

28th April 2020

Foresight

“May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are they the result of previous study?”

Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice

In 1963 and 1965, Dr Richard Beeching, chairman of British Railways, produced reports on the restructuring of the rail network in the UK. *The Reshaping of British Railways* and *The Development of the Major Railway Trunk Routes*, known collectively and colloquially as the “Beeching Report”, identified 2,363 stations and 5,000 miles of line for closure.

Foresight for Beeching would have been wonderful! If he could have anticipated the demand for the *expansion* of the rail network which many clamour for now, then, of course, the cuts would never have been made. But the prevailing political climate and the information at hand at the time was all he could work with. How different it could have been ...

It would be great to have foresight right now. As we discuss what will happen when this crisis is over, phrases such as “when the dust settles”; “how the cards might fall”; “lessons to be learned”; “the shape of things to come”; “a new normal” ... are commonplace. But the truth is, we don’t know. We can speculate and have our ideas. If we had foresight, we could work it out *now* and all would be well. But, like Dr Beeching, we don’t have that tool at our disposal. So let’s make sure we base our decisions on what we know and what we’ve learned, and have solid principles from which good and right conclusions can be drawn: justice; equity; inclusiveness; sharing; worth; value; openness; honesty. I could go on, but I think you’ll know what I mean. Let’s make sure the society we create isn’t based on Jane Austen’s “impulse of the moment” but is the result of well thought-through and carefully processed “previous study”.

There will be changes. When all this is over, some familiar stations and branch lines will have gone. But whether these changes are for the good of everyone or just a few will be for all of us to work out together.

A prayer for today

Loving God, with hindsight I know what you have done for me.

With no foresight, I have to trust that I'll do what's right for you. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>