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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (August 2016)**



#### **GEM SQUASH STEM FACIATING - VICARAGE GARDEN**

(See article 153 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 **August 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” - 28 August 2016

For over twenty years I have typed into a computer file anything I find arresting or memorable in my reading. Too often there has been no computer to hand and so much has been lost. In spite of this the file contains 144,000 words. An enjoyable trawl this week yielded the following:

*In joyous memory of George Jones who was president of the Newport Rifle Club for twenty years. Always missed.*

*Here lies the body of Mary Anne Lowder  
She burst while drinking a Seidlitz powder  
Called from the world to her heavenly rest  
She should have waited till it effervesced.*

### **Evolution and Faith**

This piece on Darwinism in relation to faith, is taken from a letter to the Spectator over twenty years ago:

*Darwinism has taken God out of the evolutionary equation. But who then wrote the equation? At the moment that the universe came into existence - and ‘Let there be light’ is as good a description of the Big Bang as any - it contained within the finely tuned laws that govern it the potential for the emergence of life and of intelligence, of all the beauties of nature and of music and poetry, and of a being capable of moral awareness. On the flip side, pain, suffering and death, and our troublesome natures, are the legacy of the evolutionary process that has brought us into existence and defines what we are. Human beings have emerged from the darkness of their evolutionary past into the light of spiritual awareness, capable, in the Christian scheme of things, of rebirth and salvation. Religious belief remains a matter of faith.*

### **Tracey Emin’s lost cat**

From a review by Edward Skidelsky, in the New Statesman, of Simon Blackburn’s book ‘Truth: A guide for the perplexed’ enlightenment on Tracey Emin:

*When the celebrity artist Tracey Emin lost her cat and put up “lost cat” notices around her London neighbourhood, these were immediately taken down and treasured as valuable works of art. Had she prefixed them with the words “This is not a work of art” they would have been viewed as still more valuable works of art. Emin can do nothing but produce works of art: and this only means that the whole notion of a “work of art” has lost its meaning. Emin is, in Blackburn’s analogy, like an archer who fires arrows randomly into a barn door and then draws targets around them. What looks at first glance like a 100 per cent success rate is, in fact, the collapse of any independent standard of success or failure. Conceptual art exists in a normative vacuum. And what fills the vacuum is not creativity, as its apologists would have us believe, but money, fashion and celebrity.*

### **Trickle-down theory**

J. K. Galbraith's definition of Trickle-down theory:

*The less than elegant theory that if one feeds the horse enough oats, some will pass through to the road for the sparrows.*

### **Trinity men**

Many years ago the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, in proposing the health of the College said "it is as well to remember that, at this moment, both the sovereign and the Prime Minister are Trinity men." Augustine Birrel (1850-1933) responded, 'the Master should have added that he can go further. For it is obvious that the affairs of the world are built upon the momentous fact that God also is a Trinity man.'

### **An unfashionable point of view**

*In its own, quiet, embarrassed way..... the Anglican religion goes on maintaining churches that it cannot fill but which keep patient vigil in the countryside, awaiting the Prodigal's return. ....The old Prayer Book tells us that 'we are his people and the sheep of his pasture', and that we have erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep. Its language and thought are pastoral, and its message of redemption is also a covert affirmation of the rural life from which we have been sundered That is why country churches have such appeal to the modern travel-ler, who steps for a moment from his car, creaks open the wooden door, and sniffs that curious smell of dried flowers and polished brass which is the smell of God at home in England.*

(Roger Scruton)

## **(155) "This and That" - 21 August 2016**

A wedding guest, a stranger to St John's, recently said to me "This doesn't look like a Baptist church." I replied, "that's hardly surprising, it isn't". *She had assumed St John the Baptist's Church, Boldre was St John's, the Baptist Church, Boldre.* Punctuation is important.

### **Eulogy or Elegy**

The most interesting part of a funeral is usually the eulogy. It nearly always reveals something surprising and enlightening about the deceased. The word 'eulogy' itself, however, is problematic. It means 'to praise' and too much of that can be nauseating. Occasionally a eulogy is more interesting for what is not said than for what is.

I have listened to many during my priestly life. Most have been heartfelt, moving and well done. I incline more to elegy than to eulogy though. To me lamentation seems more appropriate at death than praise. A beautifully written, understated, poetic lament is perfect. One that says everything by saying very little, but exquisitely. For example the priest and poet R. S. Thomas on the death of his wife:

*We met  
under a shower  
of bird-notes.  
Fifty years passed,*

*love's moment  
in a world in  
servitude to time.  
She was young;  
I kissed with my eyes  
closed and opened  
them on wrinkles.  
“Come,” said death,  
choosing her as his  
partner for  
the last dance. And she,  
who in life  
had done everything  
with a bird's grace,  
opened her bill now  
for the shedding  
of one sigh no  
heavier than a feather.*

### **More faciating**

Since observing faciation in our gem squash we now notice it in other plants. One of our runner beans has a faciating stem. So too a forsythia bush. Is this a peculiarity of our garden, or is it just that we now have an eye for it?

### **Silent worship**

There are not a few folk who never or rarely attend a church service, but who love St John's and visit it when no one else is present. There they find peace, solace and in many cases a sense of God's presence.

What is it that allows a mere building to grant us such blessings? The architecture? The use to which the building has been put for centuries? The memorialised dead all around? The quietude and tranquillity? Remembered rites of passage, departed loved ones and childhood certainties?

It is probably all that and more. Not only bread and wine are sacramental. So too are buildings. God breathes through all creation, but to recognise that glorious generality we particularise it. Distil words into liturgy, space into architecture, light into stained glass, sound into cantatas and anthems. Many who come to church on their own, when the building is empty, are about the same business as those of us who attend on Sundays. They come to partake of and be with God, are silent worshippers.

### **Demolition**

Christopher Hitchens once did a demolition job on Mother Theresa. He did the job thoroughly and contemptuously. Demolition is easier than construction. He called her 'Hell's Angel' and accused her of fanaticism, extreme dogmatism, blinkered faith, fundamentalism and worse. Contempt is contemptible. Few would bother with such a book. How apposite this comment upon Hitchens himself though:

*“.....it would be unfortunate if he were to be remembered not as the person who had fed the poor and comforted the dying, but the person who had given a good kicking to the woman who did.”*

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## “This and That” - 14 August 2016

Unlike king Agag I don't tread delicately. Hence the indelicacy of my first topic today, belly buttons.

My navel became painfully infected when I bred budg-erigars. My doctor healed it with antibiotics and was mildly surprised on inspecting his handiwork to discover husks blown from my bird seed receptacles in my navel's innermost recesses. Perhaps the cause of the original infection.

Who was Agag? King of the Amalekites. He was defeated in battle by king Saul and taken captive. When called before Samuel the prophet, he *'came unto him delicately'* saying “*'surely the bitterness of death is past'*”. He was wrong. Samuel *'hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord'*.

### Putting away childish things

On the Island of St Helena I was invited to preach at a colleague and friend's church in Jamestown. He was a thoughtful and intelligent priest who happened to be Diana's first husband. May he rest in peace.

My short sermon light-heartedly asked how best to identify Adam and Eve. The answer had nothing to do with fig leaves and little to do with nudity. Rather it was their lack of a belly button. Neither Adam, created from dust, nor Eve, from Adam's rib, had had need of an umbilical cord.

My friend took me to task for not making it clear enough that I was being jocular. I had left the congregation's simpler and younger folk with the impression that Adam and Eve were real, historical, belly-buttonless people.

The transition from a child's understanding of faith to an adult's is difficult. Too few people appear ever successfully to make it. Stuck with a Sunday school or primary school understanding of the faith, they either discard Christianity as their critical faculties develop, or remain embarrassingly naïve Christians.

To be enabled to *put away childish things* is to be blessed. Though it is an ongoing project. When I read some of my sermons from twenty or thirty years ago I cringe. We all continue to move on and must. In making the transition I received no help from my schooling. It was the faith lived admirably, though not flawlessly, at home that most helped. Also an openness there to debate and disagreement.

### Re-enchanting faith

Dave Tomlinson in his book *'Re-enchanting Christianity'* tells of a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood among the Hopi people of Arizona....

*Throughout their life these children have been familiar with the Kachinas, the tribe's masked holy men, who bless the corn harvest and bring toys and gifts for the children, like Santa Claus. One night as the children are brought to the sacred circle, something different occurs: on this occasion, instead of giving them gifts, the Kachinas simply remove their masks, revealing the fact that these figures whom the children thought were gods are actually their family and neighbours—people whom they see every day. It is a moment of sacred disenchantment, when childish naivety gives way to grown up reality.*

It is a shame that there is no equivalent rite of passage for Christians. It is not that the Hopi children cease to believe. Rather, they learn to believe in a different way.

Our children too need to be taught that there are different ways of understanding or interpreting the bible, miracles, incarnation and resurrection and that they are authentic, can cohere, and make sweet and beautiful sense.

### **Two Vicarage recipes for courgettes**

Never allow courgettes to grow longer than 7 inches.

**Recipe 1:** Quarter 3 or 4 courgettes lengthwise. Cut each quarter into 3 lengths. Slice an onion and slow fry it in a large pan until there are signs of caramelising. Add the courgette sticks, ensuring contact with the oily pan. Slow fry with a lid on until the pale sliced sides of the courgette sticks are dark and the onion caramelised to perfection.

**Recipe 2:** Slice courgettes and an onion as above. Add half a dozen halved cherry tomatoes. Slow fry all together in a lidded pan in plenty of salted butter until they are a gloriously tacky jumble.

## **(153) “This and That” - 7 August 2016**

Strange things happen to priests. I once received, anonymously in the post, a home-printed photo of a man’s hairy, less than muscular belly. On that flaccid gut was the tattoo of a longhaired man wearing a crown of thorns. He was giving the finger to any unfortunate observer.

### **A belly tattoo**

On the back of the photo was a hand written note: *This is* (the name of a local undertaker) *with his tattoo of Christ on his abdomen.*

Anonymous letters are best ignored, but this one was particularly nasty. The undertaker in question had just gone through a bitter divorce. I decided that he should be made aware of the evil being spread about him. I was also curious as to whether or not he had such a tattoo on his stomach.

I phoned the fellow. He admitted to having a tattoo of Jesus on his belly, but not with a finger up. He came to collect the photograph and showed me his tattoo. There indeed was Jesus, but making no derisive gesture. The photo had been tampered with. Someone was attempting to traduce his professional reputation. He suspected that every minister of religion in the district would have been sent a copy. He went off to the police to show them the photo and to decide, with their help, his best course of action.

Why would a non-churchgoing, profane and cynical man go to all the expense and pain of having a large tattoo of Jesus tattooed on his belly? Intriguing.

### **Contagious**

The mystery of the Vicarage’s extraordinarily fecund gem-squash plant’s grossly flattened, ribbon-like stems is solved. My son Peter, in Australia, informs us that it suffers from a condition known as *fasciation*.

Abnormal cellular activity in the growing tip of the plant results in a flattening or ribboning of the stem sometimes with an abnormal number of flowers.

Three of the four plants in our garden have the condition. One extravagantly. The cause can be bacterial, viral hormonal or random genetic mutation. Damage from frost, insects or animals can also be a cause. I hand pollinate the multitudinous flowers and we glut daily on the buttered gems. If Diana and I begin to ribbon and flatten, beware. It is contagious. We are fascinatingly fasciating.

## Der Lindenbaum

One still summer evening in Norfolk, six years ago, I strolled across the village green of Burnham Market. The air was heavy with the sweetest of fragrances. It came, we discovered, from the blossom of lime trees.

We pass half a dozen of these trees on our daily walk along Warborne Lane. Their tight fistled little buds opened into modest flowers weeks ago, but sadly were almost scentless. Obviously not the right sort of lime tree.

The European name for the tree is *linden*. Not only is it more euphonious than *lime*, it has been rendered numinous by Schubert's lovely song *der Lindenbaum*.

Here is a clever poem by the Scots poet Robert Crawford, Professor of English at St Andrews University:

### Same, Difference

*for Kay*

Since each is shaped  
by all its drift,  
by every updraft  
from high cloud to ground,  
in all the history of the world  
a snowflake's double  
can't be found.

Since each is shaped  
by all its drift,  
by every updraft  
from snowflake to ground,  
in all the history of the world  
a high cloud's double  
Can't be found.

A world of difference flecks each word.  
Nature abhors a Henry Ford.

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