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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (April 2018)**



#### **DISEMBARKING BY HELICOPTER ON TRISTAN DA CUNHA 2012 (See 238 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 **April 2018** 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>*

## (241) “This and That” - 29 April 2018

You can tell when a plane full of poms lands at Sydney airport, say Australians. Once the pilot turns off the engine, the whining continues.

### **To church by way of the Red Lion**

There is little to whine or whinge about in Pilley. We don't even have traffic jams. It's one of many unsung bonuses of living here. Until a mass bicycle rally coincides with a Pilley Hill road closure.

This happened recently on the weekend of a wedding. Cars and bicycles, plus road-verges churned up by a wet winter, jammed Church Lane so that the priest not the bride very nearly didn't make it to the church on time.

Nor did it augur well for Sunday, the following day. We alerted folk of the problem with the following email:

*Those coming to St John's today should be aware that Pilley Hill from the bridge to School Lane is closed for repairs and there are hordes of cyclists diverted to use Rodlease Lane and School Lane. The best way to get to church is by way of Royden Lane, from the Red Lion.*

Our email list for pew sheets includes people in Australia, South Africa and America as well as England. From folk in Wodonga, Australia, we received the reply: *Thanks for the tip.* From someone in Melbourne: *Thanks for those specific directions, I'll see you in kirk if I can just extract myself from the Red Lion.* From Jeremy Utton in America: *The best way to get anywhere is always from the Red Lion.....*

It is John Broomfield who gets things the right way round. Every Sunday he makes his invariable way to the Red Lion only after attending St John's.

### **Leaden footed plodders and wowers**

It is impossible as a parish priest not to offend someone or other at some time or another.

I once based a funeral homily on the deceased's love of dancing. One leaden-footed plodder of a relative took exception to this. I was ticked off in a curt letter. It took all my diplomatic skill to talk my way back into favour.

I love dancing, so long as it is of a robust and bucolic sort, like barn dancing or Scottish country dancing.

On Saturday, 19 May, we are holding our very own Barn Dance in the Memorial Hall. The band is one to the very best. It is not to be missed.

In my younger days I danced polkas so furiously that during winter steam could be observed rising from my bald pate. Several times I have landed flat on my back from Scottish country dancing with corybantic vigour.

### **Wild dancing**

King David was a wild dancer in the prime of his life. He cavorted so immoderately when the Ark of the Covenant was being transported to Jerusalem that his wife Michal, on seeing him through a window leaping and dancing before the Lord “*despised him in her heart.*”

There have always been wowers who frown upon dancing for being immodest, lascivious and dangerous.

Yet dancing is one of life's great delights. From the earliest years of humankind it has been associated with religion. In churches in Africa, during a particularly rousing hymn, cow-hide drums beat insistent tracteries of rhythm that arouse and encourage the congregation to twitch with excitement as they sing. Then elderly women begin to ululate and shuffle and stamp their way out of the pew to dance in the aisle.

Dance is a way of putting pattern, rhythm, shape and form into the cacophonous babble and

flux of auditory and spatial experience. On the dance floor everyone moves in unison and harmony. Chaos and disorder is done away with. That is part of the bliss of dancing.

Belief in God likewise attempts to put life's chaos and purposelessness to flight. Faith gives purpose and pattern to existence, shapes chaotic meaninglessness to make sense of things. It is part of the bliss of belief.

*Dance then, wherever you may be;  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he;  
And I'll lead you all wherever you may be,  
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

## **(240) “This and That” - 22 April 2018**

I have no quarrel with atheists. Had I been born into the home of one who lived his denial of faith as positively and attractively as my father lived his fullness of faith, I might well be one myself.

### **Seven types of atheism**

Not an evangelical atheist though. They are far too zealous for converts. Dawkins, Harris, Coyne and company, condescend to, pour scorn upon, argue, threaten and pursue the faithful with the ugly fervour of fanatics. Their contempt curdles the blood.

Atheism at its best, like Anglicanism at its best, is gentler and more respectful of opposing points of view. More attractive is the atheist philosopher John Gray. He has just published a book called *Seven Types of Atheism*. From its reviews it would be worth reading.

I noted down the following from an article he once wrote called : *What Scares the New Atheists*:

*....what if the upshot of scientific enquiry is that a need for illusion is built into the human mind? If religions are natural for human beings and give value to their lives, why spend your life trying to persuade others to give them up? Indeed.*

One of the worst things about being an atheist would be to listen to Bach's sacred cantatas unable to allow the awe for God and Jesus, so movingly spelt out in the text, to stir the heart. Or to visit a country church without any awareness of a reality present that invites response.

### **Hubris and nemesis**

There can be few better examples of hubris and nemesis than the Australian cricket team's recent ball-tampering debacle. The fall from arrogant, remorseless 'sledging' to weeping self-pity and bitter remorse has been spectacular. If it marks the beginning of the end of 'sledging', how wonderful. *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall* says the Book of Proverbs.

As a teacher in Rhodesia I perforce took an interest in cricket. I was given the under 15B team to coach. They were naturals. All the better for a coach who didn't and couldn't coach. They never lost a match. Every Saturday in summer was spent umpiring them against an equivalent team from another school. My greatest difficulty was keeping track of how many balls a bowler had bowled. If deeply in love I would be dreaming of my beloved through overs of ten or even eleven balls. At the shout "How's that?" it was always safer to shake my head. Unless of course the stumps were down. Perhaps that is why my team never lost.

I had my own hubristic moment as the boastful coach of an unbeaten team. We teachers had to play the First XI. They were very good. The derisory catcalls as I strolled nonchalantly out to bat were appropriate. I didn't see the first ball. The second likewise. The third I heard. It took out my off stump.

### **Women playing cricket**

I wonder if women cricketers sledge and are determined to win at any cost. I like to think not. Which is probably sexist of me.

The first recorded women's cricket match was "between eleven maids of Bramley and eleven maids of Hambleton" in 1745. The first known women's cricket club was formed in Yorkshire in 1887 and called "The White Heather Club". In 1890 the "Original English Lady Cricketers" toured England making substantial profits until their manager absconded with the money.

The poet Vernon Scannell concludes his poem *Wicket Maiden* by saying of women playing cricket:

*It shouldn't happen but it did  
She bowled a wicked heart break - one  
That's all. God help the next man in.*

### **Disposable nappies**

Outside my window parent robins constantly flit in and out of their nesting box. They sometimes emerge carrying a pure white faecal sac. A disposable nappy totally biodegradable. Unlike ours.

## **(239) "This and That" - 15 April 2018**

My lovely legs long for liberation and sunlight. Their winter-sickly, pommie pallor appals. At last divested of long johns, they anticipate summer's shorts and sandals with joy.

### **Long Johns**

An odd name long-johns. It is said to come from their use in the boxing ring by the "Boston Strong Boy," John L Sullivan (1858-1918). He is recognised at the first gloved heavyweight champion of the world.

On the other hand the word could just as well be an English mangling of the French *longue jambes*, "long legs".

No matter. My legs have shed their winter long johns with the relish of a snake sloughing its skin.

### **Magnolias**

The Vicarage magnolia is doing something similar. Thousands of tightly-folded, bright, white, petal candles are sloughing their velvety hoods prior to bursting into full bloom. It's an invitation to the ancient, mouldy Moses of a vicar to shed his shoes as well as long-johns in awe of God's time honoured presence and voice in natural beauty.

Magnolias are named after a highly esteemed French botanist, Pierre Magnol (1638-1715). He invented the concept of plant families, still in use today.

My greatest gardening gaffe concerns magnolias. There was a well established specimen in the garden of my last Australian parish. When I first took up residence there it had finished flowering. As is their wont it produced later, out of season, a further, though meagre, handful of flowers. In ignorance, taking this to be it's best effort, I uprooted it in disdain to make way for a vegetable garden.

### **To be happy at home**

I have just listened to a lovely rendition of the sentimental nineteenth century ballad "Home Sweet Home".

*Home! Home! Sweet, sweet home!  
There's no place like home....*

Over the years I've called nineteen places home, not counting educational establishments. I remember all with affection. That on St Helena, built by Napoleon's 'gaoler', the Island's Governor Hudson Lowe, is my favourite.

Through the window of my study here I observe, on the wall opposite, the tiny home of a clutch of robins. The parents flit in and out all day. I trust the family is as happily at home there as are Diana and I in the Vicarage.

To be happy at home is the ultimate ambition and end of all human endeavour suggests the wise Dr Johnson:

*The great end of prudence is to give cheerfulness to those hours, which splendour cannot gild, and acclamation cannot exhilarate; those soft intervals of unbended amusement, in which a man shrinks to his natural dimensions, and throws aside the ornaments or disguises, which he feels in privacy to be useless incumbrances, and to lose all effect when they become familiar. To be happy at home is the ultimate result of all ambition, the end to which every enterprise and labour tends, and of which every desire prompts the prosecution.*

### **A home doubly blessed**

I have blessed a fair number of homes in my time. Usually, though not always, new ones. Sometimes people desire a house with an unhappy history to be blessed.

I prefer to do it with plentiful ceremony and ritual. Incense, holy water and sometimes even a small choir. Every room is entered, a biblical sentence declaimed or sung and then the room is censed, smoked, sprinkled and blessed.

In Australia we once participated in a combined Christian and Hindu house blessing. First we smoked, sprinkled and blessed each room with Christian prayer and then repaired to the garage. There a gentle Hare Krishna priest built a small altar, lit a fire fuelled with ghee and then with gestures and mantras scattered grain and fruit on the fire. The house was doubly blessed. As indeed were we. For there followed a feast of truly delicious Indian foodstuffs.

In Tamil Nadu a traditional house blessing involves not only mantra chants, but also leading a cow through all the rooms, and boiling its milk in the kitchen. What fun.

### **(238) “This and That” - 8 April 2018**

The earliest possible Easter Day is the 22nd of March. It's always the first Sunday after the paschal full moon, and that is the first full moon after the spring equinox.

#### **Early and late Easter Days**

In 1818 the paschal full moon fell on Saturday the 21st of March. So Easter Day was the very next day. Few of us will be around in the year 2285 when this next occurs, a span of 467 years.

There are some among us, though, who will remember that in 1943 Easter Day fell on the 25th of April. The latest date possible. This next occurs in 2038. Even I, hopefully, might be around to experience it. A still healthy and at last almost wise, increasingly tolerant and lovable nonagenarian.

#### **Paradise by way of HMS Actaeon**

Paradise is best approached from the sea and is all the more likely to be recognised as such after a difficult voyage on a miserable tub of a boat.

In late 1952 the Neaum family of five, including a six year old boy called Andrew, set sail from the naval base at Simon's Town, near Cape Town, on *HMS Actaeon*. We were on our way to Tristan da Cunha. The ship's unlikely and only passengers.

We were told that *Actaeon* was a frigate. Research reveals it to have been a sloop of about 1,300 tons. Sloops were a class of ship specialising in convoy defence and so fitted with the best of anti-submarine equipment.

Before we fully left the calm waters of Table Bay we were on deck to witness a naval exercise with other warships. Our guns were fired and depth charges dropped and detonated. Exciting for small boys. Thereafter, we rarely left our cabins. Seven interminable days of sea sickness on a shuddering, juddering ship that stank of diesel and heaved and rolled on a wild South Atlantic ocean. Only my father refused to surrender. Playing poker with the crew was the remedy that enabled him to do so.

Then after hell, heaven. Glimpsed through a salt-rimed porthole. A mighty mountain reared out of the sea. A wind blasted, storm-worn and rain-soaked paradise of paradises. Home for three and a half years. My personal narrative's Garden of Eden.

We returned for 3 weeks in 2010 on a state of the art polar research vessel. Indulged nostalgia. Paradise regained.

The *HMS Actaeon*, launched in the year of my birth, 1945, was transferred to West Germany as the *Hipper* in 1958, hulked in 1964 and broken up for scrap in 1968.

### **Paradise by way of MV Aragonite**

Thirty years later, in 1982, myself, wife and two little boys were in Cape Town again on our way to another island paradise. We were booked on a more passenger friendly and substantial vessel this time, the *RMS St Helena*.

It was not to be. The ship was summarily requisitioned for use in the Falklands war. We were stranded in Cape Town for three months, waiting first for a replacement vessel and then for a berth on it.

The replacement was a Scotland built, rusting tub of only 698 tons. Originally the *Lady Roslin* it had been used to carry explosives across the North Sea. Renamed the *Aragonite*, we didn't warm to it in Cape Town docks. Shabby, paint-chipped, pock marked with rust and unloved. Those boarding stepped down from the wharf rather than up.

Once painted, smartened and well managed by a crew of 12, it took freight and ferried passengers, a dozen at a time, the 1,900 miles from Cape Town to St Helena and back most happily.

On the 12th of August we sailed. Although the tiny boat rose and fell mightily on a heavy swell throughout the voyage, it was so regular a movement we were able to accommodate ourselves to it and abandon seasick pills.

We enjoyed the voyage. In the dark of the sixth morning, paradise loomed once more. Dark against a starlit sky was the island of St Helena. For the next two and a half years we delighted in a uniquely beautiful landscape heavy with history, much of it sad, all of it intriguing.

## **(237) "This and That" - 1 April 2018**

It's the beginning Of Holy Week. Less onerous in Boldre than in previous parishes. Even better, the sun is shining into my study. Through the window a robin has just darted into the homemade box fixed to the wall a year ago. It overflows with busily gathered nesting material. The birds presence there this morning could well be to lay a sky blue egg towards a full Easter clutch. Brimstone butterflies and bumble bees flumble and butter around.

### **Sunstruck**

We made a diversion on our walk this morning. It was to celebrate Holy Communion in St Nicholas' Chapel. With Diana and myself were thousands of fondly remembered folk, certain to be doing the same, in churches known and loved all over Zimbabwe, Lesotho, St Helena, Australia and England. We used the Book of Common Prayer with its long Passion narrative Gospel. Still so moving when heard in one piece and perfectly understandable in the Authorised Version. A meditative and peaceful service.

After a long winter a sunny day brings to mind a poem by the wandering Scotsman, son of the manse and scholar, Alastair Reid. A noted linguist, translator and essayist, he was dubbed the second worst-dressed man in New York by Muriel Spark, a fellow contributor to *The New Yorker*. His joyful poem recalls, anticlimactically, the dour, pessimistic, Calvinist heritage of Scotland.

### **Scotland**

*It was a day peculiar to this piece of the planet,  
when larks rose on long thin strings of singing  
and the air shifted with the shimmer of actual angels.  
Greenness entered the body. The grasses  
shivered with presences, and sunlight  
stayed like a halo on hair and heather and hills.  
Walking into town, I saw, in a radiant raincoat,  
the woman from the fish-shop. "What a day it is!"  
cried I, like a sunstruck madman.  
And what did she have to say for it?  
Her brow grew bleak, her ancestors raged in their graves  
as she spoke with their ancient misery:  
"We'll pay for it, we'll pay for it, we'll pay for it!"*

### **Invergowrie**

In the year 2000 I swapped my Australian parish for one in Scotland for three months. It was rewarding enough for me to determine that should I ever return to the United Kingdom it would be to Scotland. Return I did. To Boldre, almost as far from Scotland as it is possible to get in Britain.

My Scottish parish was on the western edge of Dundee. Invergowrie, a village on the banks of the Firth of Tay, three miles wide at that point. Its Episcopal church, "All Souls", was built in the late nineteenth century of dark red stone with a fine spire. It was financed by a member of the Kinnaird family of the nearby walled Rossie Priory Estate. The elderly Lady Kinnaird was very kind to us.

The member of her family who financed the church had a tragic life. All her children and husband predeceased her. She was an Anglo Catholic with a disapproving and decidedly protestant brother. He couldn't stand even the merest whiff of incense in the family chapel. Undaunted she built All Souls and put the family priest in as its Rector.

The parson I swapped with was a bright fellow and part time chaplain to Dundee University. His small congregation contained talented, interesting folk. I took over his university chaplaincy work until the summer holidays. Whereupon we had much free time to explore Scotland.

### **A misattribution**

Dundee was the home of William McGonagall, purportedly the worst poet writing in English. No longer. The internet reveals thousands far worse including, possibly, myself. This example of McGonagall's work is almost certainly misattributed:

*The chicken is a noble beast,  
The cow is much forlorn;  
Standing in the pouring rain,  
With a leg at every corner.*

## **Home**