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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (June 2019)



Vicarage Oaks and Rhododendrons (See 298 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 June 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>

(302) “This and That” - 30 June 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha (2)

The flavour of food, when bracketed and contained by pastry, is enhanced beyond telling. A longed for destination when bracketed and contained by a sea voyage likewise.

Our three weeks on Tristan were framed by a six day sea journey there and a six day sea journey back. Getting there and returning was as enjoyable as being there.

A functional, working vessel

The day before we sailed, we signed up on the *SA Agulhas* at Cape Town’s “East Wharf”. Trustingly we left our passports with the purser and were told to board after 10.00am the next day. Before leaving we had a quick look round the ship. The cabins were locked, but we admired one of two lounge bars that overlook the front deck and bow. It is a functional and working vessel rather than a touristy passenger ship, but well appointed and beautiful. There are few concessions to luxury or superfluous comforts. Stairwells are uncarpeted, so too most corridors, hard-wearing linoleum instead, and the handrails of stairways are stainless steel. The great doors out to the deck are heavy and require muscle to open and shut. All the decks are green-painted, rough textured metal, not caulked wood. There are two helicopters in large twin hangars behind a landing pad at the ship’s stern. They are attended by a crew of eight support personnel including technicians and pilots, all in a uniform of their own.

Friday 7 Sept 2012 7.55pm (on board SA Agulhas)

I lie on the bunk of cabin 6136. We arrived at about 10.30am, parked the car near the gangway, unloaded the suitcases and struggled aboard with them. There were a lot of security people about. Our cabin has a sizeable window rather than a porthole and is fairly high up on deck 6. Two beds are separated by a desk with four plugs above it and a monitor, for I know not what. There is also a three person settee and an en-suite basin, toilet and shower. It’s as good a cabin as I have ever had. We dumped our stuff and went on deck to enjoy what we presumed would be our imminent departure. We were destined to leave late.

On deck we encountered a friendly fellow passenger whose husband is the Executive Officer on Tristan and loves living there. It’s her first voyage to see him. She wouldn’t mind living on the island herself, but no cats are allowed, even neutered ones, and she’s an ailurophile. Interested in the mystical properties of rocks as well as cats, and a polisher of stones to make ornaments and trinkets, she has a good sense of humour, a strong South African accent and a deep appreciation of wine.

A scheduled passenger briefing in the ship’s 100 seat auditorium was postponed because of a lot of speeches on the wharf to do with this being the very first Gough and Tristan trip of the new *Agulhas II*. A team of a variety of scientists is on its way to Gough Island, eight of them to spend thirteen months there, one with special and vital medical qualifications for so isolated a place. This is the 58th such expedition to Gough island.

As well as speechifying on the wharf, the South African National Anthem was sung by two African fellows with splendid tenor voices. A more serious delay is due to a faulty ship’s crane. An expert from Norway has been flown in to fix it, so although we have left port, we are now anchored in the Table Bay until he’s worked his wonders.

God-botherers

Immigration formalities took place in the ship’s auditorium. Our passports, with a photo of the main page, were tabled and everyone was called up by name to match photos to faces. That was that. No interrogation.

We befriended a “retired” psychiatrist and his wife, on their way to investigate, for the first time, possible mental problems on so isolated an island. They have done this regularly for some years on the island of St Helena.

I'm not the only parson on board. There's an R.C. priest as well as a Dutch Reformed Church chaplain to the Gough expedition. He'll be running a service on Sunday, relieving me of any obligations, though I'm to participate.

(301) “This and That” - 23 June 2019

For three hundred weeks I have produced an article of about 650 words for this pew sheet. A labour of love.

To labour my love more easily for a few months, I'll edit and serialise my diary of a trip to Tristan da Cunha made by Diana and myself in October 2012.

Returning to Tristan da Cunha (1)

Tristan, a British colony, is the remotest inhabited place on earth. I lived there from 1952 to 1956, aged seven to nearly eleven. My father was Chaplain for three and a half years. He, my mother, sister, brother and I loved it. It's the sort of place you never forget. It takes hold of your imagination. It's my own personal story's Garden of Eden.

The Island is almost plumb in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, on the edge of the *Roaring Forties*. Approximately 1,750 miles from Cape Town, 2,088 miles from South America, 1,350 miles from St Helena and 2,550 miles from the Falkland islands. It's the largest of a small archipelago: the uninhabited Nightingale Islands and the wildlife reserves of Inaccessible Island and Gough Island.

Tristan itself is roughly circular, about seven miles across, an area of 37.8 square miles. Its permanent population at the time of our recent visit was 267.

At first and close sight it appears forbidding and grim. All mountain, cliffs, ravines, gulches and wild ocean. From a distance out to sea it is thrilling. A near perfect, classic volcanic peak, often snow capped and frequently cloud shrouded. The cone is scored by deep gulches radiating out in all directions, carved by frequent rain. Sea erosion is more drastic than rain though, and so for most of the island's perimeter the cone's slope has been eaten into by relentless ocean to form forbidding 2000 foot base cliffs. They soar up from narrow black sand or stony beaches.

Edinburgh of the Seven Seas

There is one small human settlement, the village *Edinburgh of the Seven Seas*. It has an average of 67 inches of rain a year and the wind rarely ceases to blow. My childhood memories are bathed more in sunshine than gloom, though. Even our recent three and a half weeks on the island, though wet and windy, are recalled as in no way dark and inhospitable.

The village is set on a verdant half to one mile wide undulating, gulch and gully riven strip of land along the north west coast. About six miles in length this low-lying plateau, less than 100 feet above sea level, is sandwiched between mighty mountain and turbulent ocean. Sublimity is commonplace, the commonplace sublime.

Getting there

Getting to the island is not easy. We had been booked on the *SA Agulhas* for two years, not realising that this vessel had been replaced by a brand new *SA Agulhas II*, commissioned by the South African Government from Finland at a cost of nearly seventy million pounds. While our trip was not its maiden voyage, it was its first to Tristan and Gough Island. It is a state of the art polar research and survey ship, as well as a tanker, ice-breaker, cargo and passenger ship. Berths are much in demand by scientific folk, the ship's owner being the South African *Department of Environmental Affairs*. Three weeks before our date of sailing from Cape Town, we were informed that our berths were no longer available. More scientific personnel than originally envisaged needed berths and so the ten allocated to the likes of us had been withdrawn. Before we had confirmed a far less satisfactory alternative berth on a small cargo ship, we were squeezed on to the *SA Agulhas II* after all.

There is no airport nor ships' dock on the island, and no regular passenger ships. If the annual *Agulhas* trip cannot be caught, then either the small chartered island supply ship, or one of the Fishing Company ships have to suffice. The Agulhas trip takes between six and seven days and allows a very convenient three weeks on the island. After it has deposited passengers on Tristan it heads for Gough Island, three hundred miles away, to supply or replace the researchers and meteorological officers there, as well as to participate in research projects.

(300) “This and That” - 16 June 2019

Ex Rhodesians are no strangers to Brexit. Ian Smith's *Unilateral Declaration of Independence* was of the same order of things. It began well and ended badly.

A fool's paradise

In 1956 my father took us to live in Rhodesia on bush mission stations. It was a wonderful country in which to be brought up and educated. A fool's paradise. I left, finally, in 1982 part of the Zimbabwean diaspora. Once Robert Mugabe fully revealed his malign incompetence the diaspora, originally largely white, became largely black. As a consequence there occur not infrequent encounters with friendly Shona people even in Lymington.

My sister, Susan married a talented, very funny member of the British South Africa Police, Bob Bedingham. By the time they too joined the Zimbabwean diaspora, he was an Assistant Commissioner. They now live in Cape Town.

The second best job in the world

When he began his policing career in Mashonaland the job was hugely interesting, varied and satisfying. It involved long camping treks through game-occupied and far-flung districts by motor bike or on horseback, postings to isolated, paradisal bush police stations and dealings with in-digenous folk who, at that time, were as eirenic, humorous and attractive as any people on earth. Had I not been called to priesthood I'd have loved to be that sort of policeman.

In Rhodesia, as the civil war of independence gained momentum, policing became paramilitary and far less congenial. Here in England, to most of the rest of the world's astonishment, the police are courageously unarmed, except in rare and special circumstances. This because policing is essentially a pacific rather than aggressive vocation.

Bang bang

An Australian story mocks us for this:

Question:

How do you tell the difference between a British Police Officer, an Australian Police Officer and an American Police Officer?

Answer:

First pose the following question: You're on duty by yourself walking on a deserted street late at night. Suddenly, an armed man with a huge knife comes around the corner, locks eyes with you, screams obscenities, raises the knife, and lunges. You are carrying a Glock .40 and you are an expert shot. However you have only a split second to react before he reaches you. What do you do?

A British Police Officer:

Firstly the officer must consider the man's rights.

- 1) Does he look poor or oppressed?
- 2) Is he newly arrived in the country and so doesn't yet understand the law?
- 3) Have I done anything to him to provoke him to attack?
- 4) Am I dressed provocatively?
- 5) Could I run away?

- 6) Could I possibly swing my gun like a club and knock the knife out of his hand?
- 7) Should I try and negotiate with him to discuss his seeming violent intentions?
- 8) Does the Glock have appropriate safety built into it?
- 9) Why am I carrying a loaded gun anyway, and what kind of message does this send to society?
- 10) Does he definitely want to kill me, or would he be content just to wound me?
- 11) If I were to grab his knees and hold on, would he still want to stab and kill me?
- 12) If I raise my gun and he turns and runs away, will I be blamed if he falls, knocks his head and dies?
- 13) If I shoot and wound him, and lose the subsequent court case, is he allowed to sue me at the cost of my job, credibility and family home?

An Australian Police Officer:

BANG!

An American Police Officer:

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!
 BANG! BANG! BANG! 'click' (*A sergeant arrives at the scene and remarks: 'Nice grouping!'*)

(299) “This and That” - 9 June 2019

What today's churchgoers don't or do believe varies hugely. The credulous mingle with the incredulous, the doubting with the doubtless.

When we say the creed together we affirm the faith of the Church, not necessarily of ourselves. Some of us are tightly tethered to the rock of ages. Others loosely. All gladly, I like to think. An inclusive, tolerant Church is best.

Some years ago I attempted to capture in light verse the personal creed of some of my parishioners:

An Anglican's Credo

I believe belief to be
 than unbelief more odd,
 And God as likely not to be
 as likely to be God.
 But still to Church I weekly make
 my doubtful, hopeful way,
 To let the God who is or isn't,
 say or not to say
 His possibly impossible,
 uncomfortable word,
 Which might or might not, will or will not,
 leave my spirit stirred.

I go because I've always gone
 in ways now grown habitual
 To lose myself in ancient signs,
 in unobtrusive ritual,

Restrained and Church of England cadence,
polished, jewelled phrase,
Unreasonable truths explained
in reasonable ways.

But times, the world, the Church, the priest,
are rather different now.

To search for God (who is or isn't)
wondering why and how
While sitting on a pew in church,
brings less tranquillity.

Newfangledness, increasing doubts,
irascibility

Begin to tempt me to attempt
to find God on my own

In Herbert's verse or Bach's cantatas
listened to alone.

As yet the tempter's strong attempt
to tempt me hasn't worked,
The Church the pew and droning priest,
as yet I haven't shirked.

Resolve's dissolving fast though.

I've all but had enough
Of literalistic preachers
full of certitude and guff
Who preach a mindless mish and mash
of Sunday School-like rot
Expecting me to gobble up
and swallow down the lot;
And cyclopean change-fanatics,
restless, bored and fidgety,
Who've vandalised the churches' fabric,
language, hymns and liturgy.

I believe belief to be
than unbelief more odd
And God as likely not to be
as likely to be God.

Yet still to Church I weekly make
my doubtful, hopeful way
To let the God who is or isn't
say or not to say
His possibly impossible,
uncomfortable word,
Because, my God, O God, no God,
without you life's absurd.

(298) “This and That” - 2 June 2019

Outside my study window the great oaks encircling the garden are fully leafed. Rhododendrons bloom below them. At long last the mature ash tree is fully and greenly leaf-feathered. The front lawn’s ancient apple tree bristles with tiny fruit bobbles and a nuthatch stabs at the nutritious mix on the feeder against the window pane. It’s good to be alive.

Over night three millimetres of rain have settled the dust and refreshed the lawn. There, random scatterings of closed daisies await the sun’s warmth to open up and stare it down. I wouldn’t be dead for quids.

Study litter

Inside, the prospect is less pleasing. Every surface of the study is littered with books, papers and folders. *The Works of Rudyard Kipling*, with George Orwell’s perceptive introduction. *Poetry by Heart*, an anthology kindly given to me by Billy Howard as a thank you for the Lent Study. R S Thomas’ *Collected Poems*. Several copies of *The Book of Common Prayer* and attendant bibles await recitation of the daily office. There’s a booklet on *Church Fonts* lent to me by Graeme Shove, copies of *The Spectator*, wedding, funeral and Sunday service folders and pieces of paper innumerable... but enough. The scene is now set for an article, most happily already a third of the way through.

The baying mob

The Australian poet Les Murray died at the end of April. An intriguing, larger than life, impossible to categorise, intelligently accessible poet; egalitarian, conservative and a friend of aborigines, the poor and forgotten. I was delighted recently to come across a poem called *Demo* in which he reveals an antipathy, which I share, to taking part in any form of demonstration, no matter how noble the cause.

*No. Not from me. Never.
Not a step in your march.
not a vowel in your unison,
bray that shifts to bay.....*

Broad bean sermon

I recited one of his most famous poems to Diana a few days ago. It was strangely, deeply moving. Called *An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow* it’s about a man standing crying in the middle of Sydney and stopping the city by doing so. Unutterably wonderful. Although a periodic depressive, Murry is full of humour. There’s a sharply observed minor masterpiece called *The Broad Bean Sermon* it begins:

*Bean stalks, in any breeze, are a slack church parade
without belief, saying ‘trespass against us’ in unison,
Recruits in mint Air Force dacron, with unbuttoned leaves...*

Don’t die Dad

For some years I quoted Murray to end my round-robin Christmas letter. Instead of *With kind regards?* or *With Best wishes?* or *Yours sincerely?* I signed off: *I wish you God*. This comes from the end of the Christian Les Murray’s moving tribute to his father called *The Last Hellos*.

‘ The poem begins:

*Don’t die, Dad -
but they die....*

It ends:

*On your day there was a good crowd,
family, and people from away.
But of course a lot had gone
to their own funerals first.*

*Snobs mind us off religion
nowadays, if they can.
F***k thém. I wish you God.*

I couldn't agree more!

Tomorrow

In Ireland, at a conference on linguistics, a professor of Spanish repaired to a local pub where, over a Guinness, he got in to conversation with an Irish professor of Gaelic. The Spaniard asked if in Irish Gaelic there was an equivalent of the Spanish “mañana”. The Irish professor pondered carefully for several long moments and then replied: “Well, yes, we do indeed. In fact we have several, but none of them convey quite the same sense of urgency.”

Home