



# Maiden Road News



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2000 Edition



## Encore, but no Dome

So what do we make of the new Millennium? The Labour Party appear to be adding National to their Socialist title; America has elected Dan Quayle's love-child as President (is there any other explanation for that intellect?); the euro appears to be defying the rules of physics: 10 metres per second squared is supposed to be a maximum rate of descent; and Britain has rediscovered its role as Perfidious Albion. Peace initiatives in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, the Middle East totter on and off.

I've decided that this was not really the first year of the new Millennium at all, but the last year of the old one. Which means we get the chance to do it all again – and get it right, this time.

## Hiya, Education

The MA continues. I am on track for finishing in June; I've finished the writing, all I have to do is get it bound and presented. It feels strange to think that it has been such a large part on my life, and it is now nearly over. In fact I can't stop researching and writing, and I'm seriously considering a PhD when this is over. Of course, it means I have to find someone willing to tutor me, but I think it will be worth the effort. Never too late to learn!

## Dome, Eye and Bridge

We've visited the first two, but are still awaiting our chance to set wobbly foot on the third. No doubt most of you are aware of the wonderful array of goodies St Tony of the Blair gave us to celebrate the year 2000: there was the River of Fire - two sparklers on an old barge; there was the reform of the Lords - only those who could limbo under an 3metre bar were allowed to stay; and there was a new bridge, which had to deal with traffic no heavier than John Prescott – and still didn't work.

In addition we had the Dome. An amazing feat of engineering, it is also amazing for a complete lack of function. As an amusement centre it is appalling, rating somewhere between a root canal and another root canal. We visited in May, and took various family with us to enjoy the day out. I have to say that the under-18s appeared to enjoy the experience, but for us it proved a serious disappointment: not exciting, not entertaining, just a traipse around a museum devoted to kitsch – not so much the Victoria & Albert, more the Tony & Cherie. Still, it was a day out, and the sun mostly shone.



In comparison, the London Eye is tremendous fun. A ride takes about 40 minutes, although it passes very quickly, and the view over London is truly spectacular. They don't cram people into the pods, we had plenty of room to walk about, and everyone got all the pictures they wanted. I can recommend it to all visitors, you get to see all the famous places of London in one short "flight". I

was even able to claim "I can see my house from here", although without any real truth. But we could see Stratford station, which is close enough.



## That's Old Business Already

This year I have had more than one opportunity to practice my slobbering-about-the-home skills. This has not been a good year for work, and I have had two long lay-offs so far. Nonetheless, I have done a lot better than some of my fellow-consultants who have been unemployed for months at a time. I, at least, have had two longer-term contracts and a few small ones to fill in.

I have also had a chance to write a Visual Basic interface to the mainframe, which has expanded my skills and my CV very nicely, thank you. As my mainframe skills are becoming less saleable I am looking to expand my PC expertise, and this was a very useful contract.

One notable event this year was the start of IR35, a Government attempt to penalise self-employed people who they believe should really be employed. As with most Govt things, it's their game, their rules, our penalties. They have said that companies are allowed to keep 5% of their receipts to cover operating costs, the rest has to be treated as personal earned income.

This means that, in a good year, the company gets to pay out about £500 more than it is allowed to keep. In the words of Micawber: result, misery. I can continue to keep afloat by cutting down on "luxuries" like training, software and hardware, but this is obviously a short-term solution. Eventually I will be so out-of-date that I will be unemployable. Also, the longer I try to stay afloat the older I get, and the less likely it is that I'll get another job.

So, by next Yuletide I'll either be back as an ordinary employee, or on the dole. This has put a serious dent in my plans to retire at 55, and I will never forgive Labour for this.

Philip has had his own problems with the Govt (mainly because he works for them), and the departmental reorganisations have meant that he has changed jobs twice this year. He continues to enjoy his work, but he is working much harder. He has had several late-night sessions in the House, supporting various Ministers. I think they call it "Care in the Community".

## Pink Singers

Well, the CD is finally out. If you have not had a copy yet and want to hear it then let us know. My favourite tracks are "Corner of the Sky" and "Big City", but they are all surprisingly good (well, I was surprised).

The Pinkies have had one major concert this year, at Fulham Town Hall with the Deep C Divas. They are also doing their Yule concert at the Royal Academy of Music with the Paris choir, Melo'Men. Other than that it has been a quiet year

– the only other event of note was singing in Leicester Square for Mardi Gras (apparently, Gay Pride is Old Hat nowadays). Oh, and going to America (see below)

## Sans of Beaches

In July we went to San Jose with the Pink Singers for their performances at GALA. The concerts went very well, but the city of San Jose is a most peculiar place: it's like one big shopping mall, but without any shops. The public transport closes at 10pm, there are few taxis, and the insect life is non-existent (other than the evangelists). Apparently they spray regularly, but the evangelists keep coming back.

Fortunately, after SJ we were able to take a few days in SF, further up the bay. We stayed with our friend Glenn at his home in the heart of the Castro, and got to see all the important bits of SF. We spent a whole day in Golden Gate Park and walked from the Haight-Ashbury end all the way to the sea. We also travelled the cable car, saw Fisherman's Wharf and did all the touristy things that one does.

One of the highlights of the holiday was the day spent with Nanette and Steven, people I have been corresponding with for years. Nanette took us on a tourbus ride of the city, and we got to see the Golden Gate Bridge from several angles, including underneath and on top. This was probably the high point of the holiday for Philip.



## Other Events

The main event this year is the emigration of my brother Micheal and his family to Melbourne in a few weeks time. Boy, am I jealous! We had a send-off party, which proved to be emotional but celebratory, despite the absence of Dad.

At the beginning of October my Father was diagnosed as having lung cancer. Due to his age it is inoperable, and he is not well enough for chemotherapy. He is comfortable, and the family is doing what it can, but all we can do is wait.

All in all, rather a Horrible Anus of a year - yet another reason to consign it to the old millennium. Still, next year starts with nearly a month in Oz. This is the holiday that is going to have to last me until retirement, so I'm going to make the most of it! I have also promised myself a new car, and I'll probably need to reconsider my entire life plan. Until then...



**HAPPY YULE AND A GOOD NEW YEAR!**