

THE DREAM SCENE

Newsletter

Issue no. 34 1st of December 2009



Bienvenido and welcome to the Christmas edition of The Dream Scene.

In this issue I have not included anything about the Spanish Christmas. I covered it at length last December so I thought I would spare you this year!

Well, we have had an excellent run with the good weather this year. November has been beautiful and it has only recently started to get chilly in the evenings. Today, Sunday the 29th, we have had some rain at long last, not a downpour but enough to keep the plants ticking over.

This month's issue is a full twelve pages which includes an excellent report on the natural park at *Cazorla* by Pat & Adrian Cartwright, two of Angela's excellent cartoons and some humour submitted by yourselves. Remember, if you would like to write a page on a trip - good or bad - you have experienced over here, a restaurant review or a book review, I would be only too pleased to include them.

The rumour mill has been grinding relentlessly not only in Dream Hills but throughout the Orihuela Costa and Torrevieja as well. This time it is about Iberdrola, the main electricity supplier in this area. The most common rumour is that if you sign a new contract at their offices in Pilar de Horidada, you will not be charged any increases in your electricity rate next year. Variations on this are - If you do not sign on you will be cut off - if you sign on you will get three years without an increase in rate - and if you sign on and are a pensioner, you will get a reduced rate. At this stage hundreds of people have now travelled down there to sign new contracts. However there is nothing in writing from the company regarding these or similar offers. While perusing on-line bulletin boards in this area I came across a posting where a chap wrote to Iberdrola regarding a proposed 5% increase next year if he did not sign a new contract. They replied that the information was not correct and that it was not necessary to sign a new contract. This all seems to me like a local 'initiative' by some staff at Iberdrola anxious to meet targets and possibly trying to 'sucker' the expats. I am as sceptical about Iberdrola's methods as I am of Telefonica's. I am aware of people who have signed new contracts earlier this year after being promised no increases, then receiving a 4 cent per unit increase in the summer! At the moment we are paying 11.473 cent.€/kWh. I would expect this and everybody else's rate to increase next year. We have not signed a new contract so it will be interesting to compare rates in 2010 with those who have signed on.

More important in my opinion is to check your electricity bills from last July onwards. You should receive an invoice every month. If at the top right-hand side of your bill it says *Factura de Energia Verde*, this means that you have been placed on the more expensive environmentally green tariff which costs another 3 to 4 cents per unit! They have been known to do this arbitrarily and often. You can request that Iberdrola put you back on the standard tariff.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our advertisers and readers.



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WINE, NIBBLES AND OF
COURSE MINCE PIES, SO COME
AND JOIN US IF YOU CAN!!!**



Angela's Cartoon



'Did you manage to find something for Mother?'

WHAT'S UP?

The main story in the Spanish media during the last month was in relation to the seizure by Somalian pirates of the Spanish fishing boat, the Alakrana, together with its crew of 36. The crew were released after 47 days in captivity following the payment of a 2.3 million € Although the Spanish government denied that it paid any ransom, Spanish President Zapatero stated 'we did what we had to do.' Four armed security guards have now been placed on each of the 13 Spanish tuna trawlers in the Indian Ocean at a monthly cost of half a million euro. The ship owners will meet half the cost, with the remainder being split between the central and respective regional government. Two of the original Somali kidnappers were snatched and brought back to Spain. The courts now cannot decide what to do with them.

The Alicante provincial court recently turned down the appeals placed by nine police officers against their charges in what has become known as the Torreveja torture case. The trial will now go ahead which relates to allegations by a man, a Guatemalan, arrested for robbery that he and his girlfriend were beaten by local police officers after they were taken into custody in June 2006. They were arrested while trying to break into the home of a police inspector and were 'duffed-up' at the police station. The councillor responsible for the police has also been charged.

The number of foreign tourists arriving in Spain for the year to October was 9.3% down on the same period last year.

A judge who is investigating suspected fiscal fraud to the tune of 4.4 million € during the construction of the Terra Mítica theme park in Benidorm, has requested information from banks in Andorra. Money, which was to be invested in the theme park, is believed to have ended up there, transported across the border in suitcases. Some 30 suspects and 20 businesses are implicated in the case over alleged false invoices issued for work which was not carried out.

Well, the *looney left* are at it again, this time in Extremadura. The Junta de Extremadura has launched an advertising campaign to promote masturbation workshops under the slogan 'The pleasure is in your hands' - *El placer está en tus manos*. No, this is not a windup. The campaign which started this November is to teach youngsters how to masturbate and also encourages them to explore self-eroticism, stroking, and using lubricants and erotic toys. 14,000 € of taxpayers money, within an area with the worst unemployment record in Spain, has been allocated to the project. 25 boys and girls aged between 15 and 17 were to attend two workshops on November 20. Reminds me of the following joke -

The doctor said.. "Harry, you have to stop jerking-off".

Harry replied "Why, will it make me blind?"..

The doctor said.. "No, you're upsetting everyone in the waiting room!"

The newspaper ABC reports that the Caja Castilla La Mancha granted loans last year worth 982 million € to people who were linked to its board. The paper says there were 87 loans each at an average 11.2 million € The Bank of Spain intervened when the bank went bust in March this year.

Spain's National Competition Commission has fined six insurance companies a record €120.7 million for colluding to set minimum premiums charged to real estate developers for liability insurance against building defects. Mapfre, Caser and Swiss Re are among the guilty ones. It appears that the fined companies acted as a cartel, boycotting the companies who resisted.

Deloitte, the international accounting and consulting firm, have taken a rather pessimistic view of the forthcoming Christmas in Spain. They predict that family spending in Spain is expected to fall 19% overall and that spending on food and parties at home will be down by a massive 41%.

The casinos and bingo games in Spain are also feeling the recession. Their National Association has announced a 19% fall in business this year.

The lack of cash is forcing 149 mortgages to be re-negotiated every day in the province of Alicante, according to the *Información* newspaper. The paper reports that the number for the province is the highest in Spain, beating other high numbers in Valencia, Madrid and Barcelona. Small businesses are also complaining that the banks are just not lending to them anymore.

The AVE high-speed train service link is expected to come to Alicante in 2012 and Murcia in 2014.

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How to tell the sex of a fly.

A woman walked into the kitchen to find her husband stalking around with a fly swatter

"What are you doing?" She asked.

"Hunting flies." He responded.

"Oh! Killing any?" She asked.

"Yep, 3 males, 2 Females," he replied.

Intrigued, she asked. "How can you tell them apart?"

He replied, "3 were on a beer can, 2 were on the phone." (Martin Jung)

There have been a number of spats between HM Royal Navy and the naval branch of the Guardia Civil in the coastal waters off Gibraltar. UK and British ministers are playing the incidents down. Expect more!

The Financial Times has rated the Spanish Minister of Finance & the Economy as one of the worst in Europe. Out of a total of 19, the minister, Elena Salgado, was rated at number 16, beating the respective ministers from Hungary, Greece and Ireland - who was rated the worst. The French minister was rated the best at number 1 with the British Minister, Alistar Darling, at number 8.

12 tons of cannabis was seized in a single raid on an industrial estate in nearby Santa Pola. The drug was hidden in 10,000 kilos of fish, which has also been confiscated.

The Socialist Mayor of Estepona has admitted that the town hall has run out of money. Whereas they have paid all the clerical staff at the town hall, the 1,300 municipal workers - such as refuse collectors, cleaners, firemen etc - have not been paid since late September. Obviously some socialists are more equal than others.

The supermarket chain Mercadona has put off plans to expand outside of Spain. They have said that increased competition at home is now their main concern. (See Out & About)

The Santander banking group has been hauled before the courts in Miami. One of their investment banking offshoots, Optimal, invested 3,450 million dollars of their clients' funds in the Madoff *Ponzi* scheme. Their clients are claiming that Optimal violated its own internal procedures for monitoring and control of the investments.

In a welcome move the Nazari Palaces of the Alhambra in Granada will be made more accessible to wheelchairs late next year. This policy will also be extended to other historic national monuments.

The Spanish police have more than 100 new rules regarding dress code, grooming etc. One of the new rules is that they are not to wear sunglasses indoors. As Larry David, (of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*) said, 'Only two types of people wear sunglasses indoors, the blind and ass-holes!' Excessive makeup is banned, hair must be kept above the collar and policemen are not allowed to wear earrings.

The Trampolin Hills Golf Resort in Campos del Río, Murcia, sold hundreds of properties to UK and Irish buyers, and has now been forced into administration with 2,500 homes left unfinished and without planning permission for the golf course or houses in the first place. Although bank guarantees should have been in place to protect buyers' deposits, the developers did not arrange them and have now been fined €350,000 by the courts. Estate agents were offered commissions close to 20% to sell the properties. Last May a judge in Murcia, José Miñarro García, warned that massive losses were obvious, and condemned the Socialist local council for 'turning a blind eye' to what was going on. The two owners of the Trampolin Hills Golf Resort now face fraud charges and have currently been set bail at 30 million €

A man has been arrested by the Civil Guard for assaulting and biting four people who were changing a flat tyre outside his home in La Zubia, Granada province on Friday 20th. This lunatic was annoyed by the noise they were making as they were putting on the car's spare wheel. The Guardia Civil said one of the four was admitted to the Traumatology Hospital in Granada city after a chunk of his ear was partially severed during the biting attack. Another man had five stitches to a bite wound on his hand, while the third was bitten on the shoulder. The fourth man escaped with bruising. (The damn thing is catching!)

Lottery administration offices in Spain have voiced concern at their loss of exclusivity following the privatisation of ticket sales from 2010, when a new law will allow any establishment to sell tickets. No doubt there will still be plenty hoops & jumps to clear for new applicants. The law change is designed to bring more flexibility into the sector and stimulate ticket sales online.

The left wing Newspaper, *El País*, reports that the Catholic Church does not have enough priests to cover half the parishes in Spain. It says that 10,615 parishes of the 23,286 in Spain, have no resident priest. Cardinal Antonio María Rouco also revealed that the average age of priests is 63 and reaches 72 in some areas.

Still on the clergy, the Catholic Church has been ordered by the Canarias High Court to pay 210,000 € to a teacher of religious studies who was sacked from her job because she was 'living in sin' with a man who was not her husband. She is reported to have previously separated from her husband. The teacher claimed compensation for the seven years that the diocese refused to renew her contract, the court describing the Church's attitude as 'vengeful.'

A large Spanish consumers' organisation has been collating viewers' opinions of the quality of Spanish television and the survey results have been damning. Of those canvassed 95.6% have responded to the question, 'Are you satisfied with the general quality?', with 'very little' or 'not at all'. 98% also believe that the commercial breaks are too long. Viewers want better programs and channels to deal with consumer complaints and to offer better programs for children.

Old Chap

An elderly British gentleman of 86 arrived in Paris by plane.

At the French immigration desk, the man took a few minutes to locate his passport in his carry-on bag.

"You have been to France before, Monsieur?" the Immigration officer asked, sarcastically.

The elderly gentleman admitted he had been to France previously.

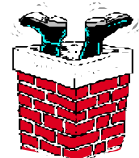
"Then you should know well enough to have your passport ready."

The British gentleman says, "The last time I was here, I didn't have to show it."

"Impossible. The British always have to show their passports on arrival in France!"

The elderly gentleman gave the French Immigration Officer a long hard look.

Then he quietly explained; "Well, the last time I was here, I came ashore on Juno Beach on D-Day in June 1944, and as they had all run away I couldn't find any ****ing Frenchmen to show it to then."



(Rik, Pete & Others)

Spanish Vignettes: Cazorla, September 2009 by Pat & Adrian Cartwright (Part time residents).

The Natural Park of Sierra de Cazorla Segura y Las Villas is situated in Jaen Province in northern Andalucia and is one of the largest protected areas in Europe. It is approximately 300 kms and a whole world away from the Costas. This spectacular area of Spain has been likened to our Lake District - a good comparison in most aspects apart from the weather, which, when we were there in September 2009, was glorious. The area is characterised by high mountains, river gorges, forests and olive groves.

Many people go to Cazorla to walk but there are a host of other activities including canoeing, paragliding and mountain biking. These activities can be organized through the local tourist offices and we found plenty of local maps for walking routes available from hotels and tourist information. I would however recommend taking a good large scale map too, especially if your reading of Spanish isn't great! There are Moorish Castles, often perched on pinnacles of rock, such as La Iruela and La Yedra. La Iruela is open to the public and has a Roman amphitheatre as well as the ruined castle. Vehicular access is possible but it would be easier to park in the village and walk up to the castle. A certain level of physical fitness is required.

For those less keen on strenuous physical activity there are wonderful drives with various visitor centers and villages dotted throughout the Natural Park. The main Visitor Centre is Torre de Vinaigre about 25 km into the park from Cazorla. This involves a magnificent drive over the mountains, offering spectacular views at several safe stopping points. The Visitor Centre offers plenty of local information and is the starting point for several walks. As we are now in the floor of the valley, many of these are on the level, whilst others climb up the valley. There is a lovely trail along the Rio Boroso, following the river bank, which eventually climbs steeply but remains in the valley for four or five kms, travelling through a very pretty gorge. It is a "there and back" route and is well way-marked, so you can simply turn around to return when you are ready. There is a fish farm at the start of the walk with its own information centre.

There are several reservoir lakes in the area, such as the Embalse Negracion and the Embalse del Tranco.

The town of Cazorla itself is built around three squares, all buzzing with life, and connected to each other through a maze of narrow winding streets. We enjoyed excellent tapas, beer and coffee in Plaza Santa Maria, the oldest of the three squares, with its 16th century church and ancient fountain against a mountainous backdrop. There are plenty of street cafes, bars and small shops and the town has a Blues Festival in July.

Accommodation is plentiful and ranges from rural guest houses and apartments to 5 star luxury. There is a Parador in the centre of the Natural Park, about 17km from Cazorla town. At the other end of the price scale, the San Pedro apartments in La Iruela cost around 47 euros per night and the Convento Rural Santa Maria de la Sierra offers a double room in low season from around 55 euros per night. Three star hotel accommodation at the RL Ciudad de Cazorla costs around the same, while the four star Hotel de Sierra de Cazorla at La Iruela starts from around 70 euros including cooked breakfast. Both the RL Ciudad de Cazorla and the Sierra de Cazorla have outdoor swimming pools.

Useful websites are: www.hotelsierradecazorla.com and www.crsantamaria.com

The journey from Torre Vieja takes about four hours on the motorway via Murcia and Lorca. Once the road leaves the motorway the going is fairly slow and the road very winding, but also very beautiful. Good places to break the journey are the hill villages of Vella Rubio and Vella Blanca, just off the motorway past Lorca. On a previous trip a few years ago to Granada we stopped for lunch in Vella Blanca and had superb *raciones* at a very reasonable price. This time we visited Lorca Castle en route home. It is about half way and offers its own guided tour with headphones for about 10 euros per person.

I would recommend this beautiful area as a get-away break. It's very Spanish!

Spanish Joke

When Pedro and Maria got married, he was a very experienced man, but she was totally naïve.

On their wedding night, when Pedro removed his clothes, Maria said, 'Pedro! What is that?'

Now Pedro was a quick thinker.

'Maria, I am the only man in the world with one of these.'

And then he proudly showed her what it was for. Maria was happy.

After the honeymoon was over, Pedro returned to work, only to return home to find an upset Maria waiting on their front porch.

'Pedro, you said you were the only man in the world with one of those and yet today, when I saw Gonzalez changing his clothes behind the shed, he had one, too!'

Ever fast on his feet, Pedro said, 'Oh, Maria, Gonzalez is my best friend. Since I had two, I gave him one. So he is the only other man in the world with one.'

A sceptical Maria accepted this answer, but when Pedro returned home the next day, an agitated Maria was waiting on the porch.

'Maria? Now what's wrong?'

'Dammit, Pedro. You gave the better one to Gonzalez!'

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Notes from La Casita

Richard and Marjory are writing this to tell you that as from 1st December we will no longer be involved in the day to day running of La Casita. We are handing over to Peter and Jackie Brain.

Our special thanks to Peter Hemmings for his invaluable help and support when we took over the running of La Casita.

Also we must thank all the people who have volunteered to run the clubs and events held there throughout the week; Carolina, our Spanish teacher, for giving such excellent classes and to everyone who has supported us over the last three years.

Most of the clubs will be ending 2009 with Christmas celebrations and taking a short break before restarting in 2010. Please look at the notice boards to see what will be going on and to get phone numbers of people to contact if you would like to join in.

Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

From Richard and Marjory Norris

(Thank you Richard and Marjory for all your unselfish work for the community during the past few years. Mick.)



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3 Minute Egg

She was standing in the kitchen, preparing our usual soft-boiled eggs and toast for breakfast, wearing only the 'T' shirt that she normally slept in.

As I walked in, almost awake, she turned to me and said softly, 'You've got to make love to me this very moment!'

My eyes lit up and I thought, 'I am either still dreaming or this is going to be my lucky day!' Not wanting to lose the moment, I embraced her and then gave it my all, right there on the kitchen table.

Afterwards, she said, 'Thanks,' and returned to the stove, her T-shirt still around her neck.

Happy, but a little puzzled, I asked, 'What was that all about?'

She explained, 'The egg timer's broken again'

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Donald & Daisy

Donald Duck and Daisy Duck were spending the night together in a hotel room and Donald wanted to have some nookie with Daisy.

The first thing Daisy asked was, 'Do you have a condom?'

Donald frowned and said, 'No.'

Daisy told Donald that if he didn't get a condom, they could not have sex.

'Maybe they sell them at the front desk,' she suggested.

So Donald went down to the lobby and asked the hotel clerk if they had condoms.

'Yes, we do,' the clerk said and pulled a box out from under the counter and gave it to Donald.

The clerk asked, 'Would you like me to put it on your bill?'

'No!' Donald quacked, 'I'll thuffocate'!

(Ken Billingham)



Three from Ken Billingham

Little Billy asks his dad for a telly in his room. Dad reluctantly agrees.
Next day Billy comes downstairs and asks, 'Dad, what's love juice?'
Dad looks horrified and tells Billy all about sex. Billy just sat there with his mouth open in amazement.
Finally Dad says, 'So what were you watching?' Billy says, 'Wimbledon.'

An elderly couple were attending Mass. About halfway through, the wife leans over and says to her husband, 'I just let out a silent fart; what do you think I should do?'
He replies, 'Put a new battery in your hearing aid.'

Japanese scientists have created a camera with a shutter speed so fast, they can now photograph a woman with her mouth shut.
(Incoming!!!)

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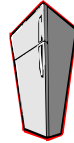
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Clever Chap!

A gynecologist decides to quit his job after becoming disillusioned with working in hospitals. He thinks he will have a complete change of career and signs up at the local tech to learn how to be a car mechanic.

He loves the course and throws himself into it and when he sits his final exams he's sure he's done well; even so, he is taken aback to see he has been given a score of 150%.

He goes to speak to his course tutor and asks if it is perhaps a mistake. The tutor says: "No, that's your mark right enough - you took the engine apart perfectly, that's 50% of the mark, and you put it back together again faultlessly, which is another 50%. I gave you the extra 50% because you did it all through the exhaust pipe and I've never seen that in my life before!"

The History of Spain. Part 10 - The Expulsion of the Jews and Muslims.

The surrender of Granada in 1492, the last bastion of Al-Andalus, was a devastating blow to Islam. It was one of the first places mentioned as having been stolen from the Muslims in an early tirade of bitterness by Osama bin Laden when he used ancient hurts to fuel his own modern hatred.

Buoyed by the victory and booty of the Granada surrender, Ferdinand and Isabella finally agreed to sponsor an exploration project proposed by an ambitious Genoese merchant-mariner named Christopher Columbus. (More on this next month.)

Although the successful *Reconquista* had now ostensibly linked all the disparate elements of the new Spain under the reign of *Los Reyes Católicos*, all these factions - different races, religions, nobles etc - were not trusted by the new monarchs; they were convinced that uniformity of religious belief would make Spain easier to rule and thus being unified would be stronger against its enemies. Back in 1478 Ferdinand and Isabella obtained authorisation from Pope Sixtus IV to appoint an ecclesiastical tribunal for the discovery and suppression of heresy. This became known as the Spanish Inquisition and I will include a separate article on this at a later stage. However it is important to understand that, from the outset, the Inquisition had no authority over Jews and Muslims in Spain. Its terrors and horrors were directed at all heretical Christians in Spain and at converts (*conversos*) who were suspected of relapsing back into Judaism or Islam. Torquemada, the Grand Inquisitor, insisted that there could be no religious unity in Spain if the Jews, approx 235,000 of them, were allowed to practise their faith, and recommended their compulsory conversion or their banishment.

Three months after the fall of Granada, on March 30 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella issued an edict of exile whereby all un baptised Jews, of whatever age or condition, were to leave Spain by July 31, and were never to return under penalty of death. The majority of the Jews choose to leave Spain (around 50,000 remaining to be baptised) but were only allowed to take with them immovable goods and bills of exchange, but no currency, silver or gold. Nothing was done to facilitate their exodus. In many cases, because of the limited time scale, Jewish houses had to be traded for a donkey, vineyards for a roll of cloth and all departing Jews were required to pay all their taxes for the full year before leaving.* Some 80,000 Jews poured into Portugal but were only allowed to remain for eight months. After the eight months had expired any remaining Jewish immigrants were sold into slavery and their children under the age of 15 were taken from their parents and sent to St. Thomas Islands in the Caribbean to be reared as Christians. This led to many suicides.

Although the Moors who remained in Granada were guaranteed religious freedom in 1492, it was not long before they faced the same fate as the Jews. The archbishop of Toledo, Cardinal Ximnez, who was a favourite of Isabella (see below) and the most powerful person in Spain after the two monarchs, instituted a policy of forcible conversion of the Moors. This led to a Moorish uprising in 1499. This uprising was deemed to be in violation of their surrender terms giving the Catholic Kings the excuse to issue a new edict. On February 12 1502, by order of Isabella, all Moslems in Castile and León were given the choice of receiving Christian baptism or leaving Spain by April 30. (The expulsion edict was not extended to Aragon until 1526.) Since measures were taken to block their departure, they were compelled to remain and become Christians, at least in name. However unlike the Jews few Muslims chose to leave believing that 'Spain was worth a mass.' An estimated 300,000 Muslims were baptised in one year. These converted Moors were called *Moriscos*.

The church in Spain, as elsewhere, was in urgent need of reform at the start of the sixteenth century. The monarchs, especially the pious queen, were aware of this and undertook to improve conditions with the help of Ximnez de Cisneros. This remarkable man, a Franciscan friar, had been Isabella's confessor in 1492, and later was made archbishop of Toledo, cardinal and Inquisitor General. Austere and zealous, he was an implacable enemy of church abuses, as he was of heresy. The result was a big improvement in the quality of the clergy. Monasteries were reformed, often against the will of the occupants; the Dominicans of Salamanca took up arms in their own defence and four hundred Franciscan friars in Andalusia, faced with the prospect of celibacy, migrated to North Africa and became Moslems! Similarly, the secular clergy were reformed, bishops came to be chosen more for their learning and piety and less for family background; schools were also founded to provide a better educated clergy.

The power of the nobles, which had long meant misrule, also needed to be controlled. The monarchs had the towns as allies in this endeavour, and the chief instrument the towns placed at their disposal was the institution of the Holy Brotherhood which the monarchy encouraged. The Brotherhood had its own troops to arrest criminals and its own courts to try them. By 1498 order was so far restored in Castile that the Brotherhood was abolished, though some local brotherhoods continue to exist today and are responsible for organising religious fiestas, Moors & Christians pageants etc.

Next agriculture was targeted and unfortunately subordinated to the demands of the sheep farmers. The latter had been united by the crown into an organization called the *mesta*, which received special privileges in return for its great contributions to the treasury. Indeed until treasure began to arrive from the New World, the sheep farmers were the main contributors to the royal treasury. Ferdinand and Isabella reserved large areas for sheep grazing, thus removing them from agricultural production. Agricultural development also suffered from the contempt of the Castilians, which was traceable primarily to two factors. The aristocratic sense of values that permeated society exalted the occupation of warfare and brought all kinds of manual work into disrepute. The second being that agriculture was largely in the hands of the *Moriscos* contributed to its low standing in the eyes of the so-called Old Christians, those without Moorish or Jewish blood.

The harsh treatment of the *Moriscos* was harmful to agriculture, just as the harsh treatment of the converted Jews (*conversos*) damaged trade. It was at this point that religion and the church impinged for the first time on the economic, social, and cultural life of Spain.

*(The expulsion of the Jews from Spain brings to mind the forcible expulsion of 80,000 Asians from Uganda in 1972 by the crazed Idi Amin.)

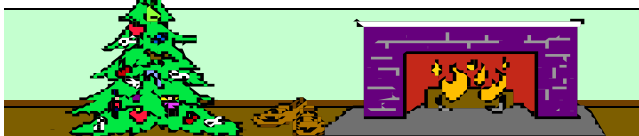
Corruption

When we first moved to Spain, about six years ago, I found the then level of corruption both perplexing and depressing. There seemed to be a general disgust at what appeared then to be a high level of political graft. Although it was not as bad as the carry-on in the 80's and early 90's, the police here were then being geared up with additional resources to investigate the problem nationwide. So have things improved? Personally I now doubt it. I think the police are now better geared to rooting out the problems but are not getting effective support from the judiciary.

In mid November the Attorney General, Cándido Conde-Pumpido, announced that there are a total of 730 cases of corruption currently opened by the Spanish judiciary against politicians of various hues. In 594 judicial proceedings and 136 investigations opened by the prosecutors' office the Socialist party, the PSOE, is the one most affected with 264 cases, the main opposition party, the PP, with 200 cases, 43 against the Canary Islands Coalition, 30 against the Catalan group, Convergencia i Unió, 24 against the Partido Andalucista, 20 against left wingers IU, and 17 against the now defunct GIL party which was based in Marbella. The remaining cases relate to Unión Mallorquina, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, the Bloque Nacionalista Galego and the PNV Basque Nationalists.

The total number of politicians being investigated represents about 1% of the total number of the 66,000 councillors and mayors across the country.

The Attorney General ended his statement with a call for calm from the public.



Canny Lass

A 75 Year old Lady rang Torry hospital and this conversation followed:
 'Hello I'd like some information on a patient, Mrs Tiptree. She was admitted last week with chest pains and I just want to know if her condition has deteriorated, stabilised or improved?'
 'Do you know which ward she is in?'
 'Yes, ward P, room 2B'
 'I'll just put you through to the nurse in charge.'
 'Hello, ward P, how can I help?'
 'I would just like some information on a patient, Mrs Tiptree, I was wondering if her condition had deteriorated, stabilised or improved?'
 'I'll just check her notes. I'm pleased to say that Mrs Tiptree's condition has improved. She has regained her appetite, her temperature has steadied and after some routine checks tonight, she should be well enough to go home tomorrow.'
 'Oh that's wonderful news, I'm so happy, thank you ever so much!'
 'You seem very relieved, are you a close friend or relative?'
 'No, I'm Mrs Tiptree in room 2b. They tell you *uck-all in here!'

Leroy's Hearing

Leroy goes to his local Church and sits at the back. The Parish Priest not seeing him for so long calls him forward and shouts "What can the good Lord do for you my brother". Leroy says "I want to pray for my hearing Father". "Kneel before me son. Do you believe in the Lord" says the priest. "I do" replies Leroy and the other 150 parishioners. The priest lays his hand on Leroy's head and a finger in his ear and shouts "Do you hear me Lord, heal this boy" The priest lets Leroy go and says "How's your hearing now boy" Leroy replies, "Don't know Father.... its not till next Wednesday".

Angela's Cartoon



'Look! When I said I'd got you a turkey for Christmas ...'



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The expression ‘The law is an ass’ was spoken by Mr. Bumble in the Charles Dickens' classic, Oliver Twist. I am sure that after reading about some very recent Spanish cases reported below, you will fully agree.

A court in Marbella has told four British purchasers of a property, now seen as illegal by the Junta de Andalucía, that they cannot have their deposit returned and they must go ahead with completing the purchase. The buyers paid more than 103,000 € as a deposit on the property on the urbanisation Santa María Green Hills, in Elviria Sur, signing the contract with Marbella Vista Golf S.L. in November 2004. The flat should have been handed over before 1st January 2006, but owing to the regional government’s challenging the building licence which they considered to be illegal, neither the property nor the gardens and promised golf course were completed by that date.

The would-be buyers then claimed their money back through the courts, with the company placing its own counter-claim as part of the same proceeding. A court in Marbella has now found in favour of the developer, ruling that the fact that the property was not completed on time is not the company’s fault. The court also said that any irregularities in the licence granted by the Town Hall cannot be attributed to the developer. The purchasers must now pay all the court costs as part of the ruling, but do have the right of appeal to the provincial court, at their own cost of course. The Junta de Andalucía might still in time order the property to be demolished.

An Alicante teacher, in the sixth level of the Juan Bautista Llorca primary school in the city, who set 100 lines for an 11 year old pupil who did not do her homework faces charges in court of ‘ill-treatment’ and of ‘harassment’. The girl had to write ‘*Debo hacer lo que me manden*’ 100 times. A *denuncia* was placed against the teacher by the child’s father, alleging that the pupil had to do the lines in class time, and was so humiliated by the experience and being told to face the wall she ended up vomiting. The family is demanding 1,000 € in compensation in the case. A teachers’ union spokesman described the charge as ‘very exaggerated’ and ‘out of place’. But at an oral hearing in Alicante on November 19th however, the judge considered there was a case to be heard.

A Catalan family have had their council flat occupied by squatters for the past 16 months, and the City Hall continues to charge them the rent. If the couple stops the payments, they will lose their right to the property managed by the City Hall housing department, and they also have to pay all the utility bills for the same reason.

The couple lived in the El Raval area of the city and were on holiday for a few days when the squatters broke into their home on July 21 last year. When they rushed home on hearing the news from a neighbour, they found the locks had been changed. They immediately placed a *denuncia* with the regional police, *Los Mossos d’Esquadra*, but the judge has refused to order the eviction of the squatters as they are considered to have no means. The couple’s lawyer is quoted by *El País* as describing the situation as ‘surrealist’. A few days ago the couple were advised by a neighbour that the squatters were ‘throwing things onto the street’. The couple rushed there and managed to save their television. The squatters have even replaced the names on the *buzón* letter box for the flat with their own. When the town hall was questioned by reporters they responded that ‘things must take their course!’

And finally a Jaén judge has been suspended for a year for trying to return a partially used bottle of perfume. The judge from the First Instance and Instruction Court 2, has been suspended for abusing her position. The General Council for Judicial Power, CGJP, has removed her from her post for a year for carrying out two serious faults linked to her closing of a perfume shop in the municipality. The judge decided to close the stores when they refused to accept her attempt to return a partially used bottle of Rochas perfume. The judge had claimed that she did not like the odour and that it could have been counterfeit. Although the shop assistant told her that she could not return her money because the perfume had been used, she finally gave in after an argument when the customer revealed to her that she was a judge and threatened to close the store. The next day, despite getting her money back, the judge issued the closure order of two stores owned by the same owner. Both businesses were closed for a week. The owner of the shop told the Spanish press that it was a clear case of abuse of authority, and now the main judicial authority has agreed.

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Fight!
 Saturday morning I got up early, quietly dressed, made my lunch, and slipped quietly into the garage and proceeded to back out into a torrential downpour.
 The wind was blowing 50 mph, so I pulled back into the garage, turned on the radio, and discovered that the weather would be bad all day.
 I went back into the house, quietly undressed, and slipped back into bed. I cuddled up to my wife's back and whispered, "The weather out there is terrible."
 My loving wife of 5 years replied, "Can you believe my stupid husband is out fishing in that?"
 And that's how the fight started...

The new Spanish Sustainable Economy Law

The new law, which was approved by the cabinet on Friday 27th, intends to change the economic model of the country over the next ten years, up to 2020, by carrying out a series of deep reforms. Past years of growth based on the building bubble are to be replaced by an economy which is 'more sustainable environmentally, and more just socially'.

The law is split into three areas:-

- 1 – Bringing more transparency to the financial sector.
- 2 – Stimulating and favouring business
- 3 – Developing all the economic sectors which are implicated in the fight against climate change, and in favour of innovation in whatever field of the economy.

Bureaucratic costs and delays in the setting up of small business are to be reduced greatly (I will believe it when I see it). Many regulatory bodies are to be reformed and there will be new tax deductions for those who invest in research & development and in environmental activities.

Tax deductions for the purchase of property are to remain, despite earlier Government statements to the contrary, but only on incomes of less than 24,000 € but these tax breaks will be joined by new measures to stimulate the rental sector. (This last bit is interesting as a recent study indicated that more than half the incomes obtained from rental accommodation are not declared. The amount lost to the taxman has been put at 2.45 billion € a year, with the fraud most commonly found in Cataluña, Andalucía and Madrid.)

Tax deductions on renovation work on the main home will be up to 10% with a limit of 3,000 € a year until 2012. (More on this new law in a future issue.)



More changes to Spanish driving laws

On Wednesday November 25th, a number of changes to the driving laws in Spain were ratified. These changes are generally beneficial to the drivers in that although previously the offences normally brought a points deduction and a fine, now they carry just a fine.

They range from driving without lights, parking in a bus lane or on a bend and negligent driving which is seen as a possible danger to other traffic or pedestrians. Also removed is driving on a motorway in a type of vehicle which is banned from motorways and driving with twice or more the maximum permitted number of occupants.

As far as speeding is concerned, points will now only be lost for motorway driving at 130 kph or more.

The other good news for drivers is that those who have appealed against losing points for any of the 7 infractions and have yet to receive an answer will automatically keep those points. The DGT Central Traffic Authority is now obliged to archive all such cases.

The penalty of the temporary loss of a licence also disappears. A licence may now only be lost when all the points have been used up.

Other changes, such as the 50% reduction for on-the-spot payment of a fine and the loss of 6 points for using radar inhibitors, are due to come into force in six months or so.

i What?

Apple announced today that it has developed a breast implant that can store and play music. The iBoob will cost from £250 to £350, depending on cup and speaker size. This is considered a major social breakthrough, because women are always complaining about men staring at their boobs and not listening to them.

Kevin has moved from the R Bar to

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Right on the Rites

Father O'Malley rose from his bed one morning. It was a fine spring day in his parish near Swansea.

He walked to the window of his bedroom to get a deep breath of the beautiful day outside. He then noticed there was a Pig lying dead in the middle of his front lawn.

Not knowing who else to call, he promptly called the local police station.

The conversation went like this: "Good morning. This is Sergeant Jones. How might I help you?"

"This is Father O'Malley at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church. There's a pig lying dead right in the middle of me front lawn"

Sergeant Jones, considering himself to be quite a wit, replied with a smirk, "Well now Father, it was always my impression that you people took care of the last rites!"

There was dead silence on the line for a long moment and then Father O'Malley replied:

"Ah, 'to be sure, that is true; but we are also obliged to notify the next of kin."

Out & About

The Orihuela Mayoress, Monica Lorente, has agreed to move the temporary dump and eco-plant near Entre Golf elsewhere. This is very welcome news. The new bridge, which is now completed, is due to be opened on Tuesday the 1st. Workers on the site have said that the commercial space will be occupied by a Vidal Supermarket and a Lidl's or Aldi's. Unfortunately no one seems really sure yet as to who will take the space. Following the news last month about the new sports centre in Orihuela Costa, it has now been announced that there will also be another sports centre in Torremendo, which is part of the district of Orihuela. Although not as large as the proposed facility on the coast, it will also have a 25-metre outdoor swimming pool which will be open only in the summer months. The facility will hopefully be open for next August.

The Via Parks are obviously gearing-up for Christmas and the New Year. In Via Park 3, the Lime Bar, which has recently been enlarged and redecorated, will be having its Christmas draw on Boxing day, and on New Year's Eve, Peter and Susan are providing a free buffet and a Fancy Dress competition with first prize going to the 'worst costume.' Mindful of the high level of sartorial inelegance that the warm weather encourages around this area, it should be very competitive!

I notice that Damo's Irish Bar has now opened and replaced Madison's. I always thought that Madison's was a bit of a disaster. The staff were generally surly and the coffee machine was always broken! Fortunately Damo's is a very different 'kettle of fish'. The premises have been refurbished to a very high standard with very pleasant and helpful staff and a coffee machine which works! Best of luck to them.

In Via Park 5, I hear that Brown's, the hairdressers on the top floor, will unfortunately be closing down in January. If you don't use these local facilities you will lose them. All Bar Sue's, the Raheny Bar and Stallion's are all offering lunch on Christmas Day. Check ads for details. Credit to Karen from Stallion's who single handedly cleared all around the base of Via Park V, which was beginning to look like a dump.

The Raheny Bar had a 24 piece brass band perform on Sunday November 15th. It was a hugely enjoyable and uplifting occasion. They are also planning a number of other entertainments throughout December (check advert) together with a Fancy Dress Party on New Year's Eve. On the 15th of December, the bar is holding a carol singing session supported by a brass ensemble and on Christmas Eve, Galadriel and the Phoenix have a joint Christmas celebration with carols, festivities and surprises starting at 6 pm.

Christine's are having a 1940's Night on December 5th (only a few spaces left) and Donna Annas are holding a special 'Ban the Brussels Sprout' dinner on the evening of December 16th.

Sam's Bar in Los Balcones are holding a Race Night with virtual horse racing on December 4th which promises to be great fun. A singalong and free buffet is also arranged for New Year's Eve. They tell me that work should begin soon on the new Mercadona which is due to be built on the opposite side of the road.

As you can see, there is plenty going on in your area over the Christmas period and New Year with some really good value deals. Don't just stay in brooding and watching the same old crap on TV. A sociable visit to one of your nearby bars or restaurants will lift your spirits and deplete theirs. Remember, a pub is not just for Christmas!

Some recent very welcome news is that Charlie has returned to the Pirate Bar in Playa Flamenca. Unfortunately most of the 'pirate' paraphernalia is gone, but the pirate himself IS BACK!! There is now regular rock music in the bar, sometimes performed by Charlie himself. This is not your pansified rock music such as Showaddiewaddie or Elton John. This is rock music with grit & sinew like G'n'R, AC/DC, Motorhead etc. To quote Charlie, 'It's not that we don't do any karaoke here, we don't do any **cking karaoke here!'

Many thanks to Dave and Terry for destroying the processional caterpillar nests in Dream Hills which have again arrived well out of season.

Plug: I lost the registration document for our car and was not looking forward to braving the Spanish bureaucratic maze. Fortunately I had the sense to contact Legal Solutions 2 who handled the whole matter for me so it was relatively painless. They were extremely helpful and can do anything concerning car documentation in Spain, including importation, re-registration etc. They can be contacted on 966 796 060 & 600 630 026 and legalsolutions2@terra.es

Scratch Away

A guy goes to the Council to apply for a job.

The interviewer asks him "Have you been in the armed services?"

"Yes," he says "I was in the army for three years and served in Iraq."

The interviewer says "That will give you extra points toward employment" and then asks "Are you disabled in any way?" The guy says "Yes 100%... a mortar round exploded near me and blew my testicles off."

The interviewer tells the guy "OK. I can hire you right now. The hours are from 8:00 AM. to 4:00 PM. You can start tomorrow. Come in at 10:00 AM."

The guy is puzzled and says "If the hours are from 8:00 AM. to 4:00 PM. then why do you want me to come in at 10:00 AM?"

"This is a council job" the interviewer replies. "For the first two hours we sit around scratching our balls..... no point in you coming in for that."

Grandpa

There was a family gathering, with all generations around the table.

Mischievous teenagers put a Viagra tablet into Grandpa's drink, and after a while, Grandpa excused himself because he had to go to the bathroom.

When he returned, however, his trousers are wet all over.

"What happened, Grandpa?" he is asked by his concerned children.

"Well," he answered, "I don't really know. I had to go to the bathroom. So I took it out and started to pee, but then I saw that it wasn't mine, so I put it back!"

ANNOUNCEMENTS

'Dog & Bone' Info.

Although the deadline for non-registered prepaid mobile phones expired on November 8, when these phones were deactivated except for 112 calls, you now have six months to register your phone if you want to recover your old number. The European Parliament has approved a measure to harmonise the rights of phone users across the continent. Under the legislation users will be able to change phone company in a single day from the middle of 2011, be it a fixed or mobile line, or internet supplier. Somebody had better tell *Telefonica*. I will believe it when I see it!

SIP Cards

The renewal of SIP - health cards - for early retirees continues to take up much space in the English press here. PUMA 22 are a local pressure group who are campaigning for free healthcare for non-pensionable expats and are dedicated to improving the health facilities in Medical Area 22, which includes Benijofar, Entre Naranjos, Formentera del Segura, Guardamar del Segura, Los Montesinos, Orihuela Costa, Pilar de la Horadada, Rojales, San Fulgencio, San Miguel de las Salinas, Torremendo and Torrevieja. You can find out more at their website at www.puma22.org

Anyone under the age of 18 who cannot gain access to healthcare should contact a social worker and apply for '*La Ley de Menor*' although this is means tested. For those over 18 who consider that they cannot afford the quarterly fee and are not entitled to receive healthcare by any other means can also contact a social worker to pursue the possibility of a means tested concession. If their household income is lower than the minimum wage, around 600 euro per month, and they do not have sufficient equity in property or savings, then they MAY be entitled to free healthcare in Valencia.

Although the above paragraph is the advice from the British Consulate in Alicante, when a British family approached a social worker at Cabo Roig, the Spanish official was most uncooperative and kept pressing the forms for the payment scheme - €270 per quarter each. For this particular family of 5, it would cost €5,400 for one year!

Tip: Do not forget that if you are a married person who reaches pensionable age and been awarded a pension but your spouse is not yet of pensionable age, if you notify the overseas section at the Works & Pension Dept in the UK to request that your spouse be added as a dependant on your E112, your spouse can then obtain a SIP card in Spain in their own name.

Not that many jokes about Cockermouth really.

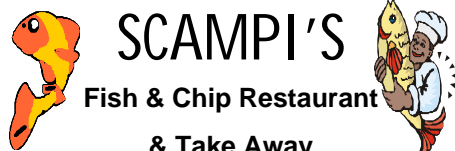
I thought they would have been flooding in. Watched the news for the deaf on TV yesterday.

The woman doing the signing gave up after three attempts at 'Cockermouth'.



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The editor, Mick, can be contacted at mick.dreamscene@gmail.com or at 586 Dream Hills.