



“... much that we do rests on foundations whose shakiness no one recalls.”

The lurch of progress

Probably I am the same as everyone else: my recall is becoming substituted for by searches.

Google, obviously. But beside that in importance comes email searches. No, on reflection the latter is more important: it represents the contents of my metaphysical sock drawer, things that I might know or have experienced that others might not. Somewhere Google itself can't go. I hope.

If I am asked a question that requires knowledge of my past life stretching back as far as whenever computers ceased to be a captivating invention, then the answer invariably depends on the success of a search of my emails. Hopefully in there will be found a message with at least some obtuse but illuminating reference to the event or issue in question. If I am lucky, there will be a whole attachment to delve into. If the search draws a blank however, I will be forced to shrug my shoulders. Perhaps whatever it was never happened, or not like that?

A recent study has highlighted a link between low vitamin D levels and cognitive decline.¹ If this is indeed my problem, a meta-analysis has highlighted the pitfall of assuming supplements will help since it even remains doubtful they prevent fractures.² Sadly, such assumptions are commonplace though. Indeed, much that we do rests on foundations whose shakiness no one recalls.

Like many people, I have two email accounts, two strands to my subbed-out memory to reflect the two halves of my existence: work and home, and I recently came across a slew of emails warning me that my NHSmail (work) account was nearing its storage limit. Resolving this crisis necessitated the deletion of everything in there prior to this year. Strangely, NHS Central, or however our management overlords currently style themselves — the self-same people who set the email storage limit — seem to be the ones sending most of the missives with massive, limit-busting attachments.

Having duly deleted my professional memory bank, I only then received an email promising that my limit will be increased

by a factor of ten sometime next year. Cue elation, tempered only with the realisation that my knowledge of what came from past promises has already gone. Still, perhaps this forced erasure of the past mitigates for the length of time it has taken me to notice the demise of carbon paper.

The true significance of carbon paper was in its impact on the use of fountain pens. Deemed to be too lightly pressed to the page to cause the required imprint on the undersheet(s) that were the very point of carbon paper, fountain pens were banned throughout my early career. Lately though, having realised this ban is long since defunct, I have rediscovered the joy of a proper nib.

Regressions like this are not mine alone, nor even all inconsequential. Today, having resorted to emailing a consultant's secretary, being fed up of her not being at her desk when I rang, I received a prompt email in reply. In tune with the urgency of the situation, her boss has already dictated a letter apparently and it will be with me shortly. No attachment was offered though: I must wait for the postman.

Fearing she would not perceive any irony, not even if my complaint was on carbon paper and written with a fountain pen, I have not objected. Besides, she could have been trying to be kind, helping me avoid exceeding my storage limit again. Or maybe selfishly she was protecting her own.

No matter, the new year brings hope as surely as the unfulfilled promises of the old one will be deleted from memory. Perhaps I'll try some vitamin D.

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