

*Hello to everyone who welcomes me to his or her world—welcome to mine.*

I hate Christmas starting too early, it adds to the concept of “commercialisation”. At the same time one has much for which to prepare and I am joyfully one of those who, in retirement, wonders how he ever managed to cope with work! For those who have to work, time is important and they need to plan ahead. So, starting early, I am already running late and this morning is the first day of December, which I perceive is the earliest that one should be “doing” for Christmas (Advent for those of religious persuasion). My first letter this year was mulled in bed (an appropriate phrase) and then ran over six pages! This shorter version was mulled in the bath this morning. A week’s time lies betwixt them, during which time a lot has happened, countering any rationality for early starts!

Starting early, Christmas cards were bought this year, almost as soon as the shops showed their excitement. Last year’s initiative was not followed through for diverse reasons but hopefully the intent will be picked up again next year. So, typical Such, ahead and behind at the same time!

I had originally intended being individually more personal—volume over-ruled but, perversely, volume dictated digitisation! That meant a short version, by way of introduction, in hard copy format—the long version to web. Previously, I had been concerned at being too mechanical, excused as simply being practical, as I happened to be entering a phase of consultant visits and I did not wish to presume upon expected results; or give a false impression, by receiving later contrary answers to a presumed, “Still alive? Jolly good. See you again in six months. Cheers! Oh, by the way, Happy Christmas!”. That is the sort of relationship I have with all my consultants. It may be me, may be them. May be just the way one P Such Esq drops in on them! Haven’t a clue.

Then news flowed in. As the long version details, I recently had lunch with college friends with whom friendship extends over half a century. Many have not met for several years. There were absences, from those who had already gone ahead of us along that bourne from which no traveller returns [moot point!]; or had spread their wings further afield for that particular period of time; or those in various stages of health recovery and being too delicate to risk travel and crowded restaurants. Various life traumas had been experienced; one or two in various stages of, or having just completed, chemotherapy; two or three experiencing serious heart and lung problems such as potential, or having successfully experienced, triple heart by-pass procedures. Allowing for age perception problems, we felt we were a damned sight better off in our seventies than when, as children, we had perceived our grandparents to have been, but past tragedies remain indelibly in the mind and new tragedies are ever ready to spring their traps, straight out of the blue.

My “about turn” happened at the end of last week. Recently, I had been going through a period of complete exhaustion—an inherent Sjögren’s effect—when I suddenly felt almost completely normal (keep joke’s quietly to yourselves, please!). Sorry Gabriel, but although intent was seriously in my mind, I had subsequently learned of an art exhibition. So, on Sunday, a glorious day, I shot up to Rugby to visit one Melvyn Warren-Smith and his wife Marie (pronounced the Scottish way) at <http://www.melvyn-warren-smith.com/gallery.htm>, rather than visit you at <http://www.hideawaylive.co.uk/efg-london-jazz-festival-gabriel-garrick-big-band-sunday-23rd-november-2014>. I know it was a superb experience but the journey to Surbiton was hell, so I understand from Francis and your mother, whom I hope to be seeing tonight at the installation of the new Rector. Another sidetrack, my life is full of sidetracks!

Now where was I? Ah yes, one of the most expensive sandwiches I have ever bought, that’s the problem with meeting them; come to think of it, some of my stays with John and Jennie Gilbert have not been any less expensive, although they would probably say my visits have usually cost them! They never seem to rate the distinction of having entertained one P Such Esq as having been particularly beneficial. Regardless, I only buy if I like the picture, to the extent of the money required and that usually means its at least worth as much twenty years later, if not more.

I do NOT blame Marie’s sandwich—it was a very nice piece of ham—but my own stupidity when I got home. I have managed to look after myself for nearly forty years and until last Sunday never managed to poison myself. Let’s just say I lost 2 Kg of weight in 24hrs and was crawling on the floor! Probably undercooked, through distracted mind; a vegetable curry and as I had never had one

of those before (Waitrose vegetable curries, thank you Lindy I am aware of and have bought from Cooks on Waitrose corner), I put the dislike of taste down to unfamiliarity of how it should taste!

With a sequence of consultant examinations coming up I spoke to my GP on the 'phone and we concluded "no immediate panic"; a week or so to sort out naturally; use taxis until properly feeling I was fit to drive and plough on! There are moments when one just needs that reassurance that one is not jumping to irrational conclusions, or making presumptions, when one knows one is somewhat disorientated, yet trying to be commercially and practicably realistic.

Then further news. A much-loved friend with three pre-teen children had been told she had Stage 3 breast cancer; still waiting news of which stage of stage 3; operation before Christmas; six months of chemotherapy at least. Shades of past family crises appallingly badly handled flooded the mind. All problems then perceived as due to wilful ignorance of supposed specialists and presumptions of arrogant priests, holding society back from dealing with life and death rationally. Such views recently tried to default Lord Falconer's Bill on Assisted Dying. I chose not to bother Rosalie with my views, not wishing to presume she would be sitting in the House for that session.

Much has moved on. So have many purported professionals, finally learning their trade and their place in society—the patient is and must always be IN CHARGE and kept fully informed! Then, two hours later, I learn my neighbour, who six months previously had featured in a major article in the local Ian Rennie Hospice house magazine, as being in remission from oesophagus cancer, had now been told he was terminal and had four months to live. Both people, unrelated save in timing of their news to me, are in their thirties. He had just returned from a tour of Australia and his Auzzie girlfriend was then on her way over. Whether a reciprocal trip, or to be here for four months or so, I know not but I was sorry to hear of his parting with his previous Welsh girlfriend, a lovely personality whose name now eludes me. There is always something lyrically beautiful about everything Welsh.

Prior to, and countering all this negativity, but positively expressed, I had received other news. The Camroux's were gathering in Norfolk, at which I had been intending to join them but was currently having to seriously review. Then Ginni rang, the Camroux–Norris–Such connection. I was invited to an assorted gathering at her place for lunch. That tied in with the Camroux Norfolk trip, if I could make that, so making possible a diverse exchange of news, although Norfolk was now reduced to basics, not the extended trip I had originally envisaged, where there are other friends and family.

As I write this page I realise how the best laid plans of mice and men... Out of the blue I am beginning to realise I could clean out the car at the dump; possibly make this evening's installation; connect with the Beuttler side of the family and discuss with Francis need, or no need, for his taxi service, for a hospital appointment in Amersham on Tuesday; by which time I will hopefully be certain I am capable of driving to Norwich. Before then, an Old Boys' dinner in London on Wednesday; oncologist in Aylesbury on Thursday. Concluded with me driving to Tring, him driving me to Aylesbury (parking arrangements at Stoke Mandeville are appalling, although it seems they may now be building a multi-storey car park). One hears of other people's problems and one is hopefully practicably sympathetic but privately grateful—I do not have any problems! [🙏, crossed fingers if too small to read!]

To the mechanics! The long (original) version of this letter I will place on my web site: <http://petersuch.com/2014Christmasinside.pdf>. If not interested, fine, I merely tell you it is there. From there, wander as you will, if you and Will so choose. It covers: my trip to Melvyn and Marie earlier in the year, which led on to Norfolk. My stay in London. My proposed German trip and related work have been postponed to next year. If you are not digital, try your local library and learn about web access but if you must I'll snail mail a print out if you let me know. I remain defiantly as active as possible, endeavouring to round off, in my own time all I perceive needs rounding off... if I'm granted the time and have not already taken too long! .../index.html signposts all!

*Much love to all those with very personal travails.*

*Always thinking of you, wishing you well & loving you & yours deeply.*

*Happy Christmas & a Prosperous New Year!*