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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (January 2019)



PRO HART GALLERY - BROKEN HILL

(See 277 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 **January 2019** 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>

(280) “This and That” - 27 January 2019

“All Over Down Under” [15]

Tasmania is about the same size as Sri Lanka. The two islands being the 25th and 26th largest in the world. Both appear as the a detached pendant of a continental land mass.

Tasmania is beautiful. It comprises 334 lesser islands as well as the large mainland one. Many of them spectacular. Like Scotland, Tassie is all firths, estuaries, lochs, inlets, islands, islets and mountains. Though Scotland has 790 islands, counting the Shetlands.

Brexit down under

On the tiny and isolated Island of St Helena, many years ago, we were looking for somewhere to settle down and raise our family. The most attractive option seemed to be Tasmania. My knowledge of which came entirely from the excellent geography lessons offered by Rhodesia’s conservative educational system.

I wrote to the then bishop of the island expressing an interest in raising the quality of his clergy by joining them. Sadly he had a full complement of priests and seemed little interested. We ended up instead across the 220 mile wide Bass Strait, settling near Ballarat in the State of Victoria.

Few realise that there’s a land as well as sea border between Victoria and Tasmania. So should Tasmania contemplate a Brexit from the Commonwealth of Australia, it too might have a ‘Backstop’ problem. The sea border runs the length of Bass Strait, but in doing so crosses the *Hogan Group* of six small islands. On 4.9 acre *Boundary Islet* there’s a 279 foot long land boundary between the two States.

Hobart

Having crossed Australia by car we flew to Tasmania because my daughter and family now live there. It was our first visit, except for a holiday on Tasmania’s *King Island* in Bass Strait that I made in 2004. It is an island renowned for seabirds, shipwrecks, kelp, lobsters, beef, cheeses and that most absurd of products, bottled rainwater. My most abiding memory of the visit is late dusk lying on a stony beach as fairy penguins waddled up to and round me on their way to their burrows.

We arrived in Hobart at 8.00pm on the twenty third of September. The temperature was 6°C. For anyone averse to extremely hot temperatures, it is climate that makes Tasmania the most attractive part of Australia to live. Periods of excessive heat in summer are never too protracted. Cool changes invariably blow in from the west after a few days. It does get hot though. The highest temperature ever recorded was 41.8°C in early January 2013. It is salutary to remember that here in Boldre we are appreciably closer to the North Pole than anywhere in Tasmania is to the South Pole.

Hobart, like Cape Town, is dominated by a mountain and water. Almost, though not quite, as spectacularly as Cape Town. Mount Wellington is 4,163 feet above sea level and broods darkly behind the city, protecting it from too much rain. The annual average is 24.2 inches, little more than London’s. Mount Wellington is an impressive mountain, higher than Table Mountain and yet only the fifty first highest in Tasmania. It goes to show that Tasmania is by far the most mountainous of Australian States.

Wallabies and pademelons in the garden

We loved Hobart. The part in which we stayed is very hilly with lovely views over the city, the Derwent river estuary and the islands and peninsulars beyond. We were but a few yards from hilly, well treed bushland. Wallabies and pademelons invaded local gardens each night.

Best of all was the lively household, its family bursting with the fun, laughter and occasional tears of four young granddaughters, ranging from 2 to 9 years old. We walked them

to school, until they broke up for the holidays, and explored Hobart together. Further afield we visited much of the spectacularly lovely east coast.

The family haven't yet been there two years and have still to make up their minds as to whether or not they settle. So far away from Brexit weary Britain it seem a very good place to visit regularly. We hope they do. PS. They have.

(279) “This and That” - 20 January 2019 “All Over Down Under” [14]

Most Australians live along the continent's edge. Its five major cities are coastal. Only Canberra, the federal capital, deliberately and self-consciously is not. The harsh interior is important for minerals, hard-won agricultural products and treasured outback myths that help Australians define themselves. As a home it is shunned by the vast majority.

A D Hope in a famous poem speaks of

*..... her five cities, like five teeming sores,
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
Where second hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.*

The back o' Bourke

Our long trip's final stopover was the far north west NSW town, Bourke. It typifies the outback. The Australian equivalent of the back of beyond, is the back o' Bourke.

At this time of the year it will be as hot as hell there. As I write it is 46C. On 4 January 1903 the temperature reached 49.7C, the highest ever in New South Wales and near to the highest ever anywhere in all Australia. When we were there it was beautifully cool.

Situated on the Darling River, Bourke is a small town of about 2000 souls. A good proportion of them are Aboriginal. We walked along the river in the dusk, after settling into a motel. Though sluggish, stagnant and green, its eucalyptus treed banks provided pleasant strolling.

The Murray Darling river basin drains as large an area of mother earth as any river system in the world. Sadly, though, there's usually far too little water to drain and the Darling in the present drought is in poor condition. The growth and death of algae on sluggish rivers deoxygenates the water. This kills life, especially fish, often suddenly.

The Darling flows mostly over plains. Its average gradient is little more than an inch to the mile. I was once called upon to do some relief work in a town flooded by the lower reaches of the Goulburn River in Victoria. Here too the river's gradient is all but nothing. In warm, cloudless, sunny weather it was eerie to wade through imperceptibly flowing, slow millimetre by slow millimetre rising, flood water, as it crept inexorably closer and closer to inundating homes and businesses.

Henry Lawson

The fine Australian poet and short story writer Henry Lawson was sent by his editor to Bourke to get a taste of outback life and to curb, hopefully, his heavy drinking. He spent six months there at the age of 25. The harsh realities of life in the bush had a profound influence on his life and work. He claimed that to know Bourke was to know Australia. He was a realist on outback life, not a romantic, unlike Banjo Paterson. Of the Darling River Lawson wrote:

*The skies are brass and the plains are bare,
Death and ruin are everywhere;
And all that is left of the last year's flood
Is a sickly stream on the grey-black mud;*

*The salt-springs bubble and the quagmires quiver,
And this is the dirge of the Darling River.*

Luncheon with a carcass

Our final destination was Tamworth. There my son Peter resides in a most welcome and comfortable dwelling which he is soon to leave to live in Albury on the river Murray. As we continued westward the countryside became more and more agriculturally productive, better grassed and treed. We stopped by the roadside for our last and usual pot noodle lunch. Only when we had set up our chairs and settled down ourselves did we notice the desiccated carcass of a kangaroo nearby. An unpleasant companion, though too sundried and ancient to smell. It was bushflies not the carcass that made for a speedy stop.

Tamworth is a large regional town of 60,000, notable for being the first town in Australia to install electric street lights in 1888. It is also notable for being the Country Music Capital of Australia and for an esteemed resident, one Peter Geoffrey Neaum the enabler of our 3,116 mile car trip. We returned his car in good condition and enjoyed his amiable company for a couple of days before flying to Tasmania.

(278) “This and That” - 13 January 2019 “All Over Down Under” [13]

To be confined in a car boot, as so often witnessed in crime dramas, horrifies even a non-claustrophobic lover of the cosy like myself. Almost as bad as confinement in a coffin. That inevitable destination we all postpone for as long as possible.

Claustrophobic

Descending to the depths of the earth in a mine can be disturbing too. There is a huge, unlovely Miners Memorial on a great mullock heap in Broken Hill. It commemorates the more than 800 local miners who lost their lives over the years. Its unloveliness a deliberate expression of the ugly, claustrophobic environment that miners endure.

My first parish in Rhodesia had a lot to do with mines and mining. Nearby were the headquarters of Rio Tinto in Rhodesia. Its managing director was a churchwarden. I travelled each month to take services at a large nickel mine and to two local gold mines. The parish church itself had been bequeathed a thirteenth part of a third in a small local gold mine. The proceeds from this had been carefully tied up into a trust fund to protect them from an always cash hungry diocese. The price of gold at the time was exceptionally high. We were a wealthy parish.

Silverton

On our one full day in Broken Hill we paid a quick visit to the city-dominating mullock heap and Monument. We noted, with amusement, a huge red bench, far too big to use, with a label saying *This Is Art... don't climb on it...* There was a cold wind and an excellent view of a pleasing city of wide streets and remarkably high kerbs.

We then drove 20 miles out of town to Silverton. Today it's a village with a permanent population of about 50 and came into being shortly after 1875. Two men drilling a well on a sheep station struck a silver lode. By the early 1890s the town's population had increased to 3,000 and the Silverton Tramway had been opened to connect the town to South Australia. Many of the houses were of simple iron and canvas construction and disappeared with the depletion of the high-grade ore and the discovery of an even richer silver-lead-zinc ore body in nearby Broken Hill.

Today it is a deserted, desert ghost town, popular with tourists. There's a thriving pub that featured in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, an empty gaol, several boarded up churches, a house or two and bare, sandy, streets with few if in any buildings alongside them. In

its day fashionably dressed townsfolk walked the streets of a short-lived, prosperous town with its own municipal council and municipal chambers.

Day dreaming

We then visited the defunct and primitive Day Dream Mine about ten dusty miles away. This too, for a short time in the late eighteen hundreds, was a rich producer of silver and lead. Revived for a while later, on a small scale, it produced little worthwhile and is now a tourist enterprise of a pleasingly unpolished and raw sort.

The pleasant and unassuming fellow who showed us round and took us underground reminded me of Robert Carlyle. After a surface tour of the derelict, tumble down remnants of a once vibrant mine, we descended 300 feet underground. The tunnel was rough, low and steep, battery-lit helmets were essential, mulga wood props reassuring. It was salutary to be given a glimpse into how unhealthy, dangerous and unpleasant mining used to be. Most miners, many of them Cornish, died before forty from poisoning and dust induced respiratory diseases. Above ground we were shown crude, stone humpies they built for themselves. Their pay though, by standards of the day, was good. Before we went on the tour we learned that the isolated shop and reception building had been thoroughly robbed two days previously. The employee who told us this was outraged. They'd taken even bottles of milk and were probably junkies. He said a policeman had advised that if identified the thieves should be roughed up and thrown outside before the police were called.

(277) “This and That” - 6 January 2019

“All Over Down Under” [12]

We read a poem last week about a visit to the popular shrine of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, in Mexico. It contained the arresting, paradoxical line: “kitsch is authenticity”. This led to a stimulating discussion of kitsch, a quality difficult to define. The poem was by *Grevel Lindop*.

Pro Hart

Broken Hill has its very own artist and sculptor, *Pro Hart* (1928-2006), the father of the Australian Outback painting movement. We visited his gallery there with great interest and enjoyed much of what we saw. Many of his works do catch something of the spirit of the outback. Nor is he a purveyor of kitsch.

Prolific and untrained, he made lots of money, was right wing, an eccentric Christian, enjoyed pistol shooting, reading the bible, collecting vintage cars, listening to and playing organ music and was awarded an MBE. An unsophisticated populist, largely disdained by the Australian artistic elite, whom he called the “art Mafia”, he'd be one of Hilary Clinton's “deplorables”. A Head Curator of Australian Art at the Gallery of New South Wales claimed that hanging *Pro Hart's* work next to those normally hanging in the gallery would be as ridiculous as equating the Country and Western singer *Slim Dusty* (also an MBE), with Mozart.

Pro Hart's funeral in Broken Hill was the first State Funeral in New South Wales west of the Blue Mountains.

The Indian Pacific

When contemplating crossing Australia from north to south and east to west, our thoughts turned first to the celebrated Ghan and Indian Pacific train journeys. We are glad that we opted instead for the independence afforded by car travel, but mildly regretted missing such memorable train trips. Not the cost though. The cheaper of the two classes of fare, from Perth to Sydney on the Indian Pacific, would have cost more than our combined air fares from Heathrow to Hobart and back. In Broken Hill though, we were granted that rarest of options, both to have our cake

and eat it. The Indian Pacific stops there for several hours on its weekly journey to and from Perth. Passengers disembark to be taken on various local tours. One being to the *Pro Hart* Gallery.

Down town on our first evening we called in at the railway station and watched a goods train depart, counting its 88 waggons with interest. Then an old fellow told us that the weekly Indian Pacific was due in three minutes, so we waited to watch it arrive. It is a long train of about 28 silver carriages plus two large diesel electric engines and, for the Adelaide to Perth section of the journey, several waggons for passengers' cars. The full journey from Sydney to Perth takes four days and three nights. It includes the longest straight stretch of rail track in the world: just short of 300 miles over the Nullarbor Plain.

A free ride

Once the train had stopped it disgorged crowds of mostly elderly passengers for the coach tours. We strolled up the platform peering into the train windows. An amiable chief steward invited us to board and have a look round. "We will have to move the train forward a bit, as it is too long for the platform" he said, "if you get caught, don't be alarmed, sit in the lounge and the steward will serve you a drink." So we boarded and walked a good deal of the train's length. It seemed pleasingly comfortable rather than luxurious, though in the "Platinum" section, the corridors are sinuously curved and carpeted. We didn't see inside those cabins, being not quite impertinent enough to knock and ask for a peep. Several of the "Gold" cabins had their doors open. They were reminiscent of those we have both experienced on South African trains.

As we made our way back to the lounge the train did indeed start to move and so we sat down and conversed with several of the passengers who didn't go on the tours. Diana enjoyed a hot chocolate and I a Crown lager.

We've travelled on the India Pacific after all. If only for about 50 yards.

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