

Personal Details of Every Child in UK Lost by Revenue & Customs

The personal details of virtually every child in the UK have been lost by HM Revenue and Customs, the chancellor, Alistair Darling, admitted today. The missing information includes the names, addresses and dates-of-birth of the children and the national insurance numbers, and in some cases the bank details, of parents claiming child benefits.

More than 25 million individuals are affected.

Paul Gray, the chairman of HM Revenue and Customs, today resigned over the "extremely serious failure" of security.

The missing information includes the names, addresses and dates-of-birth of the children and the national insurance numbers, and in some cases the bank details, of parents claiming child benefits.

In a Commons statement greeted by gasps of astonishment from MPs, Darling said that two discs containing details of the 7.25 million families claiming child benefit, sent to the National Audit Office, failed to reach the addressee.

The chancellor told MPs the information went missing after a junior official in the department failed to follow standard procedures and sent a "full copy of the data" to the NAO by courier - not by recorded or registered mail.

The Metropolitan police have confirmed they are investigating the loss of the discs. Officers have searched a child benefit office in Washington, Tyne and Wear, sources said. A spokesman for the force said: "We have got officers in the area assisting with inquiries in connection with the missing child benefit data."

<http://politics.guardian.co.uk>

Queen and Prince Philip Celebrating 60 years

When Britain's Princess Elizabeth first met her distant cousin Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark in 1939, she was 13 years old and he 18. He entertained her by jumping over tennis nets.

The future queen, nicknamed Lilibet as a youngster, recounted later that she felt love at first sight for the dashing prince, tall with blond hair and blue eyes. The pair began a regular correspondence.

The wedding, on November 20, 1947 in central London's historic Westminster Abbey, was a splash of colour for World War II-weary Britain. The couple lived in Malta where Philip, a lieutenant and a rising star in the Royal Navy, was based with the British Mediterranean Fleet.



**Timeline:
Canada
A chronology
of key events:**

2006 January
- Stephen Harper's Conservatives defeat Paul Martin in general elections, ending 12 years of Liberal government.

2006 May - MPs vote by a narrow margin to extend Canada's military deployment in Afghanistan until 2009.

2006 June - In a major anti-terror operation, 17 people are arrested in Toronto on suspicion of planning attacks. A government official says the men were inspired by al-Qaeda.

2006 November - Parliament agrees Steven Harper's proposal that the Quebecois should be considered a "nation" within Canada.

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But their relatively care-free lives were overturned on February 6, 1952 when her father king George VI died prematurely. Aged 25, Princess Elizabeth became queen of Britain and its empire. Prince Philip's military career was over and was left facing a lifetime of being in his wife's shadow. It was also deemed that his family name should not become the name of the royal house, as per tradition. Despite his personal frustration, Prince Philip has proved his loyalty to the queen over six decades of public life. Besides supporting his wife, he has carved out a role as best he could under the constraints of his situation. He is the patron of several organisations and charities and is mostly in charge of running "The Firm", the royals' nickname for the family.

The couple share the traditional passions of the British aristocracy, such as the countryside, horses and hunting. Their royal duties often oblige them to live separate but parallel lives. They live and sleep in separate quarters. However, they eat breakfast together in the morning and enjoy a drink together in the evening in their apartments. Prince Philip, 86, often then goes out again, and Queen Elizabeth, 81, if there is not an engagement to attend, spends her evenings in her private quarters.

Unproven rumours circled that the prince, irritated at playing second fiddle to the queen's marriage to duty, had numerous affairs in the 1950s. She has never strayed, one of her cousins told a chronicler. The education of their four children, Princess Anne and Princes Charles, Andrew and Edward, was left to Prince Philip, who decided to bring them up the hard way, as he had been raised.

There is no question that the queen and Prince Philip have enjoyed an outstanding working partnership. The marriage, if a happy one, has been on the aristocratic model — which is a bit difficult to understand nowadays — tied to their royal duties which have dominated their entire lives, their family life and their existence as a couple.

Source: <http://www.khaleejtimes.com>

History - A Great Canadian Company



June 23, 1887, The Manufacturers Life Insurance Company (Manulife Financial) was incorporated by an Act of Parliament. Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, was elected President of the Company.

December 1887, Manulife Financial was one of the first companies to offer life insurance to women on the same basis as men.

1893, the first policy was sold outside of Canada in Bermuda, beginning a long tradition of establishing operations internationally.

1896, assets were already more than \$1.2 million - the fastest 10-year growth of any Canadian company at the time.

1897, Manulife Financial expanded the Company's operations into Asia, including China and Hong Kong.

1901, Manulife amalgamates with the Temperance and General Life Assurance Company.

1902, Manulife Financial's agency in Manila, Philippines was established.

1903, Manulife Financial wrote its first policy in Sumatra (Indonesia).

1903, the Company entered the U.S. market with a license to sell insurance in Michigan, opening an office in Detroit. Manulife Financial began by providing basic life insurance products. Later expanding across the States, Manulife Financial developed its market to include estate and business planning services to affluent Americans and offering investment-type products to American customers.....

More? Go to: <http://www.manulife.com/corporate/corporate2.nsf/Public/companyhistory.html>

Finance - Tax

Most Canadians regard avoiding taxes as something between a duty and an obsession. Tax avoidance and tax evasion seem to indicate the same thing, but do they?

There is a definite distinction between tax avoidance (where you take advantage of the rules to minimise your tax bill) and tax evasion (where you deliberately try to hide income or deceive the taxman). Tax avoidance is perfectly legal, tax evasion, on the other hand, is not.

Tax avoidance: this is the perfectly legal practice of trying to arrange your affairs so that you pay the least tax possible. Do you contribute to an RRSP? Then you're a tax avoider.

There are two major strategies you can use to legally sidestep taxes. The first is to put your money into certain types of investments that government wants to encourage. Government deliberately equips these "tax-assisted investments" with generous tax breaks precisely because it wants to help them attract investors. The second way is to exploit loopholes in tax laws in order to earn tax deductions. Manoeuvres like this are termed tax shelters. They're the work of sharp-eyed lawyers and accountants who spot unexpected ways to legally beat the system set up by legislators and bureaucrats.

Tax-avoidance tools:

Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP)

A government backed financial planning instrument that allows contributions to be used in income tax deductions. The hope is that this will encourage people to save for their retirement. Types of investments held in a RRSP are restricted.

Flow-through Shares

Issued by some oil, gas and mining companies. A flow-through share gives the investor, rather than the originating company, the right to claim various tax deductions. Consider an oil and gas company that issues \$1 million in flow-through shares. It commits to using that money exclusively for exploration expenses, which gives it the right to deduct that amount from its corporate taxes. However, rather than use the deduction itself, the company passes it along to people who buy the flow-through shares. The shareholders can then write off the entire amount against their taxes, usually in the first two years.

Gifted Trust Arrangements

You donate money to a charity through a trust. The parent company greatly increases the size of the charitable donation you make, thus boosting the size of your tax receipt. Depending on your province and tax bracket, a \$1 donation can provide about \$1.80 in tax credits.

Buy into an existing Business

Pay a sum of money to buy into a business. As little as one fifth of the total required to buy into the business is actually paid and the business loans the rest to the purchaser. A Promissory note is issued by the business and the loan is repaid by marketing revenue earned by the business on your behalf over an agreed period of time. When buying into the business the purchaser receives a tax receipt for the total amount – principle plus loan – to be used as a tax deduction. The second advantage here is business expenses can also be deducted from your income.

If you want to explore ways of saving taxes talk to a financial planner for some professional advice.

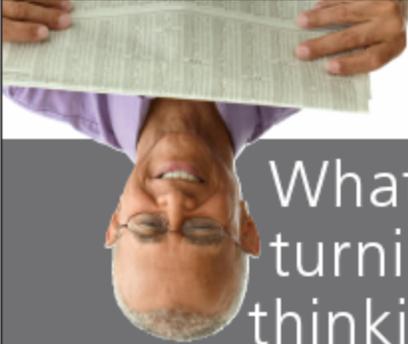


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Strikers Spoil Christmas Treat for Brits in New York

British tourists taking advantage of the weak dollar to do their Christmas shopping in New York are finding Broadway theatres dark, as a strike by stagehands stretches into the lucrative holiday season. Barbara Dow, a civil servant from Beckenham, Kent, and her daughter Joanna Lock, an ambulance woman from Bethnal Green, East London, turned up to buy tickets on the Great White Way yesterday only to find most shows cancelled.

"We wanted to spend one evening at the theatre. We are quite disappointed," Ms Dow said. "It's the first visit to New York for both of us. We had heard there was a strike but we were not sure it was still on."

Her daughter added: "It's a shame really. A lot of people come from England to do their Christmas shopping at this time of year. People show up and it's all shut."

The longest Broadway strike since 1975 – when musicians downed instruments for 25 days – has been costing the city up to \$17 million (£8 million) a day since it began on November 10.

A total of 27 shows – including such hits as Monty Python's *Spamalot* and *Phantom of the Opera* – have been cancelled as the holiday season approached.

Stagehands, represented by Local One of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, object to the looser work rules being demanded by the League of American Theatres and Producers.

Source: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk>

Dismal International Football

McClaren sacked as England coach

Steve McClaren has been sacked as England coach following his side's failure to qualify for Euro 2008. Assistant coach Terry Venables has also lost his job in what the Football Association said was a unanimous decision by its board. The FA brought a swift end to McClaren's 18-match reign as England's head coach at an emergency meeting. McClaren's position had become untenable after the 3-2 defeat to Croatia at Wembley on 21st November.

McLeish buoyed by Scots promise

McLeish's frustration is tempered with promise for Scotland's future. Scotland manager Alex McLeish has predicted a bright future for his side after their heartbreaking failure to qualify for Euro 2008. A 2-1 loss to World Cup holders Italy ended Scotland's hopes in a tough group which also included runners-up France. "We live for these kind of games and it's unfortunate that we won't be at Austria and Switzerland," said McLeish.

Northern Ireland's hopes dashed

Northern Ireland's hopes of reaching the Euro 2008 finals disappeared when they fell to Spain in Las Palmas. Nigel Worthington's side needed to win to have any chance of qualifying but they were beaten by a deflected shot seven minutes into the second half. Xavi's strike from long range came off the head of defender Stephen Craigan giving keeper Maik Taylor no chance. As things turned out, Northern Ireland could not have gone through anyway as Sweden beat Latvia 2-1.

Proud Toshack hails Wales' draw

Wales manager John Toshack said he was immensely proud of his young side that secured a goalless draw in Germany. "I thought the longer the game went on, I could see us getting a result. It was hard work of course but I thought they did very, very well," said Toshack.

"I'm proud of them. You're going to be put under pressure in places like this because Germany are a top side.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

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Ghanaian court finds British girls guilty of drug smuggling

Two 16-year-old schoolgirls from north London are waiting to hear how long they must spend behind bars after being convicted in Ghana yesterday of attempting to smuggle cocaine worth £300,000 to Britain. Yasemin Vatansever and Yetunde Diya could be jailed for up to three years after a judge in Accra found them guilty at a court hearing of trying to take 6kg of the drug back to the UK hidden in secret compartments in laptop

bags. The hearing took place behind closed doors - the blinds of the high court room were pulled down to prevent a crowd outside from viewing proceedings.

People who had been at the hearing described how the girls, dressed in T-shirts and trousers, sat on chairs and listened in silence as the judge read out her summary of the prosecution and defence cases. It was an hour and a half before they were told of the guilty verdicts on counts of drug possession and attempted smuggling. As the judge left the room, both broke down in tears.

Sentencing was adjourned until next month for social services reports to be prepared by the British and Ghanaian authorities. For the last five months the girls have been held in an unoccupied office of the Narcotics Control Board building.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

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Other News & Events

Canadian Government To Grant 265,000 Residents Visas in 2008

In 2006, Citizenship and Immigration Canada admitted 251,649 permanent residents and more than 1.2 million temporary residents. Of the 251,649 new permanent residents admitted, 138,257 were admitted under the economic class which is 54.9% of the total. This includes skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial nominees and live-in caregivers. 70,506 were admitted under the family class which is 28.1% of the total. As announced on 31st October 2007 by The Honourable Diane Finley, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Canada is to accept up to 265,000 new residents in 2008. "Our government believes that immigration plays an important role in building our communities and growing our economy," said Minister Finley. "The immigration targets will help ensure that Canada continues to grow and benefit from all that newcomers and their families bring to our country."

Brit Numbers soar to decade record

2006 was a record year for British emigration to Canada, with a total of 6,542 Brits receiving a permanent residence visa. This, according to newly released data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, is the highest since 1997 – from which the current means of collating statistics dates. The figure is an 11 per cent increase over figures for 2005, and made the United Kingdom the seventh-biggest source country for immigrants

entering Canada in 2006. This increase was despite a 4 per cent decrease in the overall numbers admitted through Canada's immigration programme – from 262,239 in 2005 to 251,649 in 2006.

<http://www.migrationnews.com>

Sudan "teddy bear crisis" ends as president pardons British teacher

A British teacher jailed for naming a teddy bear Mohammed on Monday said she is "sad to be leaving Sudan" after being granted a full presidential pardon. Gillian Gibbons is expected to be back in Britain within 36 hours, Sky News reported.

In a written statement, the 54-year-old mother of two said she was sorry if she had caused distress and added that she had "great respect" for Islam.

Sudanese president Omar al Bashir cleared the teacher after meeting two British Muslim representatives.

Gibbons was arrested over a week ago after a secretary at Unity High School complained that she had named a teddy bear Mohammed. Gibbons was convicted of insulting Islam at the end of an eight-hour hearing on Thursday and sentenced to 15 days in detention. She had faced 40 lashes or up to a year in prison.

<http://www.albawaba.com>

British beer sales drop to record low

Sales of beer in Britain have dropped to the lowest levels since the 1930s, brewers said Tuesday, as the country turns increasingly to wine and spirits. The number of pints per day sold in British pubs peaked in 1979, but has slumped by 22 percent -- or seven million pints -- since then, according to the British Beer and Pub

Association (BBPA).

The group claims that from 1997 to 2006 beer duties grew by 27 percent, against 16 percent for wine, 11 percent for cider and three percent for spirits -- cutting brewers' profits by 78 percent between 2004 and 2006 alone.

The BBPA, which also lamented soaring costs of raw products such as barley, malt, glass and aluminium, called on the government and lawmakers to agree a freeze on tax on beer sales.

<http://afp.google.com>

British shows scoop Emmy awards

British TV shows have dominated the 35th annual International Emmy Awards in New York.

They won seven out of their eight nominations, and all but one of the British winners were BBC productions.

They included best actor for Jim Broadbent in *The Street*, which also won best drama series, and best comedy for *Little Britain Abroad*.

Other British winners included Simon Schama's *Power of Art: Bernini*, about the Baroque sculptor, for best arts programming.

The awards ceremony honours TV programmes produced outside the US.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Missing British canoeist turns up five years on

John Darwin, a canoeist who disappeared more than five years ago and was presumed dead turned up at a police station in London at the weekend, very much alive and in good health. Darwin's brother David told the Daily Mail newspaper: "All the family is so relieved that John is alive. "It is the best Christmas present any family could wish for."

And Finally

British PM Gordon Brown hoped to capture the public's imagination with a search for a national motto. He's been met with healthy doses of cynicism and subversion. Take a look at these:

- In America we trust
- At least we're not French
- Land of yobs and morons
- Great people, great country, Great Britain
- Courage, reason, humanity, democracy, monarchy
- A country so brave and true
- Pride comes before a fall
- Taxation without representation is tyranny
- Created by heroes, destroyed by Labour
- Our government no longer listens
- Wallowing in a post-colonial miasma
- Once mighty empire, slightly used
- Drinking continues until morale improves
- Our glass is half empty
- Fat, rude, arrogant, racist, selfish
- Sorry, it's all our fault
- We apologize for the inconvenience
- No balls, nerve or glory
- Chicken tikka masala, chips and rice
- No, please, after you, honestly
- Pride, passion, history, monarchy & exploration
- Americans who missed the boat
- Britain – where freedom reigns
- Hanging on in quiet desperation
- Dentistry is not our forte
- Five quid a beer? Blimey!
- National mottos are for wimps (Probably sounds better in Latin)
- Hail Great Britain, live, develop and flower
- Britain: Live wrong and prosper!
- Britain: Making bad decisions since 1707
- Irreverent laughter hides our pain
- Great before, average after

Have your say! Write to mick@britclub.ca and tell us what you think the national motto should be. Keep it clean please.

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