THEY USED TO MAKE THINGS THERE

Posted on December 29, 2006 by Eddie

Category: Observations

We've just returned to Southampton from visiting family in the North of England. It's amazing the changes that have happened over the past thirty years or so since I made the fatal move south. The riverside in Sunderland has changed beyond all recognition, where once there were cranes and shipyards there are now grassy banks and expensive houses for rich people. It really does look nice now. The area is much less polluted too - there are now peregrine falcons breeding on the cliffs on the County Durham coast which was an industrial wasteland when I was a lad, but is now a place of natural beauty. But, you know, I think we've lost something too. I used to like the sight of the ships lining the river bank waiting to be fitted out. I was proud to grow up in the biggest ship building town in Europe.

The same thing came to mind as we drove south today. We left early in the morning to avoid the rush of people going to the sales at the Meadowhall Shopping centre in Sheffield. When we first started doing this route, what is now the Meadowhall was the site of the biggest steel mill in the country. Sheffield used to be a byword for high quality steel goods and now it's a place that you have to pass early in the morning to avoid the huge number of shoppers. Where men used to sweat and labour in the heat of the blast furnaces, making the best steel goods in the world, people now queue up to buy bargains at Top Shop.

I can't complain - I'm a coal miner's son and I certainly don't work in heavy industry and I'm certainly not one to gripe about the cleaner air and environment in the north of England. However, there is a bit of me that is desperately sad at the way so much of our manufacturing and industrial heritage seems to have been lost - and so quickly. Steel, cotton, woolens, ships; we used to make things in the north of England - water power, coal and hard graft provided the energy. I can't help but think that one day we will be regretting much of what once was. Before you think this is nothing more than some indulgent nostalgia (which isn't as good as it used to be) - making things is a creative act and human beings were fashioned in the image of a creative God. There is something good about being creative, whereas endless shopping for bargains and new clothes that we don't need is much less valuable and much less a reflection of our creator.