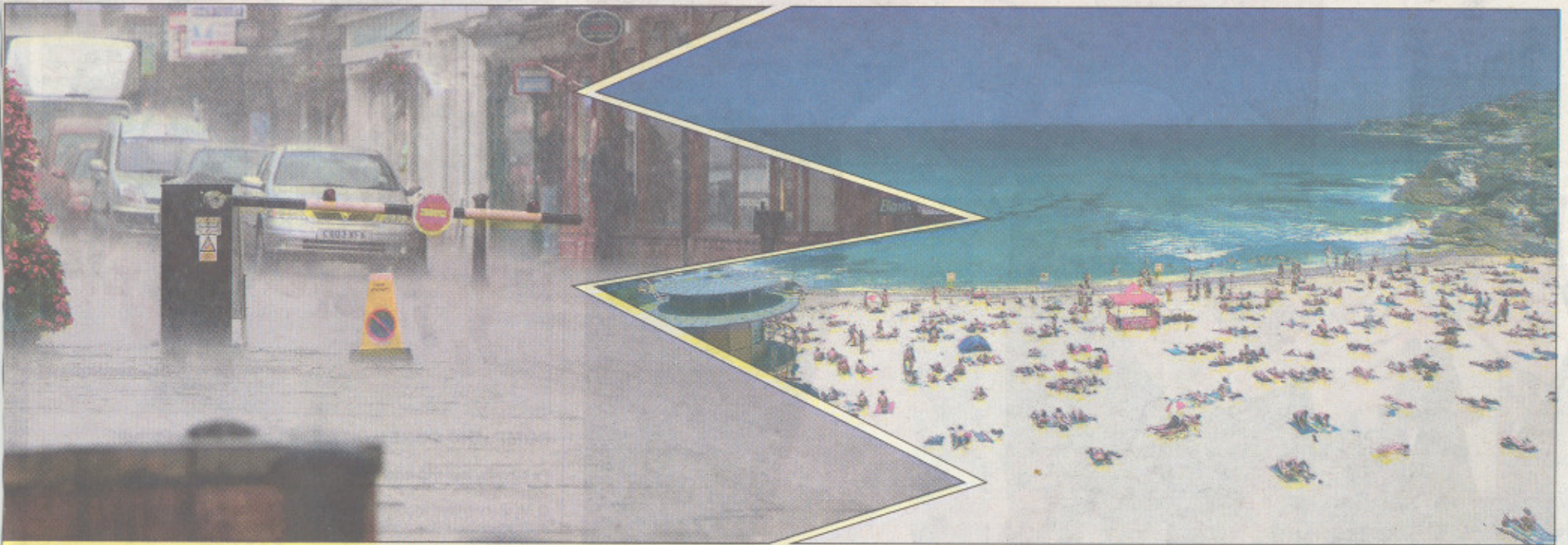


Looking at the important issues in the community

Fancy a change of scene?



PARALLEL WORLDS: On another rainy day in Chester, left, a new life somewhere like Sydney's Tamarama beach, right, seems an even more attractive option for many Brits.

Cheshire families are answering the call for a new life of adventure in the sun 12,000 miles away. BARRY ELLAMS reports

ANOTHER washout summer? Fed up of the credit crunch? Just had the gas bill?

As the cost of living soars in Britain it may come as no surprise that significant numbers of Cheshire residents are upping sticks to Australia, New Zealand and Canada in search of a new life.

Britain's economic downturn, food and fuel prices, crime and the property slump are all exerting pressures on many middle income households.

In spite of its status as a 'lifestyle county' Cheshire is at the hub of a major emigration phenomenon as young professionals and working families decamp to the commonwealth.

According to figures, the most recent emigration hotspot is Wirral with about 1% of its population having left the country between 2001 and 2006.

Chester is the UK's third highest emigration city with other relatively affluent regions like Cambridgeshire, Dorset and St Albans whose populations aged between mid-twenties and mid-fifties are on the move.

Quaffing fine new World Wines in Adelaide, mountaineering in New Zealand's Southern Alps or fishing in Niagara River, Ontario are some of the lifestyle perks up for grabs for British professionals in search of adventure, improved R&R and salaries that go the extra mile.

Director Paul Arthur of Chester-based The Emigration Group explained: "Middle England is

on the move and quality of life is the main driver. It's not people moving from run-down areas, they are leaving from well-off commuter towns.

"We've had thousands of e-mail enquiries over the last six months, we even had one on Christmas Day.

"The longer this economic climate continues the more people are re-evaluating their position.

"Our biggest client base is the CH postcodes. We get more people from Cheshire moving than anywhere else in the UK."

The Emigration Group helps professionals resettle into New Zealand and Australia and have reported an explosion in recruitment as both growing economies headhunt the UK's rich pool of professionals and skilled workers.

Australia alone has a shortfall of 180,000 job vacancies. Both Australia and New Zealand have a list of occupations that are high in demand, trades like plumbers, electricians, doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants and teachers.

Mr Arthur explained: "The UK's workforce is the preferred choice of Australian and New Zealand governments, they respect our hard work ethic and our high standards of training and they have adjusted their policy to make it easier for British workers to resettle."

Between 1997 and 2006 nearly two million Britons left the country, the largest population migration since

the mid-sixties.

Figures from July 2006 to July 2007 show 12,273 Brits emigrated to New Zealand compared to 8,165 in 2003. Emigration numbers have tripled over the last five years - 24,800 Brits emigrated down under during 2006/7 compared to 8,749 in 2001/2.

Mr Arthur said: "We helped more than 500 families to emigrate last year - Australia and New Zealand offer a fabulous lifestyle alternative, have excellent job opportunities, affordable homes and better weather.

"These countries have a better balance between work and home-life - lifestyles are geared towards recreation."

Chester Chronicle assistant news editor Rebecca Edwards and her husband are moving to British Columbia, Canada later this year.

She said: "Most British 20-somethings like us have missed the property boom, owe thousands of pounds in student loans and are under pressure to work long hours without any long-term job security.

"We hope to escape the live-to-work ethic in Britain and enjoy a more relaxed way of life in Canada, without the material pressures of keeping up with the Joneses."

Rebecca added: "We know there will be days when we miss our family and friends, but with internet phones it is easy to communicate now and we hope they will visit.

"At the moment we plan to move back home in a couple of years, but if things work out I think we could well stay out there."



'We get more people from Cheshire than anywhere else in the UK.'

PAUL ARTHUR, THE EMIGRATION GROUP