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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (September 2019)



Tristan da Cunha: Settlement Plateau

*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 **September 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>

(313) “This and That” - 15 September 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (13)

Sunday 16 September, 2012 11.30am

After the great baptism feast of crayfish pastries, quiches and cake and then a snooze, we visited the ruined *Garden Gate* beach, directly below the vicarage. It is now little more than an industrial dump and wasteland. The sand has been bulldozed away and a rusting pontoon frame dumped there. The boulders below the cliff are infested with kikuyu grass and further along the black sand beach we sunbathed on as children is now great stones and pebbles.

Three ancient and derelict boats are beached high and dry even further along, two of them not dissimilar to the life boats on the *Agulhas*. I tried to determine the contours and whereabouts of *Little Beach*, which no longer exists, as we walked to the small lagoon gathered behind a natural dam of beach stones. The 1961 lava flow appears to have swallowed up both *Big Beach* and *Little Beach*.

Walking with some difficulty over the large stones we came to the lava flow and began to climb its rough, sterile and jagged surface. Then we noticed an approaching squall and decided to turn back. On the way down Diana put her hand on a piece of clinker to steady herself and it gave way. She gently fell over, rolling on to her back. The only harm was a nastily scraped hand. We fixed it up temporarily with micropore from her resourceful pocket and made our way home by way of the harbour. There I found the cave I was looking forward to rediscovering. In my memory it was clean and pleasing with a sandy floor. Now it is almost in the harbour, has rough sheds in front of it, no sand in it and is dank, shade-gloomy and uninviting.

Monday 17 September, 2012

We arrived at the church just in time to say matins at 8.00am. Much as I love the Lady Chapel in St Augustine's (back home in Australia), tucked so beautifully away from the outside world, an icon decorated, glittering, warm-brick cavern of a chapel, it is pleasant to say Morning Prayer with a window beside us and looking out over low cottages and flax to the boundless South Atlantic. It is a grey day and fairly cold but as yet with no rain.

We intend taking a walk later to *Pigbite*, the easternmost part of the settlement plateau. We have made the day's most important decision though: what to have for dinner tonight. It will be a meal enjoyed as a lad on the island fifty five years ago: toad in the hole, if we can obtain some Vienna sausages from the island's only supermarket and shop.

Tuesday 18 September, 2012 8.42am

Another good night's sleep. The toad in the hole, after some difficulty in working out how to light the gas oven, proved highly successful. It was served with half a large gem squash, tinned peas and fresh but ancient and mildly scabrous carrots. Tinned pineapple, cake and yoghurt followed. We didn't get round to our intended walk yesterday. Instead we did a bit of visiting. First to Lars and Trina to deliver two little parcels, one from my sister Sue, who lives in Cape Town, and one from a relative of theirs in England. We then went to visit Rose who we had been told had sometimes child-minded me, my brother and sister when we were little. We found in fact that she had not. Her charge had been the daughter of the Administrator of the island at that time, Phil Scott. Rose is a widow of some years standing, her husband having been policeman for many years. A lovely person she seemed delighted to see us.

We then visited Harold and Amy Green. He's in his late seventies or early eighties, acute of mind and witty. His parents, Johnny and Sophie Green, had been particularly close friends of my parents. He told us of what a pleasure it is these days for him to hear the fishing gong boom out early in the morning and be able to turn over in bed and pull up the duvet. He interprets the 1961 volcano as providential. The lava had flowed without damaging the village, curving round it rather than annihilating it, "... a protective elbow sent by God". He maintains that in opening the island to the world the eruption had taught the islanders not to defer obsequiously to expatriates, but to

treat them as equals. An excellent thing. Johnny Green, his father, died in exile in England of a broken heart, he says.

(312) “This and That” - 8 September 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (12)

We arrived at St Mary's for our first Eucharist. The church was already open with a line of silent, staring people in the very last row, their backs to the wall. One or two others were scattered about the pews. A bright young girl, already robed, was waiting in the vestry, the altar server for the day and eager to assist in any way.

That laryngitical voice

The service went smoothly. Lars is a confident lay reader, and the lessons were beautifully read. Evangelical hymns from a book unfamiliar to me were sung robustly and seemed justified in such a setting. My parents would be turning in their graves though. Their beloved choir no longer in existence.

My laryngitical voice aroused a few comments afterwards, but not the content of either the children's talk or the sermon. We divined that folk were well enough pleased though. There were about 60 present and we finished at five past nine, in time to join the RC's for a reception ceremony of a lad who'd been baptized earlier, in extremis.

At the R C church I sat next to the Administrator. Several expatriates were present and the little church was comfortably full, about forty of us. The priest was in a purple zucchetto, taken off for the prayer of consecration and mounted by a mitre for the blessing. He was strangely hesitant and fumbling. Regrettably we were too late for his homily. There were 14 godparents.

Not at all bonkers

Afterwards we had a quick chat in the cold to the Administrator and to Brian and Françoise Robertson, he being the psychiatrist who came with us on the boat. We invited him and his wife in for coffee and an interesting conversation about psychiatry. He seemed to enjoy my questions and probing. For instance, on the nature of imagination and the difference between a 'normal', laudable imagination and the imaginary world of the schizophrenic. Also about empathy and autism, empathy being a form of imaginativeness. I asked how psychiatrists train, and if they have any deep knowledge of psychology. Too little in most cases, Brian opined and so psychiatrists have a tendency, from dealing always with abnormality, to be ignorant of psychology in "normal" people. We touched too on the island of St Helena where Brian has worked, and on the inevitability of losing patients to suicide as a psychiatrist. Altogether I warmed to him as a wise old bird, human and unusually, not at all bonkers himself.

After their departure we went to the Prince Phillip Hall for the "baptism" bash. Pretty well the whole 260 population of the island was present, as well as all expatriates. We were twenty five minutes late and it was a little daunting to walk in on a great crowd of people not much given to effusion. There were the ex-patriates to relate to first of all however, which we duly did, and then set out to fraternise more widely. I had three light beers and some excellent food, notably a variety of crawfish pastries and home made potato crisps. Laden tables were constantly replenished.

Kobus the Buddhist

Before sitting down on a bench with some of the older island women, I had a good chat with Kobus who is a Buddhist. When I asked him what had turned him that way he said that it was in response to working in the war-ravaged hell-hole that was Sierra Leone. I asked him how Buddhism answered the problem of that sort of evil. His answer didn't fully satisfy me, possibly because of the noise in a hall full of merrymakers. It had something to do with the necessity of being able to find inner peace. He also said that in Buddhism he found an absence of politicking. He's a thoughtful and interesting person and we'll engage in Island questions over dinner on Wednesday. He and Linda have asked us round.

My conversations with a succession of older ladies were good fun and involved for the most part reminiscing about our time on the island in the nineteen fifties. We had plenty of good laughs. A good time was had by all and we left at about ten to two.

(311) “This and That” - 1 September 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (11)

Sunday 16 September, 2012 11.30am:

A cold and windy day today, with occasional squalls. I awoke at 5.30 to the sound of a heavy shower on the corrugated iron roof. Yesterday was an aberration it seems.

Five finger fish and a penguin

It had been a lovely and largely sunny day with only a light breeze, though cool to cold along the beach. In the late morning we went down to the small harbour, past stinking fishing boats and drying pieces of dead octopus swarming with flies. We passed by quickly, down on to the beach and headed west. I was hoping to find the cave we played in as children, but didn't. I learned later that it's on the east side of the harbour, not the west, into the cliff above a black sand beach that has now been ruined by heavy vehicles to do with the harbour.

We made our way west over large pebbles difficult to walk on. It was good to be beside a real, swell-heaving ocean, as a gentle if cold wind blew. We came across Frank Repetto and his brother fishing. They had caught a couple of the delectable “five fingers” fish. As we chatted, Simon and his family, who'd been with us on the ship, came looking for a rockhopper penguin someone had spotted earlier. There indeed it was, just sitting on the beach, possibly ill. It allowed itself to be picked up and photographed. We then pressed on almost up to the Hill Piece, where the ocean comes right up to the cliffs

Beach debris

We returned by way of Hottentot Gulch, having first thrown a great lump of pumice into the sea to see it float. The beach is littered with debris from the sea, bits and pieces of plastic the most unpleasant, but as well a great deal of fishing flotsam such as rope and buoys. It detracted from what one would have expected to be pristine ocean and beach in an isolated spot well over 1,500 miles from the nearest inhabited land. The beaches could do with an occasional clear up, surely not too difficult to organise, even with a population of only 267.

Earlier in the morning we visited the Administrator whose house is behind the Rectory. The door was wide open, but we couldn't rouse anyone. Later, in our back garden, hanging out washing on so fine a day, we heard voices through the flax and discovered both Administrator and wife in their vegetable garden. Diana had a chat to them, largely to do with gardening. We then unravelled a salvaged piece of nylon fishing rope to make a line to hang washing under the eave of the back of the house.

Visiting old schoolmates

In the afternoon we did a little home visiting, to return bowls in which gifts of food had been left for us. We visited Agnes, behind the church, but there was no one there and so we left the bowl with a note. She'd left us crayfish mayonnaise. We then visited Peggy and Brian Rogers who'd given us a shepherd's pie. She's an exact contemporary of mine and so was in the same class at school. On the way we had met Julian Swain who had been on the ship from Cape Town with us. He told us that an old lady called Rose Glass had informed him that she used to babysit us when we were on the island. I have no memory of this at all, but we must go and see her.

All those sixty years ago Peggy had gone with Pam and my sister Sue as girls on the 25 mile trip to Nightingale island in the old canvas long boats. A bright spark she remembered my brother Peter as the one who liked to fight and was naughty. She filled us in on a variety of people and names and her husband Brian showed us two of the model longboats he makes for tourists. We had

a good laugh over a drink and she gave us a great nog of frozen fish, probably the stolid, staple called blue fish - and as well and far more welcome, three crawfish tails.

In the evening we were cold and tried to light the gas heater, but couldn't get it going. Linda Potgieter, visiting her husband, the island's South African administrative officer, had informed us that she was well used to such heaters, but even she couldn't start it. Her husband brought round a replacement and all was well.

There followed a good night's sleep in preparation for my first Sunday Eucharist on the island since 1956 .

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