

Hello.

This is one of “those” mornings... that can run into days! Mulling in bed, the whole of my Christmas letter 2014 formulated. Feeling as tired as when I went to bed, nearly eight hours earlier, I finally arose, breakfasted while taking in the TV news; pre-planned the programmes I wanted to watch that day but for which I knew I would not be available and once more wished I had two recorders, as programmes clashed. I also wished I had a hard disk player to save jiggling with discs, across which, programmes needed to run but then, would I not run out of physical storage space because I had not had time to view what I had recorded? In any case, what I record is usually for archive retrieval. However, none of these perceived requirements deserved immediate cash expenditure. Electronically, my mind is distracted by a demonstration of the new curved screen in John Lewis, where I went originally to look at new stands; ending up contemplating a complete renewal of everything to do with media entertainment!

From the foregoing, you will guess this open letter is intended to cover everyone... and “everyone” covers a diverse range of personalities! So there will be bits that will bore you, as you already “know that”, or perhaps were glad to be reminded? Hopefully, there will be bits that you should find interesting, as they cover ground you have never contemplated before. Exciting!?

With all this done, I sat down to switch on my laptop and had not forgotten what had been playing in my mind while lingering in bed! I simply got diverted... again! The diversion may have been due to having recently engaged in a lunch with friends from college. Not as many as might have been there, due to good fortune... all of us finding retirement so hectic as to experience the old cliché “I don’t know how I ever had time to do any work!” We were also fortunate in being there despite our diverse interactions with various health services for needs ranging from various cancers to factual and potential triple heart by-passes!

One was lingering at home, due to chemotherapy making him too vulnerable, for the present, to be safe in a crowd; one had already departed years ahead of us, to wherever we all go in due time; a couple of others were in Canada; one or two other acquaintances were commented upon, of whom no one had heard since we last debated their possible continued existence; and one of our more regular ones had skidaddled to America, where he and wife are living on wheels doing a massive tour. America was closer to me, as another of our slightly extended circle, now American based, had dropped over for a visit with his second wife and I had joined them for lunch in London a fortnight before.

This second and more immediate distraction has been generated by two or three responses I received from last year’s “broadsheet”, where apparently the ink had powdered and they were disappointed to miss some of the text. Regretfully, I put their requests to one side and lost them. Sorry.

First, it is nice to learn that some people had found what I had written to be of that amount of interest. I had thought of repeating it but decided that those who did not need it might not be so enthused, although I might change my mind and include it when I know how much the envelope will accept. I have subsequently decided to put it on the web!

This year, the cards have been bought and their envelopes are thin, standard size. Last year I was enthralled by the abilities of my new printer and was still playing around with it, using cheaper but nonstandard inks. That was the error of judgement. I had intended following through year on year but for reasons that will follow, the year has not progressed as expected.

Returning to the moment. I have used Word primarily as an office facility, rarely as an artistic input device. QuarkXPress and DreamWeaver are my main programs, as they can drive professional typesetters and other professional level technology, allowing me to (vaguely) “keep my hand in” with my past career. A career that started at 14 at school, where I learned to hand set type and acquire a better acquaintance with Latin but not sufficiently as to pass the language at GCE ‘O’ Level. My first major setting exercise had been setting three 10”x8” double-column pages in 10pt Verona Roman (a ‘Founders’ typeface). We only had enough type in a full composition case to set one page at a time. As we could only print one page at a time this wasn’t a problem, except that one had to ‘diss’ (distribute) the letters back into the correct boxes before starting on a new page.

I will digress a moment. “Oooh! A double digression! Oooh! A triple digression! I will come to the fourth digression later, putting it in sequence. Now, where was I? Aah yes. It is often thought that Henry Ford’s car manufacturing production line was the dawn of ‘Time and Motion’ study. It wasn’t. Printers were ahead by four centuries. A full case of type for book composition consists of two cases laid on a random. That is a storage unit holding trays of type up to a level providing a comfortable working surface for a standing man. The surface is a double-angled slope, the case nearest the compositor, in the lower of the two positions: hence the expression ‘lower and upper’ case when referring to small letters and capital letters. The capital letters being in even sized boxes running alphabetically... save that “U” and “J” appear somewhere else, according to individual ‘house’ preference.

When first using moveable type, the church controlled printing and only used Latin: "U" and "J" did not exist in Latin at that time. Hence "virtue" in church windows appears as "VIRTVS" (phonetically "wirtus"). The lower case consists of a seemingly higgledy piggedly arrangement of different sized boxes. That is 'Time and Motion' before the term was invented! The box sizes are related to the amount of lead letters each can contain and that number and its position is related to the frequency with which those characters appear in the language. The largest size of case, the overall dimensions of which are determined by the width of a man's arms to carry comfortably when pulling the case in and out of recesses that contain the stacked cases, is termed a 'book' case; not because you could set a book from it but because a book would involve the longest period of continual type-setting. The relationship of letter quantities is geared according to their use, so that all boxes empty at about the same rate. That relationship was still used, until very recently, in what is known as 'casting off'. The method used in counting the number of words in a typescript for estimating time, cost and number of printed pages the text will make, now done automatically by computer programs as in 'Word'. However, the technique is still used today at the very first stage when design and layout are considered. Change a typeface, not its size, just its design and you can add or lose a whole section of 16 pages, affecting the final cost of the proposed book.

In our lunchtime conversation, Rodney commented that he reckoned he could still set type, remembering the 'lay' of the case, that is what letters went where. That position was linked to their frequency of use, the most used boxes being the largest and nearest to the centre, making the movement of hand to the box, to composing stick in which the lines were set, the shortest and fastest possible route. Time and Motion again! What I declined to say at that time was that when at college I took the Intermediate type setting exam, required of all professionally taught apprentices. I think at that time it was still a five-year apprenticeship and they would have taken that level in their third year. I wanted to see how a self-taught amateur could hold his own with a professionally taught apprentice. There have been times on the shop floor when I have been more grateful for my City and Guilds in hand composition than in my Management Diploma!

From diversion number umpteenth back to my main thread, a convenient expression as a following on process is of cause to sew together the sections of the printed book... with thread! It was this lunch time meeting that brought printing *per se* as a scenery drop to drape the back of my mind: that means theatre of course! It was theatre that brought Charles (now permanently in America and with whom I had lunched a few days previously) into the arena as an "attachment". As an artist his course was separate from ours and he was a couple of years older, which meant he was already established and familiar with college routines, one of which was... drama! Watford college was superbly equipped. A compact stage with full fly tower, although its lighting was beginning to show its period. We were all, in one way or another, involved. I think my and my family's theatrical interests were well covered last year, so I will scuttle back to where I departed my planned thinking, several diversions ago.

I was waxing lyrically (I thought so, so "shut up!") about the mainstay typeface at the school press, prompted through looking freshly at Word's facilities. Life has indeed moved on. Not only did I discover the range of borders now available [known as printer's 'flowers' in the trade (and not always properly fitting at the corners in Word)]; that some of them were pre-formed to print in more than one colour; all of which prompted me to look in more detail at the range of faces available.

As I earlier wrote, I use Word as an everyday default input for more sophisticated programs. I had in mind "Old English", or something like that, which was the name of a Founder's face we used for Christmas cards. This is fine in short sentences but for several pages...! I mulled the now enormous list of typefaces available, thinking of cursive scripts, knowing how awful my handwriting has always been and how nice it would be to "write" seemingly well. I used to be very embarrassed by my handwriting, my maternal grandmother not helping by generously buying me a typewriter at an early age. Then I discovered Michael Foot's reputation. He himself frequently could not read his own handwriting and frequently neither can I mine, so I banished my shame and wrote (typed) head high! On the other hand, his volumes were published!

Running through the list of available faces was like a kaleidoscope of my life, different faces suddenly standing out, ready to unfold my past associations. Optima, the face in which this text is set [not if you are reading on the web, in which case it is most likely to be Helvetica] was my recommendation for Wellcome International Trading Ltd's official typeface. Technically a 'sans serif' face it has certain angularities within it that make it interesting, while not distracting from the text. More importantly, it was clearly different from, yet provided good harmony with, Wellcome's established use of serif and non-serif faces, showing independence of a new, separate entity within the international family, yet harmonising with the collective whole.

I could go on along this path but will not now. There are many more paths to follow and many branches off each of them but in time... and time is the question, how much time is left? This has launched me into a very public debate across a diverse range of issues that are not for this notelet but, as some of you

may have been accurately guessing, these notelets are potentially something more than they seem.

So, let me pick up from last year. For the last two or three years I have been treading new ground in health and although sometimes irritating, that new ground has brought me into contact with a wide range of personalities, in diverse places, in diverse circumstances and all themselves undergoing re-examination. Occasionally frightening, the time has been interesting and sometimes a little challenging but it has been exciting.

A conversation with John, on the telephone, indicated his and Jennie's view, expressed to their children, was that they were both happy their life-time was phasing out in this period. My view is that these are exciting and invigorating times. So much is to be looked at anew. So many preconceptions and past acceptances by default to be rethought and challenged. This is not the format through which to examine them. I will not give you the web site where I am working out my thoughts. If you are that interested you can find me on Google, if not, you won't, so I will not waste space here.

I write this ahead of when I will be entering my latest round of consultations. These will be during the run-up to Christmas and I have no cause to feel especially concerned, although there is always something, such is the continually changing state of my condition. So far, they have been saying to me, in effect: "Oh, you're still alive? Jolly good. Tests more or less as last time, keep taking the tablets, carry on living and instead of seeing you in 3/6/9 months time I'll see you in 6/9/12 months time, okay? Cheers! All perfectly simple and straight forward, one wonders how anyone has cause to complain about the NHS or why the NHS is worried about costs.

When one takes into account that every one of those people are probably on £50,000 to £100,000+ a year, are each supported by sharing at least 3 supporting staff, each on £20,000–£30,000+ a year, themselves backed by several more at a lower rate; never mind about the overall hospital costs of building maintenance and general administration; and that I am at the very cheap end of need (so far), one realises just how incredibly fortunate we are as a nation.

I remember being called to a crisis meeting at WITL and pointing out the seniority of the many managers there, from which one could mentally calculate the cost of the meeting. I added in a few other costs, as just described and pointed out we were generally not aware of this. We were an unproductive overhead, lost within the overall fixed costs that were borne by every hour every one of the machines and personnel at Dartford were working. These costs determined the cost of our tablets, before we thought of profit, which itself was affected by the bulk buying power of governments. No one fainted but a few blanched significantly. That is the sort of calculation I make every time I enter a hospital: it is the root cause of so many of the modern world's problems. Not all of us, who constitute the collective whole, bother to think things through in enough detail ahead of need, or are as objectively aware as we might be. Hence, the inevitable jamboree over the next few years to which I am looking forward most excitedly. A pity, likewise, that religion generally looks backwards instead of forward into this time and plane.

Back from yet another detour. I have but one problem, Sjögren's Syndrome. As the name implies it is a condition, not an illness or disease but it can be the cause of many and diverse 'possible' illnesses and problems, for which one has to watch out to define what the problem actually is, hence the need for a range of specialists. It is rather like driving a car. You are in third, about to go up into fourth when the car, of its own volition, decides to go into reverse. You are never too sure where you are at any particular moment. So far, my only complaint is that I am permanently tired. This means that I lose, effectively, half the day resting, despite having had a full night's sleep, from which I awake as tired as when I went to bed. I used to be an insomniac, from which experience I now believe I actually gained more benefit than now, sleeping like a log. So, this year's schedule, announced last year is somewhat behind but, we plough on. Another diversion.

The 'we' just used is not the 'Royal' 'we'. I am at odds with concepts of ego so have always had a tendency, on some occasions more than others, to use the plural pronoun. It is the same plural device used to evade the 'male' 'female' conundrum which, in earlier years, I avoided by using "chaps and chapesses" in colloquial speech.

Assuming all consultants conclude my forthcoming meetings with something like "Piss off until well into the New Year but have a Happy Christmas on the way", I hope to be forging ahead as previously indicated. Much groundwork has in fact been laid, it just isn't obvious, for the time being, but original plans remain intact. A penultimate point, I owe a number of people an apology. They are the people who might reasonably have expected to receive a birthday card from me and didn't. Sorry.

There may be a problem of overload with my electronic diary but I suspect the fault lies with me. For now, I am refusing to accept my situation and so plough on regardless as if I had the time and energy that clearly I no longer have, unless Sjögren's goes quiet (which it can) for a reasonable period. Deliberately reducing my interests seems somehow defeatist, rather than simply realistic, but facing reality in life is as

much an art of management as anything else. So, I am beginning to rationalise. In the mean time I suddenly realised I had accumulated several birthday cards and realised I had intended sending them but could not remember to whom for when. So, that will be why, if you were expecting a birthday card but did not receive one—I got side tracked until the date had passed!

This tiredness of mine is the main reason I opt out of commitments. I rarely know, until the moment, what my reliability is likely to be. This is why I booked three days in an hotel in London, simply to attend one dinner! Unsure of my health, I allowed one day to get up there. Perversely, the next day I was a bundle of energy and spent some time wandering around parts of the city I have not seen for a long time. Normally, I'm up for the West End, the city being only for business but the city was my cause for being there. That night was a white tie formal livery dinner at Fishmonger's Hall. Three Old Boys within my time frame at school had coincidentally been elected Master of their respective livery companies this year. A unique occasion, never previously known, so of course it had to be celebrated. I made a separate page for that occasion [Fishmonger's Hall **MONDAY 22nd SEPTEMBER 2014 [after-noon post]** on

<http://www.petersuch.com/WeeklyCommentary201409September.html>]. I included, in my wander around on that middle day, the new developments in the City. I was amazingly in top form. As a precaution, the after-noon was spent on my bed. The next day I walked back from the city to Euston, re-linking with locations very familiar to me, when working for Staples in St Albans, again bringing back many happy memories.

However, by the time I reached Euston I was finished. I insisted on walking home from the station but had to sit a couple of times. Not having my fold up seat in my wheeled trolley with me was a nuisance but I learned I now have to rethink my intended German tour, as I now know I could not cope with my case. So, something was learned that might not have been learned until too late.

Prior to that, I celebrated my birthday with a little excursion, covered at [\[http://www.petersuch.com/Birthday2014.html\]](http://www.petersuch.com/Birthday2014.html). This was surprisingly repeated 23rd November when, feeling nearly normal for the first time for some time, I visited Melvyn and Marie (pronounced the Scottish way), bought a painting and intend to visit the Camroux family, more or less *en famille*, on 7th December in Norfolk. Here is where 'my day' can change so dramatically.

Reviewing this open letter, prior to putting it 'to bed'. That is a standard printing term and refers to the bed of a printing machine, not a young man's aspiration for his bird (as they were referred to in my young days!). As I was saying, reviewing things as I was, I suddenly contemplated this letter had over-run for standard sized envelopes, so I thought I would précis it and refer you to the URL's for those who are digitised. For those who are not, you could always ask for a print out, or try out your local library's web facilities. Then I was hit by a bug! I think it is the first time I have managed to poison myself after nearly forty years of living on my own and cooking for myself and "yes", I do actually cook, quite a range of things, and not always pre-prepared out of a tin!

Irritatingly, it was the first time I felt nearly normal for several weeks and had enjoyed a full day in Rugby. Now, a few days later, still unsteady on my feet and unfit to drive, I thought I would miss the Camroux gathering. That was bad enough. Then a friend rings to advise his eldest had been hit with stage 3 breast cancer and still not knowing exactly how badly. Christmas would be post-op at least and probably full cancer chemotherapy for the next six months. Happy Christmas indeed! The Camroux-Norris came immediately to mind. Charlie has three kids all pre-teens.

Two hours later, I was sitting on my stairs with my front door open, waiting for a taxi to take me shopping, when my neighbour passed and stopped to enquire if I was o.k. Both bachelors, although half a century apart, we are "aware of one another", having similar medical problems. A few months ago he had featured on the front page of this area's *Ian Rennie* magazine as a success story for oesophageal cancer, very unusual, too unusual. He had been touring Australia and his Aussie girl was to arrive shortly, possibly just a return holiday... or to see him through the next four months? He had recently been diagnosed as terminal with only four more months and he's around his thirties. Timing, however, is not always accurate. I have another friend, given three months, still ploughing on (with due care) eighteen months later!

Then Ginni rang to ask me to lunch, when some of her siblings would be there. That would make a nice tie-over for seeing Fred and Co a fortnight earlier. Especially as I had hoped that would be a full weekend, to include one or two others on different sides of the family... subject to me being fit enough to drive! Far too messy any other way in winter.

Only life can throw you problems, so grab it and plough on. Envelopes can still be stored. I'll do as I did last year when printing my own cards (ex accumulated stock from going digital) but *Tempus Fugit* is not to be played with. So, mind on much work still to do and organise completion on this letter. Then presents to wrap. Fortunately, I started early this year, itself unusual, must have been forewarned! All I have to do now is send the cards away. Next job! Cheers.

So, next year? The problem with laptops is the periodic need to completely replace. I am waiting Apple's latest MacBook Pro, to enable me to upgrade my two main programs when I can really make headway with this year's original intentions. As usual, nothing lost, I've just diverted for diverse reasons onto other projects. All, as usual, progressing along several paths in parallel: just a slight panic on remaining time available!

Happy Christmas & a Prosperous New Year!

A helping guide, should you be so interested:

<http://petersuch.com/2013Christmasinside.pdf>

<http://www.petersuch.com/index.html>