

Northern *news*

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

NOVEMBER 2008



Editorial Ramblings



Following the recent *Photokina* in Cologne, there may well be a number of you wondering if I'll be rushing off to the shops this month to purchase the new successor to my Canon EOS 5D camera, the MkII version - a stunning camera if ever there was one. The answer is not as simple as you might think as, yes, I'd certainly love to get my hands on one, but there would

be no point in my doing so. The resolution of the camera I currently have is rather better than my lenses, so instead of upgrading my camera, I first need to upgrade my Canon lenses to those usually purchased only by the very well-heeled or professional photographer. Canon make two ranges of lenses, and all my lenses fall into the standard range - that is: cheap and cheerful! To buy the three lenses, and the few other bits and pieces

I need, from the better quality range, is likely to set me back about £3000. Only then will I be able to get the best out of my current camera - so the £2300 upgrade to the MkII camera body will have to wait a while, maybe until there is a MkIII version in a few years time. Another, albeit fairly minor, factor is that Adobe say they will not be supporting this camera in their *Photoshop CS3* program - only in the new *CS4* version - a very expensive upgrade, although not an absolute necessity as Canon provide their own, very good, RAW processing software called *Digital Photo Professional*.

By the time you read this, we will have been in the UK for 5 months. Doesn't time fly (even when you're NOT enjoying yourself). I was talking to Grace, only this morning, about the way I felt about being here. It all started when I peered out of the window and there happened to be some, albeit a little watery, sunshine - to the point where I would have normally gone out to take some photographs. That said, by the time I'd have grabbed my camera and gone out, the weather had returned to its normal overcast, miserable looking self. As I was saying, Grace was encouraging me to go and take some photographs, but, as I told her, I don't know where to go! I went on to say that I'm not used to city living (even in Doha, we had the sea and the desert very close at hand), as I'd almost always lived in, or very near to, the countryside and within a very short distance of the sea. In fact, from my last two homes in the UK, I could see the sea from my living room windows. In Wolverhampton, we're about as far from the sea as it is possible to be in the UK, and, whilst there are areas of countryside not too far away, I'm not yet sure where to find them. Despite living in an area considered quite affluent, the daughter of one of my colleagues, who lives nearby, was mugged (robbed at knife-point), just a few days ago. Is it any wonder I want to get out of here? Another sad fact about being here is that I rarely see daylight! During winter, I travel to work in the dark and return in the dark. My office has no outside windows as it is stuck in a building more like an aeroplane hanger. Grim!



Photograph above: Grace and Little Lad on the bridge over the River Dee in Llangollen on a wet winter's day.

Cover photograph: Taken from the towing path of one of the canals near our former home in Stoke-on-Trent - by Grace.

An experiment I tried recently was to have a book printed. During our last visit to Hong Kong I had just a few days to take some photographs after getting my camera from the repair centre. Many of you might remember the photographs, as some were published in this magazine and on one of our web-galleries. Anyway, I thought it would be nice to put them into a hard-back book, so I spent some time sorting out the best photographs and arranging them as I wanted them in the book. I then uploaded them and after about 10 days my book arrived - WOW! was I excited? Was I pleased? Yes! This was a GREAT success, so much so that I can recommend this service to you all. Now then, here is the surprise: The website I used was that of the cut-price supermarket chain of, would you believe, Tesco! Yes, that's right. Grace and I called into one of their branches en-route to a party one Saturday evening and I happened to pick up their photographic brochure and their photo-books were advertised inside. On Sunday morning, I downloaded their free software and gave it a try. After sorting and editing my photographs I uploaded them on Sunday evening and that was it until the postman called 10 days later. The printing was well done and the (optional) printed covers made it look like a book from a bookshop. This is a book of dimensions about 11.25 inches x 8.5 inches (285 mm x 215 mm, roughly), and comprises 54 pages + covers. The maximum page count on this site is 60 pages. The cost of this little experiment was just over £33 - cheaper than printing all the photographs with my own printer - and with a hard cover. There are 49 photographs + those on the front and rear covers (including 2x double page panoramas), that provide us with a great souvenir of our visit to this lovely part of the world. In fact, we can't wait to get back there!

On November 13, Grace and I celebrated our eighth wedding anniversary. Looking back over those eight years, it seems quite amazing that we've had so many adventures and been to so many countries - and had our Little lad too! We thank God for keeping us safe and in good health and that we love each other now, even more than we did all those years ago when we first got married. During those eight years we've made a number of good friends with whom we are still in contact, even though we are many miles apart, as our friends mean so much to us, just like our family, who are also scattered around the world.

Just the other day, we had the good news that Grace's mother has, at long last, obtained a passport. It's taken years to get this far! Anyway, it paves the way for her to apply for a visa to come and see us. We are hoping that she, together with Nadia and Michelle, will visit us next year, during the time of year when we should be having our summer (we didn't get ANY summer this year!). In fact, we woke up to yet more snow and misery this morning. Like many countries, the UK is a very lovely place (given a little sunshine) ruined only by the people and, particularly, the politicians. I'm almost counting the days (at least another 1000) to when we can get out of here for ever, but we're trying to make the best of a bad job, so will be doing our utmost to show our family around the beautiful parts of the UK, when (if) they eventually get here.



Little Lad by the piers that support the bridge over the River Severn at Ironbridge - by Grace

Fortune takes Britain hostage

by Melanie Phillips

Daily Mail, 10 November 2008

With all eyes fixed upon the political excitements in the U.S, few have paid much attention to a trip made by the Prime Minister several thousand miles in the opposite direction.

A week ago Gordon Brown, accompanied by his new best friend the Business Secretary Lord Mandelson, went cap in hand to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to ask them to help bail out the stricken economies of the West by pumping billions into the International Monetary Fund.

It is more than a little strange that the British Prime Minister should have apparently taken it upon himself to speak on behalf of the IMF. But the real concern is that asking for help from Saudi Arabia is not like tapping your friendly neighbourhood bank manager for a bigger overdraft.

No, this loan comes with a devastating IOU — nothing less than a big slice of control over Britain and the West by a regime at the heart of the attempt to bring about the Islamisation of the free world.

Granted, this country is facing a truly grave financial crisis. But does this mean we should remortgage the future of the West to those whose most radical elements are actively engaged in seeing it destroyed?

I have long been concerned by Britain's failure to acknowledge the true nature of the threat from global Islamism. This latest move is yet more alarming evidence of that process.

Saudi Arabia is at the root of the Islamic onslaught against the West. It is Saudi's Wahhabi form of Islam which, along with its Shi'ite counterpart in Iran, aims to restore the dominance of Islam in the world and destroy rule by 'unbelievers'.

It is Saudi money which has fuelled the enormous spread of Wahhabi mosques, preachers and educational institutions in this country, delivering the message of holy war and radicalising countless thousands of British Muslims.

And it is this Saudi ideology which was the inspiration for Al Qaeda. True, Al Qaeda turned upon Saudi itself on account of its ties with the U.S. As a result, Saudi regards Al Qaeda as its mortal enemy, and as such co-operates with Britain and the U.S in combating it.

But sometimes, to rephrase the old adage, our enemy's enemy is not actually our friend, but our enemy as well.

Saudi Wahhabism seeks to conquer the West through a pincer movement comprising violence on the one hand and cultural infiltration and takeover on the other.

At the very least, Saudi Arabia speaks with the most lethal of forked tongues, and we should actively be seeking to diminish its influence over our affairs. But instead our Prime Minister is effectively offering it yet more opportunity to control us.

Mr Brown claimed he did not want such investment to be used to gain political influence. But Lord Mandelson blurted out the truth when he acknowledged that the Saudis and other Gulf states would expect a bigger role in global institutions in return.

This should be enough to chill the British marrow. Islamic influence is already spreading in Britain and the West, way beyond Muslim communities themselves.

The Islamic world is buying a financial stake in increasing numbers of Western institutions. Among its latest acquisitions are Manchester City Football Club, which was sold to the ruling family of Abu Dhabi, and Barclays Bank, which has secured an almost £6 billion capital injection from Abu Dhabi and Qatar.

Extremist Islamist ideas are also being spread through Islamic study centres attached to our universities. According to Professor Anthony Glee, eight universities — including Oxford and Cambridge — have accepted more than £233.5 million from Saudi and Muslim sources since 1995, spreading radicalism and helping create within Britain two separate identities and sets of allegiance.

Shockingly, Saudi blackmail has also forced Britain to suspend its own rule of law by ditching the bribery investigation into the arms deal between Saudi Arabia and BAE systems, in response to an explicit threat made by the Saudi authorities that, if the case continued, '*British lives on British streets*' would be at risk.

Those aren't my words, they are from Britain's former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles. Thus, the Islamists are already pulling British strings through the supremely manipulative combination of the threat of violence and the lure of unbridled wealth.

Apparently oblivious to all this, however, Mr Brown has pledged to make London the global centre of Islamic banking. Accordingly, Britain's major banks are eagerly embracing sharia finance, on the basis that it is a source of vast wealth.

What they fail to realise is that sharia is also a project for Islamising society, and wherever it is embraced it will use its position to do precisely that. The assumption is that sharia banking — which has at its heart the prohibition of interest — accords with ancient Islamic religious principles. Not so.

Sharia banking was devised by mid-20th century Islamist ideologues specifically to further their strategy for global Islamic rule by creating separate administrative systems.

Muslims are required to donate a proportion of their income to charity, including the money

that goes through the sharia banking system.

Yet in many instances, the clerics deciding where this 'charity' money should go are the spiritual godfathers of terror, such as Sheik Yusuf Qaradawi, who supports suicide bombing in Iraq and Israel, and Sheik Muhammed Taqi Usmani, who has admitted he ran a madrassa that supported the Taliban, yet who sits on the sharia supervisory board of the Dow Jones Islamic Index Fund.

It's no surprise, then, that many charitable donations end up being channelled straight into terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

But apart from being a global money-laundering exercise for terrorism, sharia banking is also a beachhead in the attempt by radical Islam to infiltrate British and Western society.

The key point is that sharia does not recognise the superior authority of the secular law of the land. Sharia financial institutions may not be making this clear — they don't want to frighten people away — but at some future time they may do so. This is how they will endeavour to spread sharia beyond their own territory.

There are already examples of sharia regulations over-riding commercial decisions. Citibank, for example, launched the Saudi American Bank (SAB) in Jeddah and Riyadh. In 1980, the Saudis abruptly seized the SAB, denied Citibank all future profits and ordered it to train Saudi staffs because the bank was judged insufficiently Muslim.

When trillions of pounds and dollars become locked into Islamic banking and Saudi and other Islamic institutions, who will be in a position to argue with the Islamists when they finally call in their IOUs?

But our politicians and financiers seem blind to this prospect — because they are mesmerised by the seductive prospect of so much wealth.

Moreover, the British establishment does not believe that what we are being subjected to is a religious war. That is why their response to the steady encroachment of Islamic radicalism in our society is so weak.

And that is why I fear the British Prime Minister is in danger of selling this country to those who are intent upon undermining our most treasured freedoms.

More than giving hostages to fortune, he is enabling fortune itself to hold Britain hostage.

Courtesy of Melanie Phillips at URL:

<http://www.melaniephillips.com/articles-new/?p=624>



Ana Marie

We were delighted to attend the Christening of Ana Marie, the daughter of our friends, Malcolm and Wilma. The service was held in the Roman Catholic church of St. Gregory in Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, on 16 November 2008.





They shall not grow old as we who are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

11 a.m. on 11 November

the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month



River Dee in Llangollen

I have written, many times, about the decline in standards of education in the UK, and supported my claims often enough too, however, there have been a few people who argue against the facts (and one can NEVER successfully argue against a fact!), so here is yet another article that backs-up my claim that the UK has lost the plot when it comes to educating our young people (as well as in everything else) - the future of our country. Based on this, and my previously published articles, is it any wonder this country is in a state of decline?

Gove's long march back

by Melanie Phillips
The Spectator, 19 November 2008

The Tories' education spokesman Michael Gove has consistently shown that he gets the most important point about the collapse of Britain's education system: that it's not just the structures that have gone badly wrong -- the schools and the education authorities that run them -- but the substance of what is actually taught, or to be more precise the absence of any substance as the concept of education itself has systematically been eviscerated. For years it has been obvious that the claims of ever-rising levels of achievement have been utterly bogus, since examination standards and the content of the syllabus have been steadily lowered and hollowed out in order to achieve this sleight of hand through grade inflation and exam devaluation. As children 'achieve' more and more, they learn less and less. In a speech yesterday evening at the Haberdashers' Foundation Gove provided yet more evidence of this calamity:

Peter Tymms at the University of Durham has shown that a student achieving an E in A level maths in 1998 would have achieved a B in 2004. And Duncan Lawson from the University of Coventry has shown that students entering university in 2001 with a B at Maths A level displayed the level of knowledge which 10 years before would have been shown by a student with a grade N - or fail.

Indeed students who failed the Maths A level in 1991 performed better overall in tests of mathematical competence than those who secured a B pass in 2001. Dr Jonathan Ramsay and John Corner have analysed maths papers from the 1960s to the present day and found topics which once used to be set for 16 year olds at the old O-level and even the CSE, which was designed for less academic pupils, now crop up in A-levels.

Their report pointed out that 'finding areas and volumes using calculus, which used to be examined at O level are now examined in A level pure mathematics, but it is the O level questions which are harder' and, perhaps even more shockingly, 'some applied mathematics CSE papers from the 1970s are almost indistinguishable from the mechanics unit one A level paper, with some CSE topics even overlapping with unit two. One calculus topic from

O level pure mathematics is now to be found at A level.'

And here's a 'science' GCSE exam question:

Residents have a variety of thoughts concerning the siting of the new power station. Two views are -

- 1) The nuclear power station will provide employment in the area.**
- 2) Any release of radioactive material would be very dangerous.**

Which statements are arguments in favour of siting the nuclear power station here - 1 only, 2 only, both 1 and 2 or neither...

Oh dear.

Gove continued to tear the system apart to show the cynical racket that it has become in massaging expectations ever upwards while emptying knowledge, achievement and education itself of any meaning. He correctly identified what has happened as part of a Gramscian 'long march through the institutions' -- and there aren't many Tories who have understood this crucial point and its devastating implications. He not only proposes that all state schools should be able to choose what public examinations to offer their pupils but he also wants a return to fact-based learning, with children sitting in rows. Brave man. He will have to take on the entire education establishment and a doctrine of progressive education which has captured not just the teaching profession but the institutions that train it, the university departments of education, the government ministry in charge of de-educating Britain, the curriculum body and the Ofsted regulators charged with ensuring standards are maintained but whose checks -- see this week's Civitas report -- are 'superficial' and 'worthless'. It's a task at which Sisyphus himself would have blanched.

Courtesy of Melanie Phillips at URL: <http://www.spectator.co.uk/melaniephillips/3021871/goves-long-march-back.shtml>

Photograph overleaf:

Grace and Little Lad at the National Sea Life Centre in Birmingham - 30 November 2008.

