

My Somerset Life

A diary by Brian Snellgrove

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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.



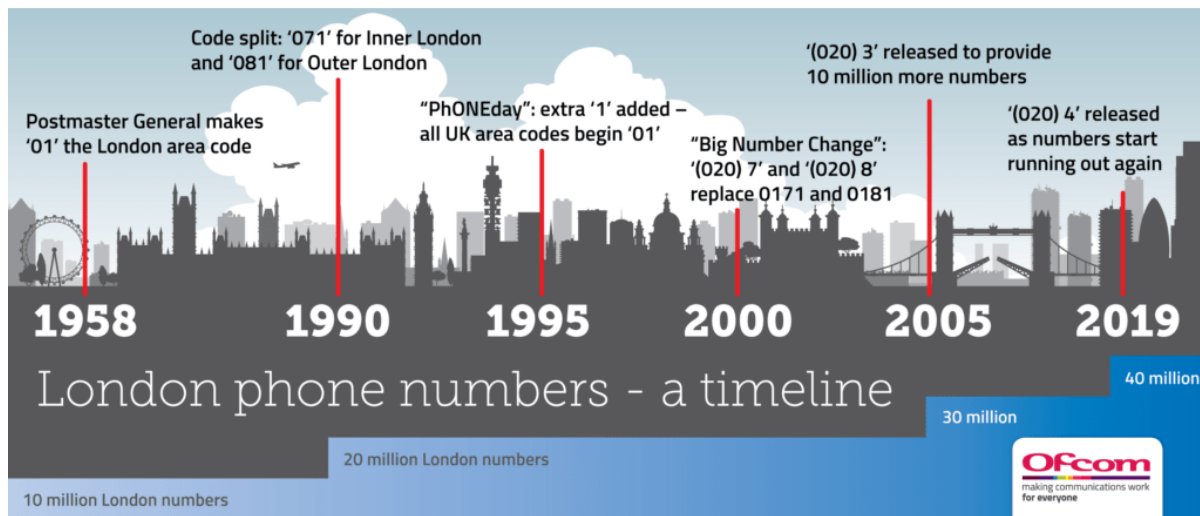
I am looking back to the 1950s when television was just coming in and where the internet was not even an idea in the heads of most people.

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.

My Somerset Life by Brian Snellgrove

With over 1 million words and 7,130 images.

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