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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (March 2016)



Over the Andes (Article 131 below)

*The Reverend Canon Andrew Neaum became the “House for Duty” Anglican priest of the lovely Boldre Benefice in August 2013. The Vicarage in which he and Diana live is on the edge of the New Forest, a couple of miles north of Lymington in Hampshire. He is old fashioned enough a priest to visit his flock in their homes, but “house for duty” clergy are supposed to work only two days a week and Sundays, which means visiting everyone in the parish takes a long time. The following are the **March 2016** weekly ruminations, aired prejudices and footling observations that in the weekly pew sheet augment his visits and help keep folk in touch week in and week out. Earlier articles are available from the Article Page on this Website:*

<http://www.andrewneaum.com/articles.htm>

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“This and That” - 27 March 2016

For ten years before coming to Boldre, I celebrated Easter twice. I was priest to the Macedonian Orthodox community as well as to the Anglican in my last parish. The Orthodox Easter is usually on a different date from ours.

The stench of hard-boiled eggs

At the end of the Macedonian Easter Vigil, lots of hard-boiled, red-dyed eggs were distributed to everyone. We tucked into them with gusto. Flakes of shell littered the carpet. The church narthex began to smell like a *fart factory*, as one of my earthier old ladies put it. A pair of expensive vacuum cleaners, purring like Bentleys, dealt with the eggshell flakes. The pong lingered.

The beauty of eggs

Eggs are lovely things. A clutch in a tidy nest is exquisite. On the Vicarage’s south facing walls a pair of robins, for the first time, are making their nest in a box we put up a year ago. A pair of blue tits are refurbishing their last year’s nesting box, as too are a pair of tiny wrens theirs. Lovely.

Hugely nutritious as well as beautiful, eggs have gathered to themselves all sorts of symbolic and religious significance. 60,000 year old engraved ostrich eggs have been discovered in Africa, celebrating something other than Easter.

One of the oddest things about the Macedonian Easter celebrations, was how few people came forward to receive communion. Out of a full church only one or two elderly women, and a handful of little children, received the sacrament. This is because the Lenten fast was too severe for most folk to bear. Children and the very old were exempted from the fast.

No eggs or prostitutes in Lent

Even eggs, as well as meat and dairy products, were forbidden. This used to be the case in the Western Church too. Hence *Shrove Tuesday*, the last day before Lent being called Pancake Day (*Mardi Gras* in French, *Fat Tuesday*). A day to eat up all eggs and dairy produce before Lent began.

With the arrival of Easter, the eating of eggs resumed. Because hens don’t stop laying in order, there would be plenty to hand. They were often hard boiled for ease of handling and to help keep them longer. All sorts of eggy recipes evolved to deal with the glut. A common one was a meatloaf with eggs in it to accompany Easter’s dinner.

In parts of Spain there is the tasty *hornazo*. It is made with flour and yeast and stuffed with pork loin, bacon, spicy chorizo sausage and eggs. In Salamanca it is traditionally eaten out of doors, during the *Lunes de Aguas* (*Monday of the Waters*) festival. The name is said to derive from a twisting of the word *enagua*, or petticoat, which the prostitutes of the town used to wear under their dresses. During Lent the local prostitutes were banished to the other side of the Tames river so that the town’s many students were not distracted from their Lenten religious observances. On the *Monday of the Waters*, the students of the town threw a party on the banks of the river to celebrate the return of the women. Eating *hornazo* was part of the celebration.

Egg jarping and egg hopping

In the Eastern Churches, Easter eggs are dyed red to represent the blood of Christ shed on the Cross. The hard shell of the egg symbolises the sealed tomb of Christ and the cracking of the shell symbolises his resurrection from the dead, his bursting from the tomb. Easter eggs are blessed by the priest at the end of the Paschal Vigil (on Holy Saturday night) and distributed to the faithful.

In many of the Eastern Churches egg symbolism has retained its variety and richness. All sorts of local traditions, games, pastimes and recipes to do with eggs remain associated with Easter. Even in the England old traditions survive in pockets of the country. Egg jarring, egg hopping and Pace Egg Plays, for example. Decorating eggs is also a widely practised art.

A vestige of authenticity

Commerce has done its worst to reduce Easter's symbolism, beauty, truth and tradition to mere profit. The hollow, chocolate egg is a good symbol of this. With nothing inside, it is empty of meaning and disappointing to eat. The only chocolate Easter eggs I relish are filled with marshmallow. True marshmallow is made from genuine egg white. Such eggs retain, therefore, a vestige of authenticity. They are all the more delicious for that.

(133) "This and That" - 20 March 2016

Diogenes (412BC-323BC) was an interesting fellow. Originally a banker he became embroiled in scandal and disgrace (as bankers do). He then took to idiosyncratic austerity and witty cynicism (as bankers do not).

Featherless biped

In response to Plato's definition of man as *featherless bipeds*, Diogenes plucked a chicken, brought it to Plato's Academy and declared: *Behold! I've brought you a man.* After which the definition was broadened to: *featherless bipeds with broad flat nails.*

Diogenes came to my mind in response to a happy Saturday morning tidying up the churchyard. Why, I wondered, do church graveyards seem so much more beautiful than secular cemeteries? Has it something to do with God, faith and hope? Or has it more to do with association, geography and tradition?

Country churches tend to be ancient, lovely and located in pleasing settings. They are redolent of history and associated with fondly remembered rites of passage.

It is not so with secular cemeteries. They represent the escape of humankind from the clutches of Church, tradition and history. It was only at the start of the nineteenth century that the churchyard began to give way to the cemetery. The architecture of cemetery and crematorium chapels is either nastily faux ecclesiastical, or brutally municipal.

When Diogenes was asked what he would like done with his body after he died, he replied that he wanted it thrown out for animals to devour. Why not, if faith, resurrection-hope and God are no more? Yet few atheists can countenance that. Love still begs for a capital letter.

South Door and West Door entry to St John's

Saying Matins a few mornings ago, my mind settled on a phrase in the Jubilate: *O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving....* I recalled the simple pleasure of opening the door to enter St John's and stepping down into the building over well worn stone. How odd, I thought, to step down into a church instead of up. It is expressive of its architectural modesty, a most attractive feature of St John's. On mentioning this to Diana she reminded me that entry through the west door requires stepping up. Beauty is not easily categorised. The loveliness of St John's is paradoxical, unfathomable, both homely and numinous.

Some weeks ago we attended Evensong in Canterbury Cathedral. Unutterably lovely. A recent report on church growth informs us that weekday Cathedral congregations are the fastest growing part of the Church of England. I find this reassuring. Diogenes-like cynics dismiss

attenders of such services as those desirous of a free music recital without 'real' religion. I disagree. For the most part, I am sure, they are folk who desire to hear God speak to their hearts through exquisite beauty.

God does speak to us in this way. I was listening to the andante from a Haydn Piano Trio last week. The movement is 10.19 minutes in length. At the 8.58 minute point, and again at the 9.47minute point there occur several, simple right hand twiddles on the piano that thrilled me to the core. They shouted 'Yes' to God, beauty and meaning.

I have a very sensible daughter. If ever I begin to fulminate against happy-clappy worship and the loss of the old hymns, prayers and ways, she reminds me that happy-clappy worship can bring people from the street to faith. Faith that, tiring of pop emotionalism, might well lead on to Cathedral Evensong and loving participation in Eucharists set to Mozart or Haydn. In coexistence lies strength. *Vive la differance.*

A Bishop for our Patronal Festival

When we were in Canterbury we had a most convivial lunch with Bishop Richard Llewellyn and his wife. Retired and living in the lovely Cathedral Precinct, he was Suffragan Bishop of Dover for some years and then Bishop at Lambeth, as Head of Staff. His wife had spent a year in Rhodesia and we discovered all sorts of fascinating connections. One of these is with another retired Suffragan Bishop, David Jennings, now an Assistant Bishop in Gloucester Diocese. His wife is the daughter of my father's doctor and friend in Rhodesia. Bishop David has agreed to come to preach at our Patronal Festival Evensong on 26 June. Note the date.

(132) "This and That" - 13 March 2016

I like a set routine to begin each day, to steady it and set it safely on course. Thereafter, anything random, surprising or disturbing can be absorbed with equanimity.

Our days at the Vicarage begin with pleasing predictability. Bedroom curtains are drawn back for brief contemplation of a garden prospect that always delights. There follows a scalding shower, a pint of plunged coffee, a brisk twenty three minute walk along School, Warborne and Burnt House Lanes, over the playing fields and down Pilley Hill home. After this we say a leisurely Matins, read and discuss a poem and partake of a light breakfast of pulverised fruit and nuts. As we eat we watch blue tits vacillate as to whether or not they nest in a box by the kitchen window.

After this soothing and unvarying morning ritual, let emails flood in, phones ring, chores press, no matter. Sweet routine has steadied the day, set it on course. All is well.

Rooks and chimpanzees

I am fond of rooks and am glad that there is rookery in Hundred Lane, near the Old Vicarage. They are often to be observed grubbing and worming in the paddocks along Warborne Lane. My father used to sing a song to us which contained the lines: *High in the trees they sing to the breeze, caw, caw, caw.....* Google is unable to trace it for me. It is said that rooks are as clever at making and using simple tools with their beaks as chimpanzees are with their hands. In Roger Deakin's beautifully written *Wildwood: A Journey Through Trees*, given to me by my daughter for Christmas, he writes: *Rooks speak in the strongest of country burrs. They are rasping, leathery, parched, raucous, hoarse, strangled, deep-throated, brawling, plaintive, never reticent and, like all good yokels, incomprehensible. No doubt you could play a dead rook like a bagpipe, all drone and no melody.*

Populism and Donald Trump

In civilized families our gross bodily functions and private parts are graciously euphemised. In my family the euphemism for breaking wind was 'trump'. Never in my youth did I ever experience a trump as unpleasant as the one that lours, glowers and towers over the USA at present.

Donald Trump's popularity brings to mind Francis Fukuyama's argument that liberal democracy is the ultimate form of government towards which all governmental systems ineluctably evolve. Liberal democracy is the end of the line. It might be tinkered with and modified a bit, but is as close to governmental nirvana as we'll get. Hmm, might not populism of the Donald Trump sort eventually scupper democracy? The will of the masses, so easily whipped up by social media and technology, is as likely to be stupidly and dangerously wrong as is the will of any individual. Populism in Egypt brought to power the Muslim Brotherhood. "Out with democracy" said the army. It is not difficult to see why.

The wedding season begins

We are back doing weddings at St John's. Two in the past fortnight. I enjoy them, but it means I need to write a few more wedding homilies. I have only three that really satisfy me. Re-cycling these is fine, but I sympathise with the organist, carillon player and choir. I would hate to be known for the same homily time after time after time.

Wedding homilies need to be short, direct, have something saltily worthwhile to say and yet light-hearted. Bel Mooney, in her anthology *From This Day Forward*, tells of a bride who said that her proudest moment came when, in wedding finery, coiffed and made up, she joined her fiancé at the altar and literally he did not recognise her, did not 'know' her. There's pathos, humour and scope enough for a salty homily there! The following verse by Ralph Hodgson also carries much food for thought, though because weddings are joyful occasions, it is too sad for a homily.

Silver Wedding

*In the middle of the night he started up
At a cry from his sleeping Bride,
A bat from some ruin in a heart he'd never searched
Nay, hardly seen inside:*

*'Want me and take me for the woman that I am,
And not for her that died,
The lovely chit nineteen I one time was
And am no more,' she cried.*

(131) "This and That" - 6 March 2016

[To the Falklands 13 finale]

As the crow flies (give or take a mile or two), Chile is longer than Australia by only 364 miles. As the crow flies (give or take a mile or two), Chile is narrower than Australia by all of 2,106 miles.

Does the dog still pine for us?

Our flight up and down half the length of Chile granted us a view of the country's entire width. Islands and fiords to the west, snow topped Andes to the east. Beautiful.

In September we intend driving a good deal more than half the length of Australia. From Darwin in the north, right through the red centre, to Port Augusta in South Australia. This trip will be rather different. Desert to the east, desert to the west, all ameliorated by the bliss of shorts, sandals, an open-necked shirt, blinding heat and kangaroo steaks for dinner instead of Chorillana.

Having enjoyed Chile's Pacific coastline in Valparaiso for two days, we headed for the eastern border and the Andes on our last day. On our lengthy walk to the Coach Station, we were picked up by one of the many stray dogs. At first we regarded it as a nuisance. Snarling and bickering with a companion, it kept butting and nuzzling us, not in affection, but in a quest for suspected food in our packs. Then it desisted to become simply our shadow all the way to the bus station. When we thought we had lost it at a crossing, it would scuttle back to greet us at the next, desperate not to lose us after its diversionary amble round the block. Our acquaintance had warmed into friendship.

When sitting in the coach, after the scramble to buy tickets, we realised regretfully that we had failed to say farewell. Does it still pine for us?

At the mercy of a clown



The Clown

We were an hour and a half late getting back to Santiago, thanks to a traffic jam, but decided to press on to Maipo in the Andes. Santiago's metro system is new, clean and efficient and among a succession of talented buskers and entertainers on board was a large and loud-mouthed clown. We couldn't understand his patter, though it appeared to be suggestive, lewd and popular. He garnered much laughter as well as coins, though none from us. I then made the mistake of catching his eye, whereupon he took the mick out of me for a while. All the better fun for being incomprehensible, I am sure.

At the end of the line we caught a small, ramshackle, country bus up the Maipo Canyon. It was cheap, and after a few stops, hugely crowded. The Maipo river, in its lower reaches, runs through a beautiful and fruitful valley rather than a canyon. As we went further up it became clear that to Santiago it is something of what the Dandenongs are to Melbourne: a playground and weekend retreat for the wealthy.

We disembarked at San Alfonso, beautifully overshadowed by great mountains. There we ate a simple picnic in a small and leafy park before a leisurely amble around the settlement, to admire the rushing Maipo river and exotic domestic architecture, before catching a bus back.

At the mercy of a bus driver

The driver of this bus was even more gung ho than the first. He talked on his phone, took fares, changed gear, closed and opened the door and minded a young boy sitting on a ledge near the dashboard, all at the same time, and at speed. However, in spite of his efforts to kill us, we arrived back in Santiago unharmed. We caught a crowded Metro train to our hotel, booked in, and then went out for another Chorillana, noting, as we went, signs advising on routes to be taken in the event of a tsunami threat or a volcano.

At the boarding gate of the airport next day we met Clare, wife of the priest at Vina del Mar. They were those who had befriended, fed and entertained us so well on the Sunday before. Since then her 80 year old mother in England had had a fall and died and so she was travelling back to support her father and family. It was good to be able to accompany her all the way back to England.

On our return, how lovely our own bed, our own shower and to refamiliarise the unfamiliarised familiar.

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