

2nd October 2020

Backwards

**“Some men a forward motion love,
But I by backward steps would move ...”**

Henry Vaughan, Silex Scintillans (‘The Retreat, 1650)

I had a mate in school in the 1960s who had a “fixed-wheel” bike. Unlike the rest of us, his bike had pedals that were directly linked to the back wheel in a way I’ve never understood. He couldn’t free-wheel (he had to lift his legs up when he was going downhill to allow the pedals to spin round on their own) but – wonder of wonders – he could actually make the bike go *backwards*. It was a sight to behold, and he was good at it too. Not that he could go fast, but backwards progress was definitely in his performance repertoire – and you had to get out of the way pretty quickly if you saw him coming because he was unlikely to see you in time.

As Henry Vaughan was well aware, most of us “a forward motion love”. We’re more inclined to make plans and look ahead than we are “by backwards steps” to spend time reviewing things. Of course, there are times when we *need* to go backwards to examine what happened to an enterprise. That’s why we have de-briefs, reviews, investigations and Commissions, to learn lessons, make sure mistakes are rectified and apportion responsibility for any failure. But there are times when, naturally, we keep the door to the past firmly locked, because to go back to what’s happened is simply so raw or painful, we’d rather avoid it altogether.

A lot of the conversations I had in the hospice were about going backwards. They weren’t about guilty secrets or apportioning blame, but people were pleased when someone listened to them as they looked back at where they’d come from and reviewed their journey of life. You may have been doing just that during the Covid lockdown. I know I have. And maybe you’ve benefitted from someone looking backwards with you too.

The past can’t be changed. But when we look behind us and examine our journey of life, assessing all that’s there, let’s hope we have someone who’ll listen to our story, and not jump quickly out of the way because we’ve decided to go backwards.

A prayer for today

This is the life I have. Look backwards with me and see how it all takes shape. Amen

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