

Life in 2020

In the new village of Hamstreet, in Kent, Richard Dumill goes to the bathroom and [] for a new day. It is 2020 and as he flushes the [] his sample is automatically analysed and sent to the local doctor. The cholesterol level is slightly [] because of the heavy dinner of farmed cod and chips but the computer in the surgery discounts the readings as not exceptional. There is a slight hum as the family water purifier switches on, and as he walks down the hallway he taps the electricity [] and sees it shows that the family is in credit: his own windmill generator and solar [] are putting more energy into the grid than the household is using, adding to the family []. Downstairs his wife, Sarah, is complaining. The so-called "smart fridge" has malfunctioned and the order for milk and bread which should have reached the local delivery service has not been []. The grocer, who employs a refugee from Tuvalu, a Pacific island country that disappeared three years previously as sea levels [], will have to be telephoned instead. Food deliveries go in a special lockable box rather than on the doorstep since [] of these increasingly expensive essentials is a growing problem. This start to the day of the average British [] is part of a vision of how life will have changed for everyone by 2020 put together by Environment Agency scientists. Both parents now [] to pay off the 55-year mortgage on their house. Sarah works as a counsellor for people who have a genetic predisposition to a variety of [] like cancer and heart trouble that means they cannot qualify for insurance or mortgages. Richard normally works from home but is going in a shared hydrogen powered car to the office at the waste and recycling brokerage where he works. He [] sees any of the recycled tin or plastic in which he deals but quotes prices for the futures market in which companies buy waste products to use in future []. Under international trading rules he has to account for where all the waste material goes. When working at home, a telephone gadget in his ear, which operates on electricity [] by his brain, allows his manager to speak to him at any time during working hours. This, among many new electronic [] which are supposed to make him more efficient, Richard regards with scepticism.

Today as he drives to work he carefully [] his route to avoid congestion charges on the motorway or in any of the towns on the way. His company long ago [] out of its central London headquarters to cut costs. The former [] estates, which gradually emptied and became derelict as manufacturing declined to 9% of gross domestic product, have been taken down and [] with water-and energy-efficient housing estates. The whole area is planted with trees to form what has been christened the Dartford Forest. The couple have a daughter Britney, adopted like many other []: sperm counts for the average male in Britain have dropped to 30% of 1940s level, because the chemicals widely used in food and farming have so [] fertility. It is no satisfaction that many big food [] have gone bankrupt in the last few years because of class actions brought by people no longer able to have children. The clampdown on [] in food and high oil [] mean that sending fresh food long distances is prohibitively expensive. The family keep chickens to have a supply of fresh eggs and grow vegetables because so much imported food is now an [] luxury. The warmer climate means melons can be grown [], although it also has led to a malaria scare in nearby Tunbridge Wells. The agency's picture of life in Britain in 2020 is not all bad. The air is [], public transport is much better, and because of congestion charges and home working [] jams are becoming a distant memory. []