TOLENTINO, JOSE MANANTAN AND BERNABE CORTEZ, SUPERVISING ENGINEERS.

IX

Shortly before leaving the Philippines we rented a car (the one on which the brakes failed!) to take some of our things to the family farm for storage. While in the area we visited the Mountain Province of La Union and stopped for a brake (literally) in Agoo, before we got into the mountains on the way to Baguio. These photographs show the interesting church and very unusual belfry of the Basilica of Our Lady of Charity (*history as in the photograph of the list of credits on the left*).







*Mines View - Baguio - Benguet Province, Philippines.*



*View over Baguio from the SM Mall - Benguet Province - Philippines*





## Royal Marines honoured for bravery

Eight Royal Marines from 40 Commando in Taunton have received medals, including a George Cross, for bravery in Afghanistan. Click link below to see the video:

## Operational Service Medal - Afghanistan

The Operational Service Medal Afghanistan is issued to soldiers who have served in Afghanistan, or in support of Op VERITAS, after September 11 2001.

The following operations count towards qualification for this medal:

Op VERITAS, Op ORACLE, Op LANDMAN, Op BLEED, Op DETERM, Op SCOW, Op DAMIEN, Op LARVA, Op FINGAL, Op JACANA, Op JACANA, Op RAMSON, Op BANDOOG and Op HERRICK. Those Officers and Soldiers from HQ ARRC who deployed to Kabul to man the ISAF HQ were also awarded this medal.

There is one clasp authorised for this medal, which is the "AFGHANISTAN" clasp, which is for soldiers who have served in the country or other designated areas. When only ribbons are worn this is denoted by a silver rosette being worn on the ribbon.

The medal is silver and circular in shape and designed as follows:

The obverse of this silver medal bears the head of Queen Elizabeth II with the words "Elizabeth II : DEI GRATIA REGINA FID.DEF".

On the reverse there is a Union Flag in the centre surrounded by a circular inscription "FOR OPERATIONAL SERVICE". Appearing from underneath the inscription are the points of a compass with a coronet at the point of each of the four main ones: Royal (top left), Naval (top right), Mural-Army (bottom left) and Astral-Royal Air Force (bottom right).

Clasp

The "Afghanistan" Clasp is awarded for service specifically in Afghanistan. Rosette on ribbon denotes clasp when no medal is worn.

The ribbon is 1.25" wide and has a broad central red stripe, then a dark blue stripe either side, followed by a light blue, to represent the 3 armed services. The light brown on the outer edges represents the Afghan landscape.



# *another adventure...*

Last month, I mentioned that we'd been charged an extra \$US30 each to re-book our flight after the screw-up by the British Embassy. This changed to \$US80 each when we called to confirm our flight and were charged an extra \$US50 each for the late cancellation of our original flight. So, we faced a total extra charge of \$US240 - thanks to the incompetent Filipinos in the British Embassy. It seems that these extra charges are only made in the Philippines, as I've changed my flight many times in other countries and never been charged a penalty for doing so. In addition, we have had to pay rent on two homes instead of one, due to our extended stay in the Philippines.

Once we got on our way, we continued to suffer - this time at the hands of the Filipino catering staff who prepared the on-board meals for Qatar Airways (and other airlines too). As is usually the case when flying out of Manila, the food was largely inedible. I spoke to the excellent (Filipina) stewardess who was taking care of us on the flight, and she said that this was frequently the case. She went on to say that the meals were always much better when flying from other parts of the world, and gave me a report form to complete, where I could make my complaints known to the airline's managers. Thankfully, previous experience had prepared us for this and we had a large box of ham sandwiches with us that we'd prepared ourselves before leaving home.

Those were our final souvenirs of the Philippines. Thank you, Filipinos, you will always be remembered for giving us such a great start to our new adventure!

After last month's published saga of Grace's visa, I received an e-mail (see letters page) from one of our friends who has recently managed to get his Filipina wife into the UK. He said that she too had been issued with the wrong visa and it had taken *months* of e-mail exchanges with the Filipino staff at the British Embassy before he had finally managed to contact a British member of staff who sorted it out for him and issued her with the correct visa.

Our journey started at 0930hrs on 1 July when we left out home in Sta. Monica. We were taken to the airport in Manila, arriving 4 hours before our flight was scheduled to leave. Usually, getting into the airport is the most difficult part of the proceedings, but they've made some changes to the system and it has been much improved (unless you're a Filipino OCW). Being early, we were checked in and through immigration into the duty free shop and airport lounges in one hour - not anywhere near as stressful as usual. We paid an extra rip-off price of PhP400 each (Little Lad free) to use the very tatty and run-down Sampaguita Lounge, where we were given some refreshments and could escape the hoards of people in the boarding lounge.

In Doha, where we had about 4 hours to wait for our next flight, we were royally entertained by a young man falling around and vomiting on the floor and into plastic bags.

Once in Manchester, we were picked up by our friend, John, and taken to our new home. It was good to get the journey over and get started on our new life in England.



*The Airbus aeroplane on which we flew from Manila to Doha*

On arrival, we were exhausted after our long journey. Sleeping hasn't been easy as our body-clocks are in different time zones. Anyway, we are gradually recovering.

One of the disappointments we experienced was having to leave so many of our possessions behind in the Philippines. We were going to ship them to England, but the cost of getting them from the port of arrival in the UK to our new home was about four times that as getting them from our former home in the Philippines to the receiving port in the UK. We still brought about 100kg of luggage with us. Thanks to Nadia and Shane, the things that we had left behind in Doha are currently on their way to the Philippines to join the rest of our things. When Grace next visits her family she will have to go with an empty suitcase so she can bring another load back with her!

The one big shock to the system has been the appalling weather - a daytime temperature as low as 11°C, lots of rain, thunder and lightning, cold winds. A typical English summer! The first job on arriving in our new home was to turn on the heating! Apart from myself, who always feels the cold, Little Lad has taken to shivering too! We went to a reservoir on the edge of the Peak District and he was fascinated to see, and get very close to, a flock of Canada Geese and Mallard ducks. Even though he was well wrapped-up he was shivering, but wouldn't let me take him away from the birds until he'd seen enough. Strangely, Grace doesn't have a problem with the cold at all!

A really funny aspect of our new home, as far as Little Lad is concerned, is that it has a flight of stairs between the two floors. Little Lad has only lived in a bungalow for the time that he can remember (we lived in a house for a few months when he was very young, but he doesn't remember that), so the novelty of having stairs to climb kept him amused for ages as he expended vast amounts of energy charging up and down the stairs - something he still does whenever he can find some excuse for doing so.

Our new home is very conveniently located within walking distance of a huge Tesco *extra* supermarket - which really is super (Unlike supermarkets in the Philippines which are *never* super). Next to that is an Argos *extra* store and a NEXT clothes shop. Also within easy walking distance there are all the other places one needs, such as a bank, post office, library and a wide range of stores.

I had a Volkswagen Passat hire car delivered and am gradually becoming familiar with the very comprehensive road system in the area. After a week, I returned the Passat and rented a Ford Fiesta with a diesel engine - much cheaper to rent and to run for the journey from home to work. With diesel fuel at £1.30/litre, it needs to be! I don't suppose many of you will find it believable that I'm paying the same for the fuel I use in my car as I was about 12 years ago! Well, it's true! My fuel costs about 10p/mile which is what it cost around 12 years ago. In those days I had a big car that consumed fuel at the rate of about 25-26 miles to one UK gallon. Now,



I'm running a small car which does about 57-58 miles to the gallon. Of course things will be different when we buy a caravan and have to run a big car to tow it, but as most of my travelling is the journey to work and back (about 40 miles each way), we'll still need to keep a small car.

Two days after arriving, I drove to Derby to attend a job interview and attended another on 7 July in Wolverhampton. Within 3 hours of my second interview (this being for the job I was particularly interested in), I was offered the position. Nice to know they were keen to get me! It's also good to know that I'm still employable! The following day I got another telephone call offering me the other job. Just after accepting the position I wanted, I was invited to attend an interview for yet another job. Only one week since we arrived in England and I'm already fixed up with a well paid job. We really are thankful to God that life here seems to be working out so well.

I started work as a technical author for a nuclear engineering company in Wolverhampton on Monday 14 July 2008. Getting up at 0530hrs and driving for about an hour each way is taking some getting used to after a life of freedom. I usually work from 0700hrs until 1600hrs with 30 mins for lunch - a 42 hour week, getting home at about 1700hrs, so it's quite a long day. Being on contract (they offered me a permanent position, but the money wasn't so good!), I don't get paid holidays or sick pay - I only get paid when I'm there.

We've also got Little Lad registered for a school place -

just in time - on the last day before the summer holidays start. Grace and I have been trying to get him registered in a number of schools, particularly those that have been recommended to us by our friends in the area. Nothing seemed to be working out as all those we went to said they were full and weren't accepting any more pupils. Finally, on the last day of term, Grace went to another school, Christchurch Church of England Primary School, where Little Lad was accepted. This was a little further from our home than we would have liked, but we both feel that it is the right place for him to attend. The reason we're so sure is because we feel very strongly that God closed the door on the other schools (mainly Roman Catholic) because He wanted our Little Lad to attend Christchurch. This thought came to me very strongly while I was sitting in the office later in the day that Grace went to Christchurch and had let me know that Little Lad had been accepted.

Although we've only spent a short time travelling around the area, we have found that there is a great deal of natural beauty within a short distance of our home that we will enjoy exploring once we get some better weather. One of the things that has given us a great deal of pleasure has been seeing so many caravans on the move - more than I've ever seen in my life. It seems that after many years of being in the doldrums, caravanning has become popular once more and it is great to see so many around - a great symbol of freedom. The Caravan Club has also reported record levels of membership. The downside is that caravan sites will be much more crowded and will probably need to be pre-booked in order to get a pitch at all. Let's hope all the extra money pouring into this activity will soon result in more sites. We too are hoping to buy a caravan in the not too distant future and will publish photographs of our travels once we get on the road to new adventures. In the meantime, I will take as many photographs as I can and hope to publish a series showing the typical English villages and scenes around where we live. The first of this series is Penkridge, which I've included in this edition of our little magazine.

Sadly, I don't expect to be publishing any record breaking editions of our little magazine in the near future. No doubt some of you will breathe a sigh of relief! Unfortunately, I don't now have the time to put together editions like last month's record 53 pages. However, I will try to put a few pages together every month, but some of the features will, I'm sorry to say, disappear until I can afford to retire once more.

One of the good things about being back in England is the vast range of products that are available. Everything you can think of - and plenty that you wouldn't have; much of which is good quality and the choice of what one can buy is just mind-blowing. The downside of this is that it is so easy to spend, spend, spend! Grace commented that it is so tempting to spend money here as there are so many things to choose from. Of course, the advertisers try to make sure you do just that. Every time you go in a store you are bombarded with flyers, catalogues, special offers and promotions - they

even come through the letter box. The *Argos* catalogue alone lists over 18,000 items! The *B&Q Kitchen Book* lists well over 50 sinks (some available in several sizes) and nearly 60 patterns of taps (some of which are available in more than one colour). The list goes on - and on. It is easy to see why so many people have a debt problem here - and it isn't just because of the high cost of living - it's more to do with the high cost of spending!

On 19 July, we finally got connected to a land-line telephone and broadband internet service. At last, I can now respond to your e-mails without having to walk to the library to get on-line.

On Tuesday, 22 July, I went to work as usual, On my return we went to a nearby park for a walk and Little Lad enjoyed the facilities in the play area. During the evening I started a bit of a cold and didn't feel 100%. This was no surprise as Little Lad had been suffering with a cold for a few days and I thought I'd caught it from him. After a rather poor night I decided not to go to work on Wednesday morning as I felt rather unwell. I didn't want to pass on my infection to my colleagues.

By Thursday morning I felt really ill and went to have lay on the bed for a rest. After a short rest I asked Grace to help me get to the local doctor as I felt I needed some antibiotics. By this time, my chest was a bit tight and congested so I thought I'd got a bit of 'Flu. Getting out of bed and into the car was quite an effort, but we made it ok. On arrival at the local health centre we were told that they were closed and re-directed to another clinic staffed only by nurses - several miles away! With Grace navigating and reading the book of street maps, we eventually got there and paid for the parking ticket.

After a wait of well over an hour, I was called into see the nurse who started her routine examination and interrogation. Before I knew it, she'd got a mask on me that was connected to bottle of oxygen. I had quite a low blood pressure (103 systolic over 70 diastolic) and a low level of oxygen concentration in my blood (as I understand it, the haemoglobin that carries the oxygen in the blood (arterial) was at 91% saturation instead of about 98% (minimum acceptable level is 95%). My heart was also beating faster than it should have been. After several minutes on oxygen alone, she put me on a nebulizer for the rest of my time there.

She said I should go to the hospital to see a doctor as she wasn't allowed to treat me further because of the nature of my illness. I explained that we didn't know where the hospital was so would appreciate some directions. She immediately told me that I wasn't going to be driving anywhere as I was too sick. She then called the emergency services and a few minutes later I was in an ambulance en-route to hospital.

In the accident and emergency unit I was, once again, examined and interrogated and the results from the clinic confirmed. I was also given more time on oxygen, a chest



Our friends in Stoke-on-Trent, John, Stephanie and Cora

X-Ray and an ECG. I could tell by their line of questioning that they thought I might have had a heart attack. The doctor found it difficult to believe that I'd been fit and well 2 days previously and was now laid so low. By this time I was wanting to go home and told him I wanted out. I said that he could give me the antibiotics I needed and I'd go home and take them. He advised my very strongly not to discharge myself and would I wait to see the Consultant. The Consultant came to see me and told me "*the evidence we have indicates that you have severe Pneumonia.*" When I heard that, it made me re-consider my decision to leave, as I know how serious this illness can be. He told me that I needed to get antibiotics into my system very quickly and the only way to do that was intravenously. He said "*you look very ill.*" I decided to stay in hospital. Grace and Little Lad found their way home by bus. I was put on a drip with both antibiotics and a saline solution going into my bloodstream and that was that.

About 2300hrs I was moved into another ward. In the morning I was put (eventually - my observations regarding the National Health Service are in my *Reflections* pages) onto another drip, first a saline drip, then (later) an antibiotic drip.

As the last drops were being pumped into me I was stunned when an ambulance crew arrived to take me to another hospital that had a specialised respiratory ward. I soon recovered from the shock and told them outright that they weren't taking me anywhere! I knew that Grace and Little Lad were on their way to see me and none of us knew our way around. I told them that I wasn't going to be pissed around by them or anyone else. Needless to say, I had a stunned audience of ambulance crew and nurses by now - even the unit manager came to see me. I told them that the only place I was going was HOME! After a lot of discussion, (I'll spare you the details), the ambulance crew departed and a few minutes later Grace and Little Lad arrived. By this time, I really had decided that enough was enough and I was going home. They sent for a consultant (and he arrived with another doctor in tow) to see me. He had the most appalling bed-side manner I've ever experienced, although his colleague was very pleasant. After an inquisition, and my refusal to go through an arterial blood test and my explanation of how I felt about my situation he eventually accepted defeat and agreed that I could go home (not that he could have stopped me) with strict instructions to return if my condition deteriorated - they were still extremely concerned about the low level of oxygen concentration in my blood which hadn't improved at all (hence the reason why they wanted to take another blood sample - more accurate than the instrument they attached to my finger). I got ready, waited for my medication and departed (the NHS paid for the taxi that took me back to where our car was parked). We found our way home. Wasn't it GREAT to be back!

However, I still wasn't out of the wood. I was still unwell and rather weak. During the late evening my temperature rose to quite a high level - Grace said I was burning. I was also very

low in spirit and felt at quite a low ebb in every way. By the morning, my fever had reduced very considerably and I was feeling much better. Prayers were being answered. Throughout the day I continued to progress, my strength building and my morale improving.

I decided to take a full week off work in order to recover properly (I hope). On Monday we went for a walk along the Trent and Mersey Canal (*see below and later in this edition*). I think I overdid things a little, so spent the next couple of days resting.

I just hope that August will see me complete a full month at work - and get some money coming into the coffers!





# *Your prayers are needed...*

## *for Marc and Tessa:*

We ask you to pray for Marc (aged 70) who is in very poor health and who broke his arm (again) recently. Please also pray for Tessa, his wife, who is taking care of him. They are in the Legazpi, Philippines where medical treatment is not always as good as it should be.

## *for Gerry and Sylvia:*

Gerry is still in poor health and needs your prayers for his ulcerated leg and the pain he is suffering from arthritis. Please also pray for Sylvia (his wife) who is doing all she can to take good care of him. They both need your prayerful support.

*and thanks.....*

## *from Alan, Grace and John:*

for a safe journey to England, a comfortable house in which to live and a good job for Alan. Thanks are also due to our friends, John, Cora and Stephanie (*photograph on page 7*), who have been unstinting in their help and support since we got off the 'plane at Manchester airport.

for the speedy recovery of Alan from serious illness - helped by all those who were praying for him whom we also thank for their support during this difficult time.

## *from David and Ruth:*

Dear all,

I have just got the results of the latest Biopsy (FNA). I quote: Diagnosis: Left cervical lymph node: Monotonous small lymphocytes, no evidence of transformation to high-grade lymphoma. The doctors were thinking that the lymphoma was active and spreading, they were suggesting more chemo, however, the consultant said that on examination this is not the case and now they are suggesting radiation on the neck to reduce that site, So I am very relieved. Not yet clear but at least it is not active and not spreading.

# Your Letters



We hope that ALL of you will contribute a few words to this page. All letters published will be done so anonymously. Letters may be edited a little, although nothing will be done to change the meaning or context of anything submitted for publication.

The stamp (left) depicts the '**Penny Black**' - the world's first postage stamp used by the world's first postal service (British).

Hi Alan and Grace,

I am sorry I do not respond regularly - my workload is enormous and the heat in Dubai plus humidity and sand-dust smog make everyone very tired here. I will be looking for a job back in Perth to reunite with my family, so I will be in the same situation as you are now.

I trust that your arrival in England will bring you all happiness - I hope you will get a job, Alan, with your qualifications and experience, and that you will gradually settle for something really nice.

I have you in my thoughts and heart and am sure that good things are there for you all. It must be hard to be going into the unknown, but with your great attitude and qualities I am sure you will find happiness in England. And for your lovely Grace and little John it will be good, too. I really believe in it.

Wishing you a lot of strength and positive energy to pursue the new chapter of your life.

God bless you, let me know how you are doing.

Hugs,

Dear Alan

It was interesting to read about your troubles with the embassy. They did the same thing to us. My wife received the passport but without the indefinite leave to remain. I e-mailed them for many months and in the end I actually got through to a native British person!!!! - who admitted their fault, so now she has the residents permit.

It seems that she still has to stay here three years before getting a passport! A very hard thing to do in this cold place. We are thinking of either going back to the Philippines or maybe wait until she gets the passport.

I expect that you have researched this so I would be interested if you have any more information on it.

Have a nice trip.

Hi there,

I am so excited for you guys having a new adventure and seeking the unknown... All the best and god bless you

Hope you can survive there in the UK after all the hassles and misfortunes you have had preparing to get there.

Living in the UK remains a dream for me. I am currently teaching in Singapore but have been in hospital on a drip. They thought it may be dengue fever so more blood tests. I often get food poisoning here too.

Good luck to you all

Hi Alan & Grace,

Thanks for your newsletter. We hope your move to England went well and that you settle in quickly. We're midway through our own move, made reluctantly of course. I think that adds a lot to the drudgery of moving - when you don't want to do it in the first place. Anyway, enough whinging.

Finally, off to the wilds of India for the hols soon, that might mean a break in correspondence, but photos on our return.

Good luck in S on T, see you there or thereabouts,

Have a great flight - I'm wishing you all well with everything as ever...and a great next chapter! Look forward to hearing more when you get a moment. Thanks for the newsletter - great work as usual.

Much love

# Where We Are - Canal Country



© Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

As can be seen from the map (above) dated 1777, we are in the heart of the canal network that gave England such a fantastic heavy transport infra-structure when it was most needed - during the industrial revolution - before the advent of the railway system. The area around where we live became know as *The Potteries* due to the availability of the china clay used to make pottery. I well remember going to see the annual *Pot Fair* while staying at my grandparent's home in Preston, Lancashire, where traders from *The Potteries* set up marquees in the town square and sold their wares from the famous pottery manufacturers. Names such as Wedgwood, Spode and Royal Doulton, that were famous throughout the world. Stoke-on-Trent is very near to two well known canals; The Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal and the Trent & Mersey, as well as the River Trent. We are looking forward to exploring the canals by walking, and riding our bicycles, along the tow paths, and we may even rent a narrow boat for a short while to get an even closer experience of what canal life is all about. We had a brief drive around on 13 July, the first (only!) day we had some sunshine! The photograph (right and overleaf) of a narrow boat that has just exited the lock, was taken at Park Gate Lock on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal. We had a brief chat with the folks on board. They told us that they spend 6 months on board, travelling the waterways of England in the summer, before returning to their home in Scotland for the winter.







## *Harecastle Tunnel - Trent and Mersey Canal*

As you view the tunnels, which run parallel, the one which is not in use is the original Brindley Tunnel (*just to the left of the white van in the photograph - the top is indicated by the white-painted semi-circle*).

The Brindley Tunnel took 11 years to build (*circa 1777*) and was probably the smallest but longest tunnel of its day, being only 9'3" (2.8 metres) wide, 12' (3.6 metres) high and 1.75 miles long. There was no towing path which meant that boats had to be "legged" through the tunnel which took some 3 hours.

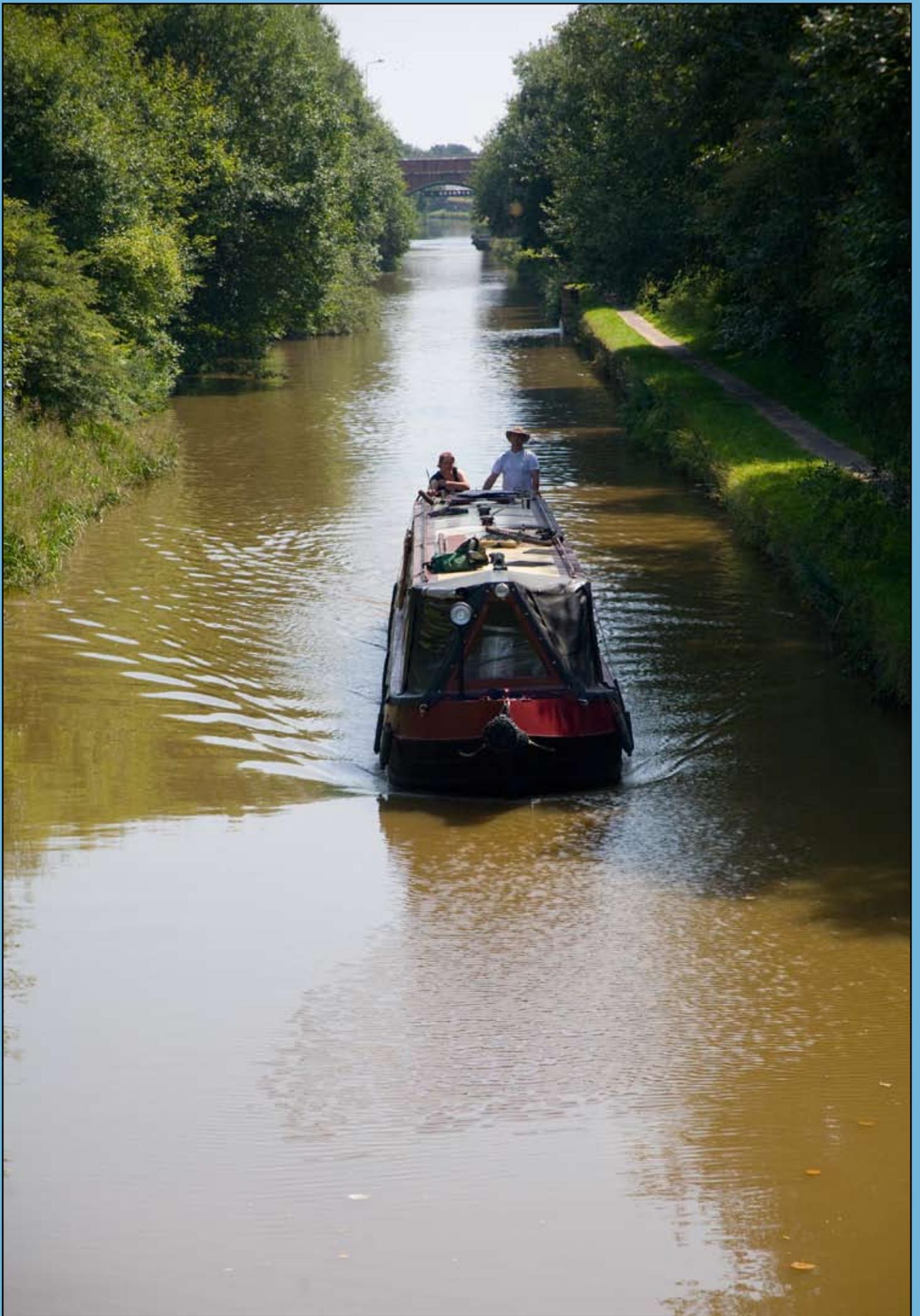
In 1822 Thomas Telford recommended the construction of a second tunnel and this was started in 1825. Advances in engineering skills and being able to utilise Brindley's Tunnel meant that the second tunnel, complete with towing path took only three years to construct, at a cost of £113,000. Boats were allowed to use both tunnels for a while but due to low headroom Brindley's Tunnel ceased to be used in 1918.

Settlement in Telford's Tunnel continued to lower the headroom from the original 12ft, and in 1907 there was water on the towpath to a depth of 13ins. (330mm) in places. To alleviate this problem an electric tug service was started in 1914. This service meant that 30 boats could be hauled 'through the tunnel at a cost of 6d 2.5p) each. The cost of "legging" through Brindley's Tunnel, was 1/6d (7.5p).

The first tug was constructed in 1914 at a cost of £1,563 and a second one was built in 1931 to allow maintenance to be carried out on the tug without disruption to the services. Because of the decline in traffic it had proved to be too costly to run a tug on two shifts involving four men, the cost of new rope every six to nine months and maintenance to the hull To allow diesel powered craft to pass through under their own power meant building the fan house at the south end of the tunnel with 3x 38" (970mm) fans to extract the foul air. This work was started in 1953 and completed in 1954. This ventilation system saw the end of the electric tug era.

During the 1960's with the decline of commercial traffic the tunnel was opened on a trust basis where traffic would pass northbound dawn to noon and southbound noon to dusk. Now, in the busy pleasure boat era, the tunnel is manned by a tunnel keeper at either end using a direct telephone link.

On average 6000 boats pass through the tunnel each year.



# *Penkridge - An English Village*



This ancient village, thought to be more than 1100 years old, is very typical of the beautiful villages found in England. The photographs depict: The Village School (*top*), St. Michael and All Angels Church (*below*), the right hand photograph (*below*) also shows the memorial to those of the village who lost their lives in the two World Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. The photographs overleaf depict: Two flower displays (*top - photographs by Grace*), An Ivy covered house (*left centre*), a Tudor building (*right centre*) and a view through a shop window (*bottom*) showing models of some narrow-boats as seen on the local canals.







This month I'm concentrating on *sharing your photographs and file storage*. Most of you will be familiar with the links to the various photograph galleries I've connected you to via the buttons on the pages of this little magazine.

I now want to give you some ideas on how you can share your photographs with your friends and family, and give you some links to websites that will make it easy for you to do so. Please send me some links to your photograph galleries once you've got them up and running, so we can see them too. It isn't as difficult as you might think. And it's FREE!



Picasa is my favourite service for sharing photographs because, not only is it free, but it so quick and easy to use. For example, Grace or I can take a set of photographs that we want to share with Nadia. We can download them from the camera, and within a few minutes, Nadia can be viewing them in her home or office in Doha. And I do mean, just a few minutes. It is even quicker than messing around sending them by e-mail as attachments. The downside is that Picasa gives you only 1GB of storage space for your photographs (although you can open several accounts if you need more - or pay for extra storage space) and only stores them as .jpg files - so if you shoot RAW files and want to upload those while you're on the road, think again.. Picasa allows you to save your files in a variety of sizes up to the original file size (maximum 20MB, video up to 100MB), but only in .jpg format (other formats are usually converted automatically).

The first thing you need to do, is set up a Google e-mail account (G-Mail). Go to URL: <http://mail.google.com> and sign up - you can do it almost as quickly as you can read this. Open your g-mail window (*Screen 1*) and near the top of the screen towards the left hand side, you will see an underlined piece of text that says [photos](#). There two ways of getting your photographs into a Picasa Gallery. When you get the Picasa Web Albums page (*Screen 2*), you will be able to hit the buttons *New Album* or *Upload* (*Screen 3*) from where you can follow the instructions.

The alternative, and really the best way, is to download the Picasa software from URL: <http://picasa.google.com/> This program is very easy to use, so won't be any real problem to anyone who is even vaguely computer literate.

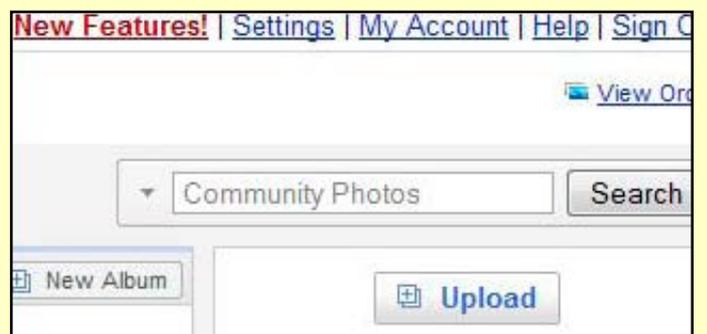
Remember that Picasa is primarily a photo-sharing service, rather than a file storage facility. For storing files, read on...



Screen 1



Screen 2



Screen 3

There are two main advantages of MediaFire:

- Unlimited FREE storage of files up to 100MB each.
- You can upload files in any format.

This is a wonderful facility if you're on the road and want to have an extra back-up of your camera's RAW files - just as long as you have a fast broadband internet connection - not always (or often!) available in most third-world countries you may be travelling through. Remember, the bigger the file size, the longer it will take to upload.

However, keep in mind that MediaFire was designed to let people host files and images to share with others. It is not really meant to be used as a backup service.

Uploading is so simple that I won't insult your intelligence by giving you instructions on how to do it. You can set-up a folder system in much the same way that you can on your computer's hard drive and move files from one folder to another or show your images as photograph albums (as long as they are in formats that are recognised by the album display software - such as .jpg).

The files you upload to MediaFire are not publicly accessible and can only be downloaded if you choose to share them with others by giving them a sharing URL. You also have the ability to make any and/or all of your files private or password protected at any time to provide an extra layer of security.

Another aspect of file storing and sharing on line is that you can share images, documents, drawings etc. that would be far too large to send by e-mail. This is a great aid to, say collaboration, when more than one person is working on the same document or drawing - or if you need someone to review your document/drawing - just as long as the people concerned don't get confused over which is the correct version in use or currently being worked on!

Currently, the downside of MediaFire is that you can only upload 10 files at a time. Compared with Picasa (using the free software) it's a pretty raw deal, as you can simultaneously upload any number (of images) you like to your Picasa web album. However, they will soon be launching an uploading tool that will let you upload files more efficiently.

**There is currently no time limit on how long uploaded files will be stored as long as you access your account (i.e. login to your account) at least once every 60 days OR at least one of your files is accessed (i.e. downloaded) every 30 days.**

MediaFire are expecting the features below to be implemented in the near future:

- \* An uploading tool that lets you upload files directly from your computer
- \* A Flash uploader on the main page of MediaFire that lets you select and upload more than 10 files at a time
- \* The ability to embed .png images
- \* The ability to rename files
- \* The ability to upload files directly to a folder
- \* The ability to update a file without changing its sharing URL
- \* The ability to change a file's sharing URL without re-uploading the file
- \* The ability to send a personal note when using the "e-mail this file" feature
- \* The ability to map a sub-domain of your choosing (e.g. yourname.mediafire.com) to one of your shared folders
- \* The ability to set the default sort order on your My Files page (i.e. so you can sort files by date uploaded instead of alphabetically)
- \* RSS feeds so people can subscribe to the latest files uploaded to shared folders

## WARNING!

**Using on-line storage for your files is NOT a substitute for making proper back-up copies of your images and data files.**

### *Think about this:*

What happens if the company storing your files goes off-line when you need them, or deletes your files, or goes bust? NOTE that most service providers expect you to log-on within certain time periods (i.e. every 60 days) - or **they will delete your files!**

What happens if you can't get on line when you need your files?

### ALSO:

If the hosting website is hacked into, your data may be stolen (copied), deleted or damaged.

**ALWAYS BACK-UP YOUR FILES. ONLY STORE INSENSITIVE DATA ON-LINE. NEVER STORE YOUR BANK OR CREDIT CARD DETAILS ON-LINE.**

**BACKUPWEBTOWN**

Online storage space without limits

<http://www.backupwebtown.com/community/index.php>

**PHOTOWEBTOWN**

Organize & Share Your Memories Online

<http://www.photowebtown.com/community/index.php>

By registering an account with BackupWebTown.com Community, members expressly agree that BackupWebTown.com, by its sole decision, may remove from our systems your website, username, password, access to or use of the Service, and remove and discard at our own discretion, content published within the BackupWebTown.com Community environment for any reason, including, without limitation, **for lack of use** or if BackupWebTown.com believes that you have violated or acted inconsistently with the letter or spirit of the AUP/TOS documents. BackupWebTown.com Community may also, in its sole discretion, and at any time, discontinue providing services, or any part thereof, with or without advance notice. You agree that any termination of your access to the BackupWebTown.com Community under any provision of the AUP/TOS documents may be effected without prior notice, and acknowledge and agree that BackupWebTown.com may immediately deactivate or delete your Web site and all related information and files in your content area and/or bar any further access to such files or the BackupWebTown.com environment. Further, you agree that BackupWebTown.com Community shall not be liable to you or any third-party for the termination of your access to the BackupWebTown.com Community environment.

*Always read the small print!*

---

The photograph below, of Grace taking a photograph of us (*see next page*), was taken by little lad in Trentham Park.





# Alan's Reflections

## Alan's Reflections

Many of you will know that I've been very critical of the current UK education system. I have always maintained that the level and standards of education now are far, far lower than they were when I was at secondary school from 1960 to 1965. An example of this was published in the Daily Mail on 10 July. You can see for yourself just how low our standards have dropped.

Here is a GCE O level chemistry question from the 1960s: 10dm<sup>3</sup> of nitrous oxide (dinitrogen monoxide) are passed over heated copper and the gas formed is collected. If the reaction goes to completion, and all volumes are measured at r.t.p. (room temperature and pressure), what is the volume collected and the mass of the copper (II) oxide formed? (Relative atomic mass Cu = 64). One mole of any ideal gas occupies 24dm<sup>3</sup> at r.t.p. (Answers: Volume = 10dm<sup>3</sup>. Mass = 33.3g).

Here is a GCSE chemistry question from the 2000s: The formula of magnesium chloride is MgCl<sub>2</sub>. Calculate the relative formula mass of magnesium chloride. (relative atomic masses: Cl = 35.5; Mg = 24). (Answer: 95 ((35.5 x 2) + 24)).

These questions indicate the standard expected of 16 year old pupils after 5 years of secondary education. What a difference! Even I, as a non-chemist, could answer the second question (set in the 2000s) in my head in a few seconds - it is just a simple arithmetic question. In the 1960s, this topic would have been covered within the first week or so of a pupil's chemistry education at the age of 11! The first question is much more complex and requires some understanding of the topic (unlike the second question).

The question that needs to be answered now is: just what are pupils being taught in the 5 years from the age of 11 to 16, if all they can do now is answer questions that an 11 year old could have answered in the 1960s?

Just to add insult to injury; I might add that 2000 pupils from 450 schools carried out this comparative test and their average mark on answering questions from the GCE O level questions from the 1960s was just 16%!

Anyone who achieved a pass in 5 GCE O levels (including English language and maths) in the 1960s really had to earn them - and were considered to be sufficiently well educated to be employable or to go to take the higher step up to GCE A levels where a pass in 2 or 3 subjects would get you into university (in those days universities were somewhat special places for the really high flyers, as there were also technical colleges, polytechnics, colleges of further education etc.. Now all those have been given the title of university, so bringing down the standard to the lowest common

denominator - as usual in the UK). Here we are in the 21st century and we are sending our young people into the world at the age of 16 and they are NOT considered to be employable. In fact, when I left school, the school leaving age was 15 and youngsters were still considered sufficiently educated to be employable or to start apprenticeships (as I did).

You may remember that Grace and I have recently been concerned about people not being able to think! At long last this too is now of concern to people in the real world. According to the Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Chemistry, Richard Pike: "*There is no doubt that the clever pupils are as sharp as they ever were, but most are being stifled by an educational system that does not encourage more detailed problem solving and rigorous thinking*". As the RSC said: *This is a major issue for universities and employers who need students with these abilities so they can stay internationally competitive.*

As you all know, I've been unwell recently. This gave me the opportunity to observe the workings of the National Health Service (NHS) as a patient. As you know, I've sometimes spoke out about the decline in this service and I can now reveal the truth based on my own experience.

Firstly, I would like to sing the praises of the staff who are at the sharp-end; those dealing with the patients. They are a completely dedicated and hard working group of people and do everything they can to make patients as comfortable as they can. It is these (too few) staff who are let down by a very poor system. I will tell you about my own experiences in the short time I was there.

In the Accident and Emergency Unit, I was attended to quite quickly and given the necessary tests to enable a diagnosis to be made. After being in bed for several hours, I still hadn't been given a blanket or a pillow. I asked for these to be provided and when they arrived I asked for an extra pillow. I was told there weren't any! I said "*surely you have spares.*" "*Yes*" said the nurse, "*but they've all been used.*" Obviously, they have insufficient stock. I also asked about food as I hadn't eaten more than a bowl of cereal all day and it was now well into the evening. I was told the only food available in the A&E unit was sandwiches. With a sore throat this wasn't exactly an exciting prospect. I asked the guy in the next bed about them and he said he'd had a cheese sandwich which comprised two slices of white bread with a piece of cheese inside - not even any butter on the bread!

When I was moved into another ward, the two nurses had fourteen patients (beds) to look after. In reality, this amounted to rather more as the turnover was very high as the ward was used as a *holding ward* prior to distributing patients to other units as beds became available.

The two nurses were extremely overloaded - to the extent that the unit manager (also a highly experienced nurse) got an apron on and went to help them. In this situation, it is obvious that patient care suffered very considerably. In my

case, my antibiotic drip was not only late in being connected, but also connected without due care. Despite my reminding them (and being in pain), this went on and on. One nurse came and said it was dripping slowly (in actual fact, too slowly) and went away. The other nurse came to attend to it but was called away before she got started - to photocopy some important documents - obviously more important than a patient in pain and discomfort! Eventually she returned and got my drip sorted out and working properly. This was some hours after my medication should have been administered. On the topic of food; Although meals were better organised than in the A&E unit, I still couldn't get a cup of tea until breakfast (cereal and toast) was served at 0830hrs. No one had any time to get me one!

In many ways, the big problem that the NHS has to rectify is that the staff no longer have time for the patients. They are so overloaded that the patients have just become items on a production line instead of human beings who have needs and concerns (and fears, when unwell) as individuals. While I was (eventually) having my drip sorted out, the nurse told me it had got so bad that she was seriously thinking of resigning. The shortage of staff was phenomenal. Another,

not unimportant, example of this was the fact that I was given no warning at all that I was to be moved to another hospital. No one had any **time** to talk to me about anything. It wasn't until I'd flatly refused to be moved that the unit manager came to me to explain the way the system operated. All the staff were very understanding of my situation once they'd listened to my explanation, but this was too little, too late.

Another issue is waiting times. In the walk-in clinic the waiting time while we were there went up to over 2 hours (although I didn't wait quite that long). The notice I saw in the reception area of the hospital indicated a waiting time of 3 hours! This is not acceptable for sick people, many of whom will have had quite a struggle (as I did) to get there at all - as house visits are a thing of the past. Again, this indicates a serious staff shortage in all areas of the NHS. The more pressure the staff have to endure, the more likely they are to resign and go into other (private/industry/overseas) positions that permit them time to do their job properly and probably pay them better too. The staff turnaround in the NHS caused by staff shortages is in itself costing the NHS a great deal of money - which would have been better spent in retaining existing staff by increasing their numbers.

---

## *All the fun of the fair - at Trentham Park*



