

My Somerset Life

A diary by Brian Snellgrove

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Key points which comprise a successful conference (currently 33 points)

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I'm going to take this opportunity to reflect on the many conferences I have attended and what I have actually got out of them. If it is a specialist subject that is dear to your heart, you will be going from famine to feast. Instead of too few people to talk with, you have too many. You hear interesting conversations when you pass a group of people and could butt in without giving offense. Magic.

This coming Sunday's conference is called AV13 which takes place in Milton Keynes which some of you may remember as a completely newly built town. The hotel is called the Leonardo and there is a conference room attached. I much prefer to be accommodated in the venue if I can, because so much of the meaningful exchanges happen over breakfast or outside the conference schedule and you miss this if you have to get into your car and drive somewhere else.

Signage – you as organiser may be perfectly familiar with the surroundings of the event but remember that some people are driving some distance and are unfamiliar with the area. I'm not saying you ask the AA for signs but at least you can put up temporary signs on bits of wood hammered into the ground with an arrow on saying 'conference this way'. If you give a post code reference, check that it actually leads you to where you need to be. Some in rural areas are large and not up to date.

About parking signs. Please have them installed well before the event starts and also where the toilets are because this is a person's first need when they have come a long way. I

repeat if you are from outside it is not immediately obvious where you drive to. If it is paid parking then say so beforehand.

Being greeted. This is not an optional extra. There's nothing worse than stepping into a room where things are going on and being ignored. You need a person at the door whose job is to greet people. They do not have to know everything they just need a smile on their face and the ability to point to the reception desk.

Tea and coffee. If this welcome can be dispensed by a happy smiling person, this is a great bonus as some of the visitors will have had to come quite a distance and left too early in the morning for more than a snatch of breakfast.

Studying the program. You will probably be more interested in some items than others. The time to plan your day is beforehand so that if you need to speak to someone at length and in private, you can choose one of the talks that are not so relevant for you, excellent though that talk may be.

Conferences should start at the advertised time. That means that if the conference is due to start at 9:30 in the morning, at 9:30 in the morning you the chair say 'good morning everybody, I'm delighted to see you'. If you start 5 minutes late and there are 100 people there, you have wasted 8 hours of the audience's time. If there is a reason why the conference starts late then give the reason and apologize.

If you were catching a bus, you arrive a couple of minutes before the stated departure time, you do not turn up at the advertised departure time. So, come on people, let's have some consideration and common sense.

I have heard chairmen say, 'let's just give a few minutes to those who arrive late.' Why? What about the convenience of people who have troubled to arrive on time. Do they get respect? The protocol is to start on time and if you arrive

late then you will miss the first few minutes and in order to gain the information you can either look at the replay or inquire of other people.

I can say that I've been to good conferences, and bad conferences. The bad ones are those without the discipline of timekeeping but having said that, things are much better these days, partly because part the conference is also being streamed and the expectations need to be met.

The formula of 40 minutes per speaker is okay if the subject is directly relevant to you and it is delivered in a lively matter. It is positively painful to listen to someone who has given the same talk 37 times and it is delivered automatically without enthusiasm. When I give a talk, which is quite seldom I must admit, I never give the same talk twice and thus keep it fresh. There are so many high quality videos on any topic so unless the speaker is up to their game they will bore the audience.

A speaker should know that he/she does not have the job of delivering all their subject matter in one lump. His duty is to deliver meaningful content to the audience in chewable sizes. I detest the practice of when speakers see that their allotted time is coming to an end, act as if it was the last time they're going to appear on the planet, and speak faster and faster and say ' I don't have time for that slide'. They just lose the audience.

There is a problem with making too many points. Supposing you make the most valuable and pertinent point in the whole world. The mind of the recipients will be so occupied and intrigued that they will miss the next 3 points. The audience then do what I call 'pond skating'. The speaker needs to be sensitive to the effect of their words. Please do not just speak into thin air. I honestly think that some itinerant speakers are so jet lagged that they forget which country they are in, never mind which town.

Dear speakers please use the time to share what you really believe. if you do not believe it, you will not have the appropriate carrier wave and people will not be interested in what you have to say. I would rather listen to someone with a poor delivery manner who really believes in what he or she is saying, than someone with immaculate delivery who is just saying something for self advertising and show. You need to walk your talk otherwise the audience will pick it up in no time flat. I know within a few seconds if I am going to find the speaker interesting. Think entrainment and quantum entanglement

How to stop speakers who go over time. I do not find this happens much these days. At the recent Better Way Conference in Bath last year the chairman had the habit of walking across the stage to the speaker about two minutes before the end of the allotted time. People got the message, but some have to be shut off by saying things like 'thank you very much for your time'. It can be done perfectly politely but firmly. Not to do so shows lack of respect for the next speaker.

Buffet lunches. I know this is a small point but to avoid the formation of long queues and especially if the tables are densely packed with food, move the tables out from the side wall so people can approach them from both sides and thus double the number of people that can be served during this precious lunch break.

Whilst on the topic of food, put bins around the place and if the plates are not disposable place some tables to accommodate them. The point is that the organizers should be available for the audience, and not running around doing things they did not have the foresight to do previously.

Promoters and organizers please, please check all equipment before, well before, the first speaker comes on. There is nothing worse than seeing people fiddling around for five minutes, us viewing various inappropriate formats on the PC of

the lecturer and finally mumbling and apology having wasted 10 minutes of the audience's time. That is professional bad manners.

If the meeting is to be streamed (on zoom or Skype) then please greet the audiences even though they are virtual as they have paid some money and are just as important as those lucky enough to attend. Zoom has the capacity to show where people are calling in from by using the chat box. Ask people at the beginning to say where they are from. It does make the virtual viewers feel more included.

Speakers should make themselves available after the talk. Stand in a conspicuous position so that people who did not quite understand what you had to say, can inquire.

Now about question time, precious minutes allocated for Q and A after the formal part of the talk has finished. The chairman does not have to start with a long question of his own, fearing that silence will ensue if he does not, and in an attempt to fill the vacuum. There is nothing wrong with a few minutes silence while people compose their questions. We are all grown-ups and capable of raising our hand and speaking.

Questioners, keep to the rule, one person one question. I have heard someone who packaged three questions in one and that is just an abuse of time. If there are many people in the audience, and you have spoken, you have used your allocation of time so give the space to somebody else. though if you have a brief comment to back up someone else's comment then that would be in order.

It is also good manners of the chairperson to repeat the question of someone in the audience. With the exception of a very large hall, there is no time for assistants to run around with microphones and give the microphone to a person who will probably be in the middle of a row.



'Just one more question'. For some devilish reason, the most complicated and abstract question happens at the end of a Q and A. It will take half an hour to answer. Please have some consideration for timing and if you want to know the meaning of life phrase the question in a concise manner and don't dump a huge task on the speaker. It may be better to end the session slightly before the allotted time rather than run over and try to cram too much in. The ideal question is a 'wind down' question with a touch of humor perhaps.

Speakers have to be very strict with people who hog too much of their time afterwards. I have witnessed a certain type of middle-aged lady from across the pond shall we tactfully say, who thinks they have a right to monopolize the speaker for as long as it's convenient for them. The speaker can see out of the corner of his eye other people in the queue but cannot shut her up. Again, 'one person, one point' should be the protocol and if they want to make further points then have a card with your email address on so they can write to you. The speaker should also have a business card. It is not so effective if you as speaker say 'contact me via the organisers'.

Sound systems. There is a benefit to getting a professional company to come in. I know it's costs money but they know what they are doing, having done work in various types of acoustic situations. For example placing too speakers far apart does leave a hole in the middle. Turning up one speaker too loud is painful. It's better to have more air moved at lower volume by utilizing more units.

Microphones. Even microphones need maintenance. They have batteries that need to be kept charged. Bad contacts cause a crackle. Do not assume that because a microphone worked last time it will work this time, and I am not referring so much to wired microphones but anything wireless.

Screens. I went to a conference last weekend and there were bright sky lights shining directly on the right side of the screen with a result that the audience could not see the screen properly and we, being British, did not complain and suffered a diminution of quality. I always stand up and say anything that needs to be said and people thank me afterwards.

Oh and make sure that everyone can actually see the screen. Trying it beforehand, at the back of the hall, and making sure that the text and graphs are able to be seen. I have witnessed someone with a 2 meter by 2 meter screen with an audience of 200 and it was just too small. If you are taking money off people then you have to give them service. Yes?

Doors opening and closing – it can be very irritating when someone comes in late especially if the door is not at the back. You need someone, a helper, to help people to come in quietly and unobtrusively. I have been places where people are talking loudly in the kitchen, cleaning up etc. and forget that their voices can be heard clearly.

Please decide how you are going to remember the detail when there will be far more than can be retained especially if the material is new. I would have thought that bullet point notes would be a good memory jogger. Having said that, most conferences are recorded and so you can play them back if you have the time but my experiences that most people do not. Let us take this hypothesis:

You are present to learn certain things to move your development forward. You will neither understand or remember everything. You can be sure that the right thoughts will jump

out at you because you are ready to receive them in other words the sperm is ready to fertilize the egg. You will have no idea of the subject matter beforehand. It could be not what it said but who says it and how it is said. I guarantee you will not know or be aware of the lesson before it comes. Virtually anything can trigger the brain. When you return home write as much down as you can otherwise the memories will fade, especially new and unfamiliar material.

Dealing with people's bad manners. I have been at conferences where people whisper to each other typically in front of me, or otherwise detract from your attention. It is quite within protocol to tap the person on the shoulder and say 'excuse me would you mind not talking during the presentation, I can hear you clearly and it is disturbing'.

Women with babies. Oh my goodness I can record half a dozen conferences where people have brought their very young children along expecting them to be quiet. Stewards should turn away such people. To the mother, a crying baby is part of bringing up a child but to other people it is a nuisance and really detracts the audience from paying full attention. I have even heard this in a church in Finland where a woman brought along three young children and they moved around and talked the whole time while an organ recital was in progress. These people should be escorted out.

EVERYONE should have a form of identification for example a business card. There is nothing worse than scribbling down your name and contact number on a piece of paper when it will inevitably be lost or forgotten. With ID, try to avoid embarrassment of the lame excuse 'oh I've given my last card away' or 'I have got one somewhere'. It makes you look like an amateur.

Bringing your own material. If you, as a delegate, wish to publicize literature on any topic, an event, a Blog, a meeting to be held in the future or even selling something then clear

it with the organiser well beforehand and don't risk alienating them by setting up anything on the fly even on a table or chair. They do not have time to discuss such things at the actual event so the response is more likely to be sympathetic if you approach them before the day.

ZOOMED! Watch this space for the definitive guide to ZOOM meetings

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Sundays in times of yore

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Today I feel like having a rest, probably because for the next five days I will be very busy in ways that you will find out in due course. When I was young or should I say particularly when I was young, Sunday was a day of rest. However, as the son of a vicar, Sunday was far from restful. My dad officiated over eight o'clock communion and sometimes even seven o'clock communion, matins at 11 o'clock and evensong at 6:30. The family had to juggle themselves around this.

My mother always used to do a cooked roast lunch and afterwards spent ages cleaning up the kitchen, the utensils etc. and I occasionally helped her with the drying up. I did so reluctantly as is the case with most teenagers. Dad helped if he had not fallen asleep by the fireside.



During the afternoon we went for a customary walk in the Rookery which as Londoners may know, is at the top of Streatham Common. The lower area is devoid of any features but changes into a cultivated wooded area in the top. There are one or two very ancient trees which I always enjoyed looking at.

It was not quite 'the thing' to do something on Sunday. The shops were closed except the newsagents that opened on Sunday morning. Food shops were definitely closed as were most other types of outlets. We were expected to spend our time at home with the family, contemplating the more important things of life and resting from the labours of the week.

Now the situation is on its head with people using Sunday to go out shopping in shopping malls and to supermarkets. To be fair, such is the pressure of earning a living that this is the only time some families have. The government have quite wisely in my opinion restricted trading hours to 6 from 10 until 4, which does something to respect the needs of the workers and also needs of the management to spend time with their family. However, religion as an institution has seriously faded and very few people go to church, and Sunday is used for recreational activities such as football.

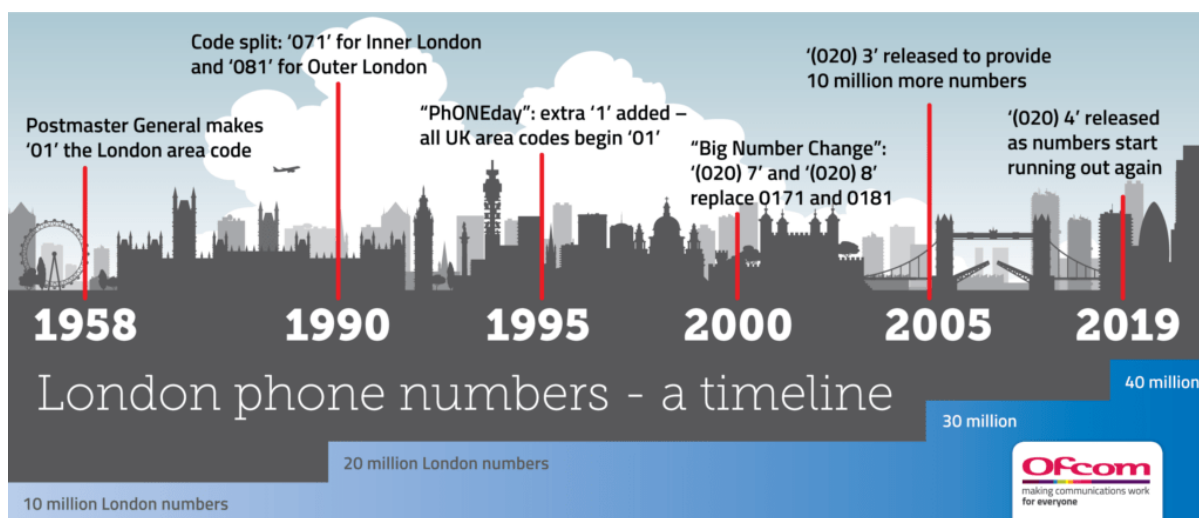


I am looking back to the 1950s when television was just coming in and where the internet was not even an idea in the heads of most people.

Social life was very different. I remember that if we wanted to pay a social call on someone, we would write to them using the postal service to ask if that was all right. I remember waiting for a friend to call and sitting by the phone waiting for it to ring. When it did not, I was crestfallen. Telephone Answering machines had been invented if I recall but they were not easily available for domestic use and were very expensive and bulky, a bit like the early mobile phones that were the size of bricks.

As for visitors, we had very few except the occasional relation. Dad seemed quite content with not having visitors. He prided himself on completing the Times Crossword each day, which he usually did by coffee time in the morning. We had a visiting missionary from Africa and I caused upset at the supper table by saying that there was a worm in my lettuce.

My remark was diplomatically ignored by the embarrassed guest. I think my father preferred his own company and it was an understood rule that you would not enter his study without prior approval.



Our telephone resided in the hall of our Vicarage and it was a cumbersome black thing with cords that easily became tangled. The number was Pollard's Hill, Norbury, where the nearest distribution center was, and I think it was STR 4525 or something like that. My father was not very good on the phone and tended to bark down it as he himself was a little bit deaf.

Interestingly I had an allotment on the south face of Pollards Hill and I cultivated a significant proportion of the vegetables for the family. Memories included another allotmenteer who gulped compulsively and regularly. I was fascinated with this man but tried to make my curiosity not too obvious. I can find no trace of the allotment now.

I cannot complain about this era because I didn't know anything else, I knew that we had to make our own entertainment and this I did, resulting in a young if shy man who was very well read, into classical music or real music as I call it, and taking the first steps in cultivating a garden which has resulted in my enthusiasm for having an allotment.

I was used to walking everywhere but at one stage I got a bike, goodness knows how my parents afforded it, but that added a new dimension to my life. It was at the time that society in general was honest and it did not occur to me to need to lock it when I left it on the street when going into a shop. It looked alright when I left it so I thought to myself, surely, no one would dream of taking it. How times have changed. Bicycle locks are now huge and the chains could hold an elephant, never mind a fragile bit of metal.

I recall 'going to the pictures' including Saturday morning pictures where I think the price was six pence, something very small anyway and children used to turn up in their droves. Going to the cinema in general, the ODEON Streatham in particular, was an exciting thing and was a real treat for a special occasion. I remember going to see West Side Story and was completely entranced by the dancing and the music. On another occasion I heard the New World Symphony by Anton Dvořák in the Royal Festival Hall. My sister Philippa took me, and again I was entranced.



Before the days of television, the radio enjoyed its pride of place by the fire. My

father used to listen to the news headlines then switch it off when he said that we have 'heard it all before'. Prior to the decline of the BBC there were so many programs that I recall with pleasure. One was 'Journey into Space' which was a very well done science fiction program which left me genuinely terrified and I had to ask my mother to take me up to bed, the bedroom being situated in the Vicarage attic which was dark and full of strange noises.

In those days, the comedy programs was real comedy devoid of innuendo and bad language which we hear today. I remember particularly Hancock's Half Hour. Poor chap. I think he took his own life in Australia. He was a depressive but you would not guess that from the performances. I remember Educating Archie. Archie was a puppet and Peter Brough was the ventriloquist.

It was also the era of Harry Seacombe and The Goons which I found the mad cap humour to be very refreshing in the same way that Faulty Towers with John Cleese put its finger on many of the peculiarities of the English way of thinking. To this day I retain some of Basil Faulty's mannerisms and sayings. For example I find my saying in moments of joking 'absolutely typical' as John Cleese used to say but no one can say it quite like him.

On Saturday morning we had Children's Favorites and I remember Peter and the Wolf, the Ugly Duckling, the Teddy Bears Picnic, Nelly the Elephant, and believe it or not Sparky and the Magic Piano which if I recall that eventually the piano learned to play on its own. I loved Billy Cotton's band. In fact I loved all the big bands including Ray Conniff that was the ultimate in sophistication. My mother always used to listen to The Archers at 6:45 p.m. but on Sunday these was a compendium. Her devotion was religious. I know that on Sunday evening there was a sacrosanct musical program which for the life of me I can't recall.

in the mornings there was Housewives Choice and Music While you Work and of course Mrs Dale's Diary. I often listened to drama on Radio 4 or the Home Service as it was called and found myself in no difficulty when it came to becoming identified with the characters portrayed. On Sunday we had Family Favorites which was primarily to reunite troops still on active duty with their family back at home.

People of my generation were greatly influenced by the radio as opposed to today when it is more background noise, but also because that was the number one media tool. I do not see how the BBC can compete with the huge social media stream of information not to mention the internet itself. I remember when you had to pay for a radio license and it was a pound a year. How would you reinforce that now?

The name Sunday



▪ About the name Sunday in general, is it the first day of the week, the Lord's day or is it the last day of the week? I am given this option with Google calendar, thank you very much. I like to see Sunday as the last day of the week and so the Monday with the associated Monday morning feeling starts in the left column. The word Sunday itself has gone through many transitions including the middle English 'son-dai', from the old English 'sunnandag', Day of the sun. You have your choice of Latin 'dies solis' - day of the sun.

In European Christian cultures the day name means the Lord's

day. A description of the sun as the first day of the week is ancient and astrological. Sunday School dates from 1783 originally for secular instruction of working children and later for religious instruction.

We used to talk about **Sunday clothes** in other words one's best or clean clothes and that was first used from the 1640s. **Dressed in your Sunday Best** came about from the middle 19th century. We talked about a **Sunday driver**, first used in the 1920s with the notion of one who drives only to church and back thus being unpracticed and unskilled. We also talk about **a month of Sundays** as being a very long time. This actually occurs every seven or eight months but never used literally.

It is difficult to say how I looked back on Sunday as I was not a typical child and teenager, because from an early age I was in the church choir and had to perform duties at nine o'clock for sung communion, Matins and evening service. There were about 16 young choristers and we were all dressed in our white finery and there was a somewhat lesser number of alto's tenors and bases. Mr Southgate was the choir master and we delighted in teasing him if we could get away with it but overall we were respectful of the services and he performed well with us. Choir practice was every Friday evening.

- There was definitely an attachment to if not a stigma of vicar's sons who were seen as somewhat apart from the general run of teenagers. In addition to my normal shyness I did also feel marginalized and supremely awkward when being approached by girls. I remember out of rebellion during a time of snow, I completely covered the entrance to the vestry with snow, a whole mountain of it, but my uncomplaining and tacit father cleared it away after having discovered it just in time. Sabotage it was of an ecclesiastical nature and was great fun.

Do I regret growing up in the 1950s? It was a fact of life, I

was incarnated when it was my time and so I didn't know anything else but my impression is that these days that the youngsters do not have a youth, they are forced by social pressure to behave like adults, with adult desires and wishes well before they are mature enough.

I find the LGBTQ movement disgusting and damaging, goodness knows how the victims will make good relationships with others when they are told by the BBC for example that there are 153 different sexes and when masturbation is talked about in school to four year olds and recommended as homework.

I call this the decline of society and standards, and I'm afraid this is something we will not get away with in the long-term in terms of survival. Indeed we are already seeing the implosion of society at the time.

Shame on us

If anyone reading this grew up in the 50's and 60's this is a great website.

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With over 1 million words and 7,130 images.

You can search for any place or topic including Bath, Frome, Wells, Bristol, Glastonbury, Cheddar, or you can search topics such as Christian, meditation, philosophy. You will also find extensive writings on Swansea, Cardiff, Weston Super Mare, London, Avebury.

- Christianity
- health
- Personal development

- Philosophy
- psychology

- How to use
- Contact
- Writing a diary
- Privacy Policy
- Creative Listening service

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