

# Pseud's Corner

John Keats, the Romantic poet, concluded "Ode on a Grecian Urn" with the thought: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all/Ye know on earth and need to know."

Had Keats been in Los Angeles this week, he could have predicted the winner of the coming video game console battle between Sony's third PlayStation and Microsoft's second Xbox.

JOHN GAPPER  
Financial Times



...now, to make my tea, I need two good-sized mugs. I boil the kettle. The hot water goes into one mug first, stays for a few seconds so the mug is heated, then goes into the second mug. The tea bag goes into the first, hot, mug, boiling water is poured in, to within a couple of millimetres of the top, and the two mugs, one containing brewing tea, and the other containing hot water, are left to stand. After about five minutes, the mug of brewed tea is placed in the sink, where some new hot water (freshly re-boiled) from the kettle, is sloshed into it, so it overflows by about half a mug. This is to stop the well-brewed tea being too strong. The full-to-overflowing mug is now tilted a little bit, so it spills out enough tea to allow room for some milk.

Remember the second mug, full of the hot (now not so hot, but still quite hot) water that was used to warm the first mug? That is now emptied. The tea bag is fished out from the first 'brewing' mug and placed in the bottom of the empty 'warm' mug, where a small splash of warm milk is poured over it. The effect of the hot tea bag, and still-warm milk, is to take the chill off the milk... [continues for quite some while]

HUGH FEARNLEY-WHITTINGSTALL  
makes a cup of tea, *Observer Food Magazine*

Recent research, reported in the spring issue of the Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics (which is, incidentally, by far the best publication of its kind I read)...

PAUL JOHNSON  
Spectator

## Pseud's Corporate

Castle Street has been selected for implementation as an early action exemplar project to demonstrate the aspiration for quality that will help promote Edinburgh's New Town as a prime destination and retail experience.

Sign in Edinburgh city centre

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£10 paid for all entries

## IN THE BACK

ID CARDS

### THE WAR ON ERROR

**A**S BRITISH MPs wake up to the likelihood that ID cards may be a multibillion pound failure thanks to poor biometric trial results and big predicted increases in costs, warnings from the United States don't bode well either.

When the White House office of management and budget investigated 33 homeland security initiatives involving many firms that are potential ID card contractors, it found that only four of the projects had been effective.

Of the ineffective ones, a scheme called US-Visit is particularly relevant to the ID card debate here in Britain. The 10-year, \$10bn contract for a computer network to screen foreigners visiting or leaving the US, recording their details and checking them against terrorist suspect databases, was won by Accenture. It promised a futuristic system with "biometric" face and fingerprint recognition, but as the US general accounting office (GAO) found, costs would be well above the \$7.2bn estimate and this "very risky endeavour" would probably cost "in the tens of billions".

Even less encouraging was its conclusion that "it is uncertain that US-Visit will be able to measurably and appreciably achieve the Department for Homeland Security's stated goals for the program".

Guess what! Accenture is a likely bidder for ID card work in Britain; and Ian Watmore, head of "E Government" here, is a former Accenture chief executive and ID card enthusiast. When he was appointed last year he suggested he would lead the project. So that's all right, then.

**serco**  
bringing service to life

**S**ERCO is another company that is keen to ride the biometric-identity gravy train.

In Britain it is known for running hospitals and prisons, but the company also belongs to the International Association for Biometrics, a British trade association pursuing identity-related work and chaired by Clive Reedman, a former Scotland Yard fingerprint expert.

Serco is keen to emphasise its computing skills in the US and is likely to bid for ID card work in Britain too. But its so-called database expertise has let it down badly with Britain's National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS).

In 2001 it was awarded the contract to develop this database to record the treatment of drug abusers. It boasted that its solution would be "robust" but distinguished by its "ease of use". Whoops! In a quiet renationalisation last year, the treatment agency took over responsibility for the database.

As the health department told the *Eye*: "Developments in the government's drug strategy meant there were changes in the data that was needed by the department. Serco and the department reached an amicable commercial settlement concerning the work undertaken to that point."

Really? Last year when the Welsh Assembly considered buying into Serco's drug treatment database, it decided not to because "problems with the NDTMS (SERCO software system) continue, to the extent that it may still be abandoned. Input times are lengthy and the system is unable to provide reports making analysis impossible".

AVIATION

## Flying tonight

**T**OURISTS staying in the seaside resort of Ramsgate rather than jetting off on cheap holidays, may be in for a rude awakening.

The town, which is just 1,000 metres from the end of the runway at "Kent International Airport" (formerly RAF Manston), faces a summer of late night noise from budget airline EUjet.

Thanet district council supports the idea of night flights but pacified local objectors with the promise of a six-month public consultation. However, while the consultation was running, the Campaign to Protect Rural England found that EUjet was offering tickets for flights landing after midnight this summer. Clearly it was under the impression that a public consultation was nothing to worry about.

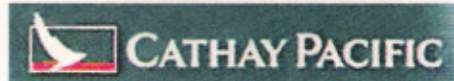
And in fact it wasn't. As soon as EUjet received its international flight slots, the consultation was curtailed and Thanet council gave temporary permission for night flights from April to September to "secure the future" of the airline. A consultation on whether to renew the permission is now being held.

In fact expansion at Manston has largely flown under the planning radar. When it ceased to be a military site, the civil operator Planestation was simply granted certificates of lawfulness. With the arrival of EUjet and the construction of a new cargo depot, the site now covers 20 hectares, even though no environmental impact assessment has ever been carried out.

Elsewhere in Kent, meanwhile, campaigners against the expansion of Lydd Airport (see *Eye* 1130) have discovered where the money is coming from for the operator's plans to expand to a "two million passenger a year capability by 2010".

Sheikh Fahad al-Athel acquired a controlling 70 percent interest in the airport in 2001 and has since invested millions to upgrade facilities. He also owns the neighbouring golf course outright. The sheikh has featured in these pages before: he was a director of Al Bilad (UK) alongside former treasury minister and convicted perjurer Jonathan Aitken.

In 1989 Aitken arranged for al-Athel to get 15 per cent commission (illegal under Saudi business law) if he persuaded the Saudi regime to buy £400m worth of helicopter weaponry from British arms firm BMARC, part of the immense defence contract known as "Al Yamamah". Aitken and the government would go on to deny having paid bribes to clinch the deals.



**F**IVE Cathay Pacific pilots can have access to British employment rights after all thanks to a ruling in the appeal court. The decision has implications for a plethora of offshore workers and people employed in international transport.

The five pilots were among the 49 sacked by Cathay during the 2001 work-to-rule by the Pilots Association over pay and hours (see *Eye* 1057). The pilots were never given proper written reasons for their dismissal and have challenged the airline in the courts of several countries.

The pilots who won the ruling on 19 May had contracts of employment with Veta Ltd, a subsidiary of Cathay Pacific based at Heathrow, which allowed the airline to employ pilots who lived in Europe, rather than have to pay higher salaries to pilots based in expensive Hong Kong.

At an earlier tribunal Cathay had argued that despite this, the nature of the job meant the pilots' work was mainly outside the UK and they were thus not covered by the employment relations act. They could thus be sacked willy-nilly, since no one had jurisdiction to do anything about it.