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The latest buzz word is “infrastructure.”

Britain used to be great at building canals and railways, but we sometimes seem to lack confidence despite a number of great success stories.

The Channel Tunnel reached completion about 150 years after starting, and HS1 then took a further decade.

Crossrail is now well on the way to completion after 40 years debate, the same delays will be disastrous in

respect of HS2 and London’s next airport, whichever side of the fence you are on.

Nearer to home, the House of Lords Select Committee has recently (November 2013) reported on “Scientific Infrastructure”.

Their conclusion is that while the UK is reasonably well supplied with major equipment, there is almost always inadequate provision for maintenance, repair and depreciation, to say nothing of decommissioning. This means that equipment is not always used as intensively as desirable.

The problem is that such costs are boring compared with the excitement of launching a new piece of kit.

It is also a reflection of the paucity of expertise in the Treasury in running major projects.

On a totally different scale, the oceans are a major natural asset, and some

recent chemical data are giving rise to concern.

The inexorable rise of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is having two consequences for the seas. The first may be benign – an increase in algal photosynthesis. This increase in biomass *may* provide extra nourishment for sea creatures.

The second – increasing acidity through absorbing the gas – is more worrying. Although the pH has only moved from 8.11 to 8.06 during the past twenty-five years (data have not been collected for long), because the scale is logarithmic, this means a 12% rise in hydrogen ion concentration. Many shells and exoskeletons are made of calcium carbonate which is susceptible to dissolution in acid.

Better book your trip to the Great Barrier Reef while it is still there.



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*The Committee is an Associate Parliamentary Group of members of both Houses of Parliament and British members of the European Parliament, representatives of scientific and technical institutions, industrial organisations and universities.*



Science in Parliament has two main objectives:

1. to inform the scientific and industrial communities of activities within Parliament of a scientific nature and of the progress of relevant legislation;
2. to keep Members of Parliament abreast of scientific affairs.

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