



"Putting people first"

# ISIS Interactive

The newsletter of ISIS Training  
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## Every Learner Matters

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve Economic well-being
- Enjoy and achieve through learning

## In this Edition

- Austerity Update
- The St Jonas Festival
- Self Harm Awareness
- Benefits of Volunteering
- Credit card scams
- Status Quo Live!

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## ISIS FL Learners Shine at the Learner of the Year Awards



The 2011 Learner of the year awards were held on the 9<sup>th</sup> June at the Lawn in Lincoln. 4 of the ISIS Training Foundation Learners had been selected as finalists and were accompanied by 4 members of the ISIS FL Team, including **Grace Clark** who takes up the story.

"We had the great privilege of watching **Amy Hinton, Tomas Prasciunas, Maria Ribeiro and Stephen Gash** receive their certificates and prize money with pride. All finalists were presented with a £10 voucher and a framed certificate as a token to acknowledge their success and achievement, making everyone a winner! For the main part of the event the finalists were split into three categories, and of the three, Foundation Learning fitted into the 16-29 group. The finalists were all competing for three top prizes in each category, the first prize being £150, second being £100 and third being £50 of vouchers.

Mr John Allen, Principal of Lincoln College presented the awards to the lucky winners.

As we waited eagerly, it was clear that all 4 learners were beaming with pride, none went in with the expectation of winning the top accolade, but were all very nervous - what if? John gave a brief story of the barriers to learning and hurdles each learner had faced, giving a moving and emotional account of the distance each had travelled. Then came second place - all held their breath.....

As John started to read out Stephen's story we all gasped and grins spread across all of our faces, I looked over at Stephen's face as they called him up to the front to collect his prize. I don't think he could have looked happier! He walked to the front proud and standing tall, this young man started with us on E2E lacking the confidence to even speak to me or write a sentence, and now here he is collecting an award from the Principal of Lincoln College in front of 350+ spectators! John reiterated his favourite word of the night 'outstanding' to describe Stephen's progress and achievement. "Next was the moment they had all been waiting for - the prestigious first prize!

John's speech about this special person started with 'this young person was born into a travelling community...' - I caught Maria's eye and she gave me a look as if to say 'it won't be me, it's got to be someone else', but as John continued with '...in Spain...' Her eyes lit up, and filled with tears.

Moments like that remind us why we work with young people; it makes everything so much worth while than it already is. I had given pre warning to all that I would probably cry, and my expectations were met! As she walked up to collect her prize for first place "Learner of the Year" award we all cheered and clapped, as we did for Stephen. For this Young lady, learning as a traveller was by her own admission difficult. She often moved and was unable to settle, and was only able to mix with other children from the Spanish Circus. Despite this she still managed to learn 4 languages, and achieve her qualifications with us ahead of time".

## Apprenticeships Work!

The government has delivered an extra 103,000 apprenticeships over the last year, twice as many as expected, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has said. "Sectors such as advanced manufacturing and IT took on more apprentices. Business Secretary Vince Cable said the government was determined to "break down barriers between academic and vocational learning".

## Minimum wage under threat!

A proposal to remove the National Minimum Wage for some employees had its second reading in the House of Commons on Friday (17 June 2011). The Employment Opportunities Bill, put forward last year by Conservative MP, Christopher Chope has been designed "to introduce more freedom, flexibility and opportunity for those seeking employment in the public and private sectors". It would enable those entitled to the minimum wage to opt out from that entitlement and remove the entitlement to the minimum wage from those who are receiving a training wage, if they had entered into a written contract of employment offering them a training wage and training from the employer in skills relevant to the employment.

## Austerity Update – How the cuts can affect ISIS and our Learners

### New 16-19 Bursary By: Pip Whiteman

The Government has announced a new bursary scheme to help the most vulnerable 16-19 year olds in full-time education. The scheme is made up of two parts: a guaranteed payment to a small group of the most vulnerable and a discretionary fund for schools and colleges to distribute.

There will also be transitional arrangements to help those who are part-way through their studies and are currently receiving EMA. More information on the transitional payments is available on the [EMA website](#), or by calling the Learner Support helpline on 0845 600 7979.

The YPLA have published a FAQ about the new bursary scheme at: <http://www.ypla.gov.uk/learnersupport/16-19-bursary/index.htm>

### It Pays To Join Foundation Learning! (By Kayleigh Panton)

#### 16 – 19 year olds who join the Foundation Learning programme with ISIS Training could be eligible for financial rewards.

The new Bursary Scheme is allocating £1200 per year to the most vulnerable young people such as children in care, care leavers, those on Income Support, Employment Support Benefit and Disability Living Allowance. A discretionary fund will also be allocated to schools and colleges so that financial support can be provided to overcome barriers to students such as transport costs, food or equipment.

Young parents can still apply for Care to Learn to get support with childcare costs while they are in education and young people may also be able to get housing benefit whilst studying. Families of 16 – 19 year old who are in non-advanced education such as Foundation Learning are entitled to £20.30 child benefit per week for their eldest child and £13.40 for every other child.

Young people who are part way through their studies will continue to be supported by Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) as follows:

- Students who applied for EMA in 2009/10 will continue to receive the same level of payments until the end of the 2011/12 academic year
- Students who are now in their first year of post-16 study and receive £30 per week will now be eligible for £20 per week until the end of 2011/12 academic year

If you have any queries about Bursary funds you can email:

[1619BursaryFund@ypla.gov.uk](mailto:1619BursaryFund@ypla.gov.uk)

For further information about how to join and ISIS Foundation Learning Course, visit our web site at [www.isis-training.co.uk](http://www.isis-training.co.uk) or Telephone

Lincoln: 01522 532225

Boston: 01205 354171

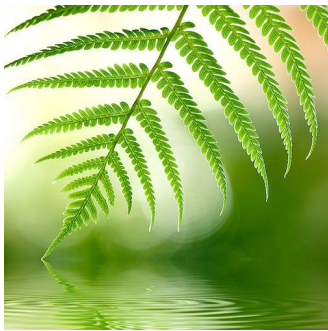
## Equality and Diversity

### Saint Jonas' Festival Or Midsummer day.

(By Tomas Prasciunas)

**The Saint Jonas' Festival** also known as "Rasos Dew Holiday", "Joninės, Kupolė", "Midsummer Day" or "St. John's Day", is a midsummer folk festival celebrated on June 24 all around Lithuania. While midsummer day is celebrated throughout Europe, many Lithuanians have a particularly lively agenda on this day. The traditions include singing songs and dancing until the sun sets, telling tales, searching to find the magic fern blossom at midnight, according to legend, if you find it, you will find all the treasures of the world. Lithuanians also celebrate by jumping over bonfires, greeting the rising midsummer sun and washing the face with morning dew and young girls float flower wreaths on the water of river or lake.

These are customs brought from pagan culture and beliefs. The latter Christian tradition is based on the reverence of Saint John. Lithuanians with the names Jonas, Jonė, Janina receive many greetings from their family, relatives and friends.



**Midsummer** is the oldest and the most amazing holiday. St. John's name came from the Catholic liturgy of the Church: the Holy, John the Baptist's birthday celebration, which is named Summer Solstice Festival. The Christian holiday intertwined with the old solar transition, rites of natural regeneration.

The celebration of Midsummer's Eve was from ancient times linked to the summer solstice. Some people believed that mid-summer plants, especially the Calendula, had miraculous healing powers and so they picked them on this night. Bonfires were lit to protect against evil spirits which were believed to roam freely when the sun was turning southwards again. In later years, Witches were also thought to be on the way to meetings with other powerful beings on Midsummer's Eve.



*Large bonfires are a big part of the Lithuania Midsummer celebrations. We have large bonfires on Midsummer's Eve and hundreds of people come to watch the displays*



### Vulnerable Groups

Some people are more likely to self-harm than others, Some of the more vulnerable groups are:

- Girls and young Women.
- Young people between. 15 – 25 years old.
- People living in residential care or secure institutions.
- Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Men and Women.
- Asian Women.
- People dependant on Alcohol or street drugs.

### Further Information

There are lots of web sites that provide information on self-harm and how to get help and support, such as:

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

[www.redtears.com](http://www.redtears.com)

[www.thesite.org](http://www.thesite.org)

### Warning!

**Please remember that if you are a self harmer, you must keep yourself safe when visiting these sites. Please be aware that these sites can be triggering.**



## Staying Safe



**Every Learner Matters  
"Stay Safe"**

### Self harm awareness. (By Dominic Smith)

"I am a young learner with ISIS Training, and I have suffered from self harming and up until one year ago, I self harmed for over five years. The reason I am writing this article is because I want people to realise what self harming is and the difficulties people face during the time they do this.

Self harming is something which can ruin a person's life and is an addiction once you have started. People who self harm aren't always people who are crying out for help and wanting attention from a family member or friend. My experience with self harming was one which progressed to become worse and worse. I didn't do it because I needed attention off anyone. I personally did it because I was depressed and had so much pressure in my life. This was the only way in which I could keep myself from becoming suicidal. After years of this, I went to see a councillor which I had really made a bond with and she found my problems out and helped me fix them.

Self harming needs to become better known through things like newspaper articles and through adverts on television. I also believe that parents need to be told more about how to approach their child who is self harming, to give the parents better understanding of self harming so to get rid of the stereotype. If I had heard adverts and read more about it, I would have felt safer and not like I had to fight on my own.

I hope this starts people thinking more seriously about self harming and that it needs to be thought of more seriously". *Dominic Smith*

### Why do people self-harm?

Self harm can be a way for a person to show they are feeling a lot of pain and hurt. There are a lot of reasons why people self-harm and these usually come from emotions that are very difficult to manage. These can be related to many things such as bullying, low confidence, lack of self-esteem or abuse.

People self-harm because they feel this is a way of releasing anger or tension. It is a physical pain they can deal with rather than an emotional feeling they are finding it difficult to cope with.

### What can I do if I know some one is self-harming?

By confiding in you, they have taken one of the most difficult steps, telling someone about their problem, so do not judge them for what they are telling you. You might feel confused and upset yourself, but there are ways you can help.

- Listen to them about how they feel, just by being there and being a friend might be just what they need.
- Encourage them to get help and support, offer to be with them when they go for help by accompanying them to appointments.
- Look after yourself as well and make sure you get support as well

# Credit Card Scams! A New way of Stealing

By Frances Bradley

Credit card fraud is increasing all the time and the criminals are finding more innovative ways of getting hold of your credit card details and of creating new scams. Normally if your credit card or credit card details are stolen, your bank or provider will normally cover any losses and replace the cards, but it depends on the circumstances, takes time and can be really frustrating and inconvenient if it ever happens to you. Here are some real life examples of how credit card fraud is perpetrated.



## Case Study 1

A friend went to the local gym and placed his belongings in the locker. After the workout and a shower, he came out, saw the locker open, and thought to himself, 'Funny, I thought I locked the locker.'

Hmm, 'He dressed and just flipped the wallet to make sure all was in order.

Everything looked okay - all cards were in place...A few weeks later his credit card bill came - a whopping bill of £14,000! He called the credit card company and started yelling at them, saying that he did not make the transactions and there must be some mistake.

Customer care personnel verified that there was no mistake in the system and asked if his card had been stolen. 'No,' he said, but then took out his wallet, pulled out the credit card, and yep - you guessed it - a switch had been made. An expired similar credit card from the same bank was in the wallet. The thief broke into his locker at the gym and switched cards.

**Verdict:** The credit card issuer said since he did not report the card missing earlier, he would have to pay the amount owed to them.

How much did he have to pay for items he did not buy? £9,000!

Why were there no calls made to verify the amount swiped? Small amounts rarely trigger a 'warning bell' with some credit card companies. All these small amounts added up to the final total.

## Case Study 2

A man at a local restaurant paid for his meal with his credit card. The bill for the meal came, he signed it and the waitress folded the receipt and passed the credit card along. Usually, he would just take it and place it in his wallet or pocket. Funny enough, though, he actually took a look at the card and, lo and behold, it was the expired card of another person. He called the waitress and she looked perplexed. She took it back, apologized, and hurried back to the counter under the watchful eye of the man.

All the waitress did while walking to the counter was wave the wrong expired card to the counter cashier, and the counter cashier immediately looked down and took out the real card. No exchange of words --- nothing! She took it and came back to the man with an apology.

**Verdict:** Make sure the credit cards in your wallet are yours.

Check the name on the card every time you sign for something and/or the card is taken away for even a short period of time. Many people just take back the credit card without even looking at it, 'assuming' that it has to be theirs.

**FOR YOUR OWN SAKE, DEVELOP THE HABIT OF CHECKING YOUR CREDIT CARD EACH TIME IT IS RETURNED TO YOU AFTER A TRANSACTION!**

### Case Study 3

Yesterday I went into a pizza restaurant to pick up an order that I had called in. I paid by using my Visa Credit Card which, of course, is linked directly to my bank account. The young man behind the counter took my card, swiped it and then laid it on the counter as he waited for the approval, which is pretty standard procedure.

While he waited, he picked up his mobile phone and started dialling. I noticed the phone because it is the same model I have, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. ? Then I heard a click that sounded like my phone sounds when I take a picture. He then gave me back my card but kept the phone in his hand as if he was still pressing buttons. Meanwhile, I'm thinking: I wonder what he is taking a picture of, oblivious to what was really going on. It then dawned on me: the only thing there was my credit card, so now I'm paying close attention to what he is doing.....He set his phone on the counter, leaving it open.

About five seconds later, I heard the chime that tells you that the picture has been saved. Now I'm standing there struggling with the fact that this boy just took a picture of my credit card. Yes, he played it off well, because had we not had the same kind of phone, I probably would never have known what happened. Needless to say, I immediately cancelled that card as I was walking out of the pizza parlour.

**Verdict:** Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Whenever you are using your credit card take caution and don't be careless. Notice who is standing near you and what they are doing when you use your card.

Be aware of phones, because many have a camera phone these days.

### Case Study 4: (By Mick Gilroy)

This is my own experience of credit card fraud and how easy it is to fall victim to it. Whilst returning from a break in Amsterdam, I had dinner on the ferry and paid for it by MasterCard without giving it a second thought. The Waiter explained they did not have chip and pin on the ferry, so took my card and returned it with the printed out payment slip, which I signed and he returned my card to me. Lots of other diners paid by the same method and underwent the same procedure.



Some weeks later I received my monthly statement that included the payment for the meal, so all seemed in order. One of the next bills I received, about 8 weeks later, had a payment for the Hilton Hotel in Kuala Lumpur including food and drink to the value of about £500, a place I have never been to in my life. I contacted the credit card company who cancelled the card, refunded my payment and asked how I thought it might have happened.

I realised that the majority of the crew on the ferry I had taken back from Amsterdam were Malaysian, so Kuala Lumpur suddenly made sense. When I had paid my restaurant bill, the waiter must have taken a copy of my card by skimming it. He had probably repeated this with several other customers cards and spent reasonably small amounts on each of them to avoid suspicion from the credit card company.

I contacted the Ferry company DFDS, who were basically not interested and told me to prove it was one of their staff who had carried out the fraud, naturally I had no way of proving this, so put it down to experience.



Now I never leave my credit card out of sight or hand it over to anyone. I will only use it if the method of payment is chip and pin and even if there is not a portable payment device, I will insist on accompanying the person taking the payment to the till or wherever else they process the payment, even if this is in "staff only" areas. I put my card in the machine myself, shield my PIN and remove it myself.

## Foundation Learning Volunteering



**Every learner Matters**  
**"Make a Positive Contribution"**

Many of the learners in Foundation learning carry out volunteering work whilst on their courses for various charities and organisations. Here, two learners from Foundation Learning write about their experiences.

### **My Experience of Voluntary Work: By Aimee Scrimshaw**

The benefits of volunteering are you will be helping the community, it will give you experience in customer service and it looks good on your CV because it shows that you are interested and that you give up your own time. The company that you are volunteering for may give you a really good reference and it would be good for them because they have more people helping them. If you are interested in volunteering then go into your local charity shop or a different company and ask. You don't need any experience and it would be a great opportunity. It is useful for charity shop to have volunteers because they are willing to work for free. You can also use the do-it website to search for a vacancy, which is how I found my place.

I am a volunteer at the Cancer Research in the Newark shop and it is a really nice environment and my bosses and other volunteers are very nice. It is a nice little charity and it is a good cause. I enjoy working there because it has a nice atmosphere and I get to meet new people. I will gain a lot of experience, as I have now started my Customer Service NVQ. I have been at Cancer Research for over a year and I really enjoy it.

### **The Benefits of Volunteering: By Samantha Lusby**

The benefits of volunteering are that you learn a lot experience from it and that you are helping the community. It helps you with developing new skills and it also shows you that you are willing to give up your spare time. Also even if you haven't got any experience in a work placement or anything this would be a great opportunity for you to gain experience. If you want to work in a charity shop you don't need any experience or training because when you go into a charity shop they will train you and show the ropes of working in a charity shop.

I am a volunteer at British Heart Foundation which I really enjoy. It gives you a chance to meet new people and to be able to get experience from it. I feel that there is a good atmosphere there. To get into a charity shop you just have to go into the shop and ask about volunteering. I have been at the British Heart Foundation for only 6 weeks and I am loving every minute of it. I would advise people to join as a volunteer because you will love it and get a good experience from it.

### **How to become a volunteer**

There are lots of opportunities to do voluntary work throughout Lincolnshire in a range of different areas. The Lincs County Council web site has a whole section devoted to volunteering as does the Lincs "Urban Challenge" Voluntary Centre services. Please be aware that almost all volunteers will have to go through a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Check before being allowed to do any voluntary work. Follow the link below for further information



<http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/residents/community-and-living/your-community/volunteering/>

<http://www.volunteercentrelincoln.org.uk/>

On a national level, The Princes Trust is always looking for volunteer in a range of projects and activities at:

[http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/support\\_us.aspx](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/support_us.aspx)

## Qualification News and Achievements

### Former ISIS Learner wins BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR Award



Claire Weingaertner was awarded "Business person of the year" at the North Nottinghamshire Business Awards on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011. She was presented the award by George Buchanan, the owner of Hodsock Priory in Blyth.

Claire who undertook her AAT level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 Technician with ISIS Training, went on to become a member in practice with the AAT and then set up her own business providing accountancy services for small businesses. Well done Claire!



## Foundation Learning Achievements

The following learners on the ISIS Training Foundation Learning courses have successfully completed the programme and achieved their qualifications. Well done to all the learners and we hope they continue their success with further qualifications.

### ISIS Boston

Amber Hardy – City & Guilds Certificate in Employability & Personal Development at Level 1.

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Marcus Cobb - City & Guilds Certificate in Employability & Personal Development at Level 1 and EDI Certificate in Functional ICT at Level 1.

### ISIS Lincoln

Conner Peters – EDI Certificate in Functional English Entry Level 3

Aisha Mullins – City and Guilds certificate in Employability and Personal Development Level 1

Mairead Kitchen – EDI Certificate in Functional ICT Level 1

Danielle Harrison – EDI Certificate in Speaking and Listening Entry 3

## The ISIS Team

**WBL Operations Manager**  
Mary Turnor

**WBL Managers**  
Alison Toffon (Lincoln)  
Vanessa Everington (Boston)  
Nicky Bush (AAT)

**Quality Manager**  
Pip Whiteman

**E-learning Manger**  
Mick Gilroy

**Foundation Learning Manager**  
Colin Ashmore

**Admin Team Leader**  
Jean Robinson

**IT Technician**  
Robert Edison

**WBL Team Boston**  
Tina Hassanali  
Collette Steadman  
Frances Bradley  
Daniel Atkin

**WBL Team Lincoln**  
Sandra Portess  
Helen Roberts  
Sandra Gothorp  
Meera Chauhan  
Jacquie West

### Learner Support

**Admin Team Lincoln**  
Helen Ward  
Sarah Brown

**Admin Team Boston**  
Gill Moon  
Kirsty Beresford

**Foundation Learning Lincoln**  
Suzanne Chambers (Team Leader)  
Sarah Foster  
Sophie Pateman

**Foundation Learning Boston**  
Kayleigh Panton (Team Leader)  
Grace Clark  
Marianne White

**Foundation Learning Gainsborough**  
Vicky Mitchell (Team Leader)  
Hannah Parker  
Flick Scott

**Marketing Team Lincoln**  
Richard Appleton  
Paul Farmer

**Marketing Team Boston**  
Pam Bambridge

**Apprentices**  
James Hine (IT)  
Danielle McKeown (Admin)  
Amy Hinton (Admin)  
Jo Edenbrow (Admin)

## ISIS Staff News

### Arrivals, Departures and Movements



Since the last edition we say goodbye to **Andrea Young**, one of our Marketing Brokers based at Boston. We welcome a new Admin Apprentice, **Joanna (Jo) Edenbrow**, who will be working with and providing admin support for our Lincoln Marketing Team. We will also be saying good bye to our Lincoln Work Based Learning Manager **Allison Toffon**, who is leaving ISIS at the end of the month, to take a job closer to her home in Grimsby. There are no new arrivals this month and we are currently in the process of filling our available vacancies. For details of any current vacancies and how to apply, visit our website at [www.isis-training.co.uk](http://www.isis-training.co.uk) for full details.

### New Apprentice Qualification Frameworks – Pip leads from the front!

One of the "hazards" of working in Work Based Learning is the constant changes to the qualifications and Apprenticeship frameworks that we deliver and keeping up to date with all the changes. We are recently experiencing another major change to the Apprenticeship Frameworks which has required all of our staff to undertake yet more training and staff development in order to successfully deliver the new programmes. Leading from the front as always is our Quality Manager **Pip Whiteman**, who has made sure everyone is aware of the changes and has developed a wealth of support material and resources. Everyone at ISIS would like to pass on their thanks and appreciation for the marvellous support she provides.

### Well done Grace and Marianne!



Grace Clark (1<sup>st</sup> from right) and Marianne White (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) stand proudly with their learners, Thomas Prasciunas, Maria Ribeiro, Amy Hilton and Stephen Gash, who were successful at the 2011 Learner of the Year Awards. (See front page for the full story)

## Entertainment News



## Review - Status Quo Live at the Showground

The first series of Midsummer Magic concerts, presented by Chris Moreno, took place on a cold and windy evening on Saturday 14 May. The crowd was surprisingly small for a Quo concert, around 2 – 300 hundred and this could have been due to the cold weather, the ticket prices (£35) and the lack of public transport to get to the venue. However the food, drink and merchandise on sale was very reasonably priced and decent quality. The atmosphere was also quite strange, as you were allowed to bring in picnics and your own seating. This resulted in people setting up their tables, chairs and hampers in front of the stage and it was more reminiscent of a brass band concert in a park than a rock gig.

The evening started with a hard working rock band, **Dawn Traders**, from Nottingham who have been playing together for 30 years, almost as long as Quo. Unfortunately as they hit the open chords, there was a complete power failure and they stood there looking bewildered and embarrassed. After 20 or 30 minutes, power was restored and they went on to play a perfectly enjoyable set of typical British Heavy Rock music, all originals and no covers, in the Whitesnake, Def Leppard and Thin Lizzy style, which went down well with the crowd. A copy of their latest CD was good value for £8 even though I will probably never listen to it again!

Quo came on stage on cue at 8:30ish and as normal, their die hard fans, the famous "Quo Front Row" were all gathered at the front of the stage. They started predictably with "**Caroline**" just as they have done for years and then went on to play a typical Quo set of their greatest hits and a few album tracks. I have seen Status Quo several times over the years and you always know what you are going to get. They played a perfectly adequate, but unremarkable set, but at times just looked to be going through the motions rather than enjoying it or trying to please the crowd. They played a good mix from their back catalogue including a very brief version of one of their early hits "**Down the Dust pipe**" included the awful "**In the Army Now**", my least favourite Quo song, but missed out some of the real crowd pleasers including "**45 Hundred times**", "**Paper Plane**" and "**Break the Rules**" but it must be difficult to decide what to play with so many songs to choose from. A brief encore of rock and roll classics including "**Bye, bye Johnny**" and that was it. Not the best gig I have ever been to and certainly not the worst either, but it will probably be the last time I bother going to see them.

Hopefully the remaining planned concerts will be better attended and the weather a bit warmer. As I rarely miss a chance to see a live band I shall go to the rest, apart from **Jedward/Stacey Solomon**, because that is not music, just pain! The events could be more enjoyable if there was some public transport to get people there such as shuttle buses and the tickets were a bit more reasonably priced. The venue itself is not particularly great facilities wise and I personally think it was much better when these concerts were held in Lincoln Castle.

## General Gossip

**Cheryl Cole** lost her job as a judge on the American X Factor because apparently they couldn't understand her Geordie accent and 99.9% of Americans had never heard of her, which sent the advertiser's who fund the show into a panic. No news on what she plans to do next as she mounts a series attempt to claim back her title of "Nations Official Sweetheart" from **Kate (or is it Katherine) Middleton** AKA Duchess of Cambridge, who literally grabbed the crown following her wedding to **Prince William**.....The wedding didn't do her sister **Pippa** any harm either, thrusting her well into the limelight and various teen magazines have now given her the ridiculous nickname of **P Middy!**..... Hot off the press the Beckham's have a new daughter "**Harper Seven Beckham**" who sounds like a new Police TV show and slavishly follows the celebrity trend for stupid names. This trend is highlighted in the trailer that precedes every episode of **Emmerdale** which should read. "*Emmerdale sponsored by people with incredibly stupid names*". .....**Nicola Roberts** is the latest member of **Girls Aloud** to launch a solo career, appearing on the **Paul O' Grady show** to sing her new single "**Beat of my Drum**". She looked and sounded if she was actually singing live, so a brave effort from the ginger one. Shame the single flopped miserably because it got little or no airplay because nobody was buying it, entering the charts at a modest No 27.....what a cruel world the world of show business is!!

## What's on TV.....A wry look at what's caught my eye on the box recently!

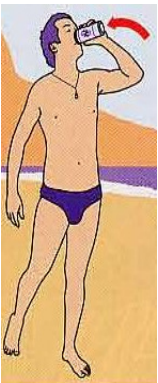
- Starting off in soap land, in **Emmerdale** Carl King is going for the record of "The most punched man in soap" after taking yet another punch on the jaw from Debbie Dingle's Cameron, for suggesting he was having an affair with Eve....what? People in soaps having affairs? Never! Apparently Edna is next in line to have a crack at him (a punch not an affair that is)! Michelle Collins AKA "Cindy Beal" of **Eastenders**, has joined **Corrie** to take over the Rovers Return, complete with the most ridiculous Man-Cockney accent you have ever heard. Also spotted in Corrie is **Doc Martin's** Auntie Muriel playing Roy's Mother.
- Reality TV series **Geordie Shore** on MTV is excruciatingly embarrassing to everyone from Newcastle and the North East in general as it is as far removed from a typical Geordie lifestyle and night out in Newcastle as anything could be. Perhaps this is another structured reality show, (See **TOWIE** further down the page) because it definitely can't be real.
- Continuing with reality shows **The Hasselhoff's** a show about David Hasselhoff; star of Baywatch and Knight Rider and his daughter's Taylor-Ann and Hayley-Amber is hidden away on The BIO Channel, weekdays at 7pm, for anyone that might be remotely interested.
- The new series of **X Factor** started in a blaze of publicity as the nation waited with baited breath to see if Cheryl Cole would be asked to be a judge again.....she wasn't! Leaving the stage clear for Kelly Rowland, once with mega group Destiny's Child and now an established Grammy award winning solo artist and Tulisa from N Dubz who isn't, to join Gary Barlow from Take That and the long serving Louis Walsh to dispense their words of wisdom and help yet another musically challenged contestant to become a one hit wonder.
- **Spring Watch** (BBC's 1 and 2 various times forever) began just as spring was ending, with the trio of Chris Packam, Kate Humble and Martin Hughes-Games getting far too over excited about various goings on in the world of animals and nature. A real "oo-er missus" moment when the announcer stated Charlie Hamilton-James (where do they get these names from?) was in Scotland getting to grips with a beaver!
- **The British Academy TV Awards** produced a major shock when the lavish costume drama **Downton Abbey** was beaten for an award by **The Only Way is Essex** with their "hilarious" catchphrase of "**SHAT-AP**". However it is not such a shock when the award is voted for by users of **YouTube** and is the only award the public can vote for. It does highlight the obsession we have in this country with celebrity and reality shows though. **TOWIE**, as it is commonly known and I honestly thought that was the name of one of the characters until I worked the initials out, is not actually a reality TV show but a **Structured Reality Show**, which means the cast are told what to say, what to do, how to act who to have relationships with etc, so basically not real at all, but planned and scripted like say Emmerdale, Eastenders or Coronation Street, in other words a soap.
- **Saturday night prime time TV** has plumbed new depths with "**The Marriage Ref**", where married couples have their problems solved by a "Celebrity Panel" who between them have enough issues to keep a Psychiatrists conference in business for months!! Issues resolved were the husband in a couple who have been married for 53 years, who is obsessed with making Pickles, (she really needs to get to know him better!) a 30 something man-child who is obsessed with skateboarding (grow up!) and the man who complains his wife is always leaving him to-do lists (he's lucky he gets a list, most men just get told and then promptly forget!) Doesn't he know about the Hoover and spray-polish trick that can get you out of all sorts of trouble??
- **Paul O'Grady Live** treated us to an hour of **Lady Gaga**, but to be honest 15 minutes and one song, where she appeared to be playing the piano, was more than enough for me. She is now officially the biggest music star in the world and the most followed person on Twitter, what a strange world we live in!
- In sport **Barcelona** showed the world how to play football as they ripped Manchester United apart to win the **Champions League trophy** and Sky Sports showed they are the masters of live football with their coverage making the ITV coverage look pretty amateur in comparison. **Lewis Hamilton** showed how not to drive an F1 car as he bludgeoned his way around the Monaco Grand Prix Circuit. He then caused an outcry after getting a good telling off from the organisers by hilariously quoting the ALI G comment "*Is it because I am black*"? Although I am convinced that phrase was first used by Lenny Henry when he used to be a comedian.

## Un-packaging the summer holidays.....Y Vive Espana!!

This is the time of year when people begin to set off on their summer holidays, with the preferred choice for the vast majority being a week or two in the sun on a traditional package holiday. Even more popular these days are the ALL INCLUSIVE Package, holiday as featured in the TV comedy Benidorm, where all the food, drink and entertainment is taken care of in one simple payment.



I normally prefer city holidays, driving holidays or exploring different countries or areas, but every 2 – 3 years like a relaxing beach holiday, but there are certain rules that apply, apart from not wearing budgie smugglers, that can make it a really enjoyable and relaxing experience.



- The flight time must be no more than a maximum 3 hours, which basically gives me a choice of Spain or Portugal as I don't particularly like France or Italy. As Portugal is currently bankrupt, that leaves Spain.
- The flights must be day flights on the way there and day or evening flights on the way back, as night flights just leave you completely worn out and make the holiday pointless.
- It must be all inclusive so I can eat when I am hungry, drink when I am thirsty and don't have to trail around for hours looking for suitable food or drink.
- It must be in a 4 star hotel at least, which in Spain means a UK 3 star, in a resort that is not too busy in one of the less chaotic areas (i.e. not Benidorm, Llorett de Mar or Torremolinos for example).
- Never, ever go to the holiday welcome meeting.

**X WRONG!**

The other problem with this type of holiday is the coach transfer from the airport, to the hotel, complete with really annoying holiday rep. Now unless you want pay a fortune for a taxi and have a white knuckle ride around the hairpin bends of the coast road, this is normally the only realistic method of getting there so one I reluctantly accept. The holiday rep on the bus always sounds like Mrs Merton, speaks to everyone as they are 12 year olds on their first holiday abroad and worst of all even try to get you to sing "Y Viva Espana" or something equally ridiculous. They then regale you with amazing facts like the sun is hot, the water is undrinkable, the alcoholic drinks are stronger than the UK (not that difficult really) and sunburn hurts, before insisting you attend the welcome meeting where you will get a free drink (sorry love, I'm on all inclusive it's all free!) so they can sell you a range of excursions at 4 times the price of the local operator in the town.

So this year I have decided on an all-inclusive week in Benalmadena on the Costa del Sol, in a 4 star hotel, close to the beach with day flights from Doncaster, booked through a reputable operator. I have looked at all the various reviews on Trip Advisor and Holiday Watchdog and it looks perfectly fine. However, I know when I get there it will not be all that was promised. The hotel will be 3 Star at best and Benalmadena won't be as up market as the brochure suggests. But as long as there is a pool to swim in, a beach with some water sports, a promenade to have a walk along in the evening and reasonably edible food and drink I will be happy.



Altogether  
now...AAAY  
VEEVA ESPANYA

Tonight all the  
drinks are free  
for our all  
inclusive guests



Then there are the guests and fellow holiday makers. The danger with this type of holiday is just like the TV comedy Benidorm; the same people come back to the same hotel year after year. Now this gives them ideas totally above their station and unrealistic expectations. Firstly they think the hotel staff are their friends and refer to them constantly by their first name. This is especially prevalent when they send their holiday review in to Trip Advisor when they get home.

*"The staff were marvellous especially MARCO and EVITA, who made sure I got a drink every time I went to the bar!! Can't wait to see them again next year"*

Yes dear, that's the idea, bar staff serve people with drinks, they are not doing you any special favours, that's what they get paid for. Don't think they will be as enthusiastic about seeing you again though! Now the hotel staff react totally differently when these strange people keep addressing them by their first names and treating them like a long lost friend. In reality they haven't a clue who they are, they serve so many people during the holiday season that everyone looks the same. Especially English people, who cannot speak a word of Spanish, are in the main sunburnt, drink far too much and are far too over familiar.

Secondly they want to talk to me and have a drink with me, as they are bored with the same people year in year out, which to be honest I am not that keen on, as I already have some friends and don't particularly need any more. They always ask if it is the first time I have been at the hotel, which it probably will be, then take this to mean I have never been outside of England in my life. This leads to them giving me a run down on the country, the hotel, the resort, the weather, what to eat and drink, what not to eat and drink, before introducing me to the hotel staff who they think are their friends *"This is Marco, you can get a drink off him at the bar and it's all free you know"*... Really? That's amazing; I never knew that's what barmen were for, you learn something new everyday. Free drinks on an all-inclusive holiday whatever next? You'll be telling me I won't get a bill in the restaurant next! Finally they will tell me I must come and see *"Antonio and his amazing dancing dogs singing karaoke"* in the entertainment suite tonight. No thanks I'm washing my hair.

Now I don't mind being reasonably sociable, passing the time of day when waiting for Marco to serve me with a drink at the bar. But I am definitely not going to meet them for a drink before dinner, or go and watch some awful hotel entertainer or even worse, listen to awful karaoke with them. Sorry I am on holiday, I have better things to do like enjoying myself. But as these people never, ever leave the hotel because they are going to get every penny out of their all-inclusive payment, which means eating and drinking all day, before grabbing the best seats for the evening entertainment (where they always save some chairs in case anyone else wants to joint them) it can be quite hard to avoid them.

So we make sure we get two sun beds, with not another one within 50 metres, never sit at the bar, this just encourages people to talk to you, get a table for two in the restaurant, make sure we don't have any spare books, magazines, or newspapers anyone can borrow (this is just an excuse to start a conversation) and unless in the unlikely event that the hotel have booked a top UK rock band, avoid the entertainment like the plague. And exchanging addresses or phone numbers with someone you meet on holiday is a definite no-no. I get plenty of Christmas cards thank you and don't need any more. This way we have a perfectly enjoyable and relaxing holiday, but never feel the need to return to the same hotel, or even the same resort ever again.

### **Top tips and hints for a Great Holiday!!**

- Never wear an England football shirt or any club shirt; unless (a) You don't want to get served at the bar or (b) you want someone to bore you to death talking about football all night.
- Shouting at the waiters in a fake foreign accent does not get you served any faster!!
- All Spanish waiters are not called Manuel and have probably never heard of Fawlty Towers.
- The Germans know we won 2 World Wars and 1 world cup, don't keep reminding them! Even if they do pinch all the sun beds.
- Remember, holiday reps are there to sell you things not to actually help you!
- A red, sunburnt body, budgie smugglers or a thong and a baseball cap is NOT a good look.
- Would you *really* ask for a pint of Vodka and Coke at home? Why do it on holiday?
- It is extremely doubtful that you will find the love of your life on a two week holiday, don't be fooled by Alcohol fuelled flattery!!
- The all inclusive Hotel bar is open for a full 14 days! Don't try to drink it dry on the first night and then be ill for the next 3 days!!

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