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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>

## (315) “This and That” - 29 September 2019

### Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (15)

Thursday 21 September, 2012 2.45pm

Yesterday was sunny, but with a bitter and strong wind, so we decided not to walk to Pig Bite as I had proposed, but to do some visiting. First though, the Wednesday morning Eucharist. Myself, Lars, Diana, and three others. Afterwards Lars and I walked off to take home communions to the eastern side of the village, four visits in all.

#### Fisticuffs with ‘Linger’

The first was too a young woman expecting a baby and due to go back with us on the *Agulhas* for expert observation and care in Cape Town. There being a few worries about how things are developing for her. A friendly and grateful person in a spick and span house.

The next was to an old lady whose “laigs” don’t allow her to make it to church anymore. In a dark, small, Spartan but pleasingly simple house, attached to that of a son or daughter, she again was most grateful for our visit, though not hugely communicative. The third was to Helen, outside of whose house was a man weeding a flower bed. He turned out to be the delightful Frank, visiting Helen his mother all the way from Southampton and who had been with us on the *Agulhas*. A second son inside turned out to be Henry or “Linger”. I remember my brother Peter having a fierce fight with him all those years ago, rolling around on the grass, pummelling each other. The cause of the scrap is lost to memory and the fight, as with most fights looked back upon with hindsight, doubtless futile. I took his photo and his mother’s.

The last home communicant was Ivy. She and her husband were welcoming and grateful in their simple and traditional cottage home, stoic in extreme age. The husband looks after his wife lovingly and assiduously. We’ve greeted him at his gate before now, on the way up past the school to the church. We offered the sacrament to both, but the husband demurred because he can still get to church. While on our rounds we met Harold who told us that he had been to the Rectory and left us there a joint of lamb and some potatoes. A top fellow indeed.

#### The Antarctic tern

In the early afternoon, in a bitter wind of possibly forty miles an hour, we crossed Hottentot Gulch and then down well cropped grass to the beach and along it. Antarctic terns soared on the wind, crisply beautiful birds, ‘sea swallows’, known on the Island as ‘king birds’. Fairly small, with a handsome black cap, they’re grey and white with long outer tail streamers. Their bill and legs are a striking red. Mighty waves crashed to shore, more especially spectacular when we came to the harbour and sat for a while to watch them roar in. One rogue wave came up behind, wetting us with its spray right over a high wall.

Later we visited Robin and his wife Dawn. She works in the Tourist Centre where earlier we had a hot dog lunch. Robin is on the Church Council and is soon to be put in charge of all the electrical work on the island. Electricity on Tristan is subsidized and needs to be, given the cost of importing fuel. There are four generators that run on diesel, though not all at the same time.

#### Septic tanks and profuse eyebrows

Sewage on the island is dealt with by way of septic tanks, but not individual ones per house. Large concrete structures we observed in the meadows beyond the cemeteries are they, four of them. A windmill for generating electricity had been tried but, according to Robin, the wind here veers in complicated ways and the project was not researched enough. The windmill was blown down in the first twenty four hours!

We also met up with Eugene and Joy, an interesting couple who live in Cape Town and had been fellow passengers on the *Agulhas* with us. Eugene is not a Tristanite, but a South African who began his professional life as a young fisherman in the Cape. He is a great raconteur, full of amazing stories about his life. He used to be captain of the fishing vessel *MV Edinburgh* and Joy lived on board with him for ten years. He has splendidly profuse eyebrows.

## (314) “This and That” - 22 September 2019

### Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (14)

**Tuesday 18 September, 2012 8.42am**

It is not straightforward getting to and from Tristan da Cunha. Ships are infrequent, short of passenger accommodation and to disembark is entirely weather dependent.

In days gone by it was even more difficult. In 1953 my family hitched a ride, at no cost, on a Royal Navy Frigate. In 1956 we left on a BP tanker, again at no cost. The clergy were held in higher regard then than now.

We were told by Harold on our visit today that after the islanders' return to Tristan from the volcano imposed exile in England, one of their vicars, desirous of a trip back to the UK because his wife needed to return for health reasons, persuaded twenty islanders to go with him. He assured them that he had UK accommodation available for them all. In fact hadn't. His motive for this duplicity was the need for sufficient numbers wishing to leave to legitimise the diversion of a ship to take them!

Harold told us too how good a job Lars and the lay readers were doing, but expressed sadness that no priest could be found for the Island. There has been none for three years. He reckoned the English based Missionary Society that sent my father to Tristan would be better at finding one than Cape Town Diocese, of which the island is a part. (Since our departure from this visit, however, a priest has been appointed from South Africa. He stayed for three years. The island is now once more without one).

I asked Harold about the daisies I remember as being everywhere in the fifties, suspecting that rampant Kikuyu grass has done away with them. He assured me that they are still widespread during summer. We both find the island accent more musical, and pleasing than the South African.

We visited the Tourist Centre in the morning and bought two T-shirts for granddaughters Susan and Meg and a knitted penguin for Hetty. Eric from the fisheries rang up to offer us half a dozen eggs, which we gratefully accepted.

**Wednesday 19 September, 2012 6.10am**

I awoke early and to spare myself the early morning sluggard's morbid mental rambles, got up immediately to get on with things. The first time since being here. It is dark, but a creaking roof and souging flax indicate a windy day to come. On opening the top half of the house's back door, I detected moisture on the wind, not enough to be heard on the roof, but the ground is soggy. Good late winter Tristan weather once more.

Yesterday we rushed out in the wet to see the fishing vessel *MV Edinburgh* arrive. There was no horizon, a misty sea blurred into the sky and the *Edinburgh*, beings white was barely discernible. We were aware of its imminence only because we'd heard on the way back from Matins that it was expected. From the study desk Diana first noticed its faint, ghostly shape. We took an ineffective photo or two. Later we observed a small shadow coming away from it and heading for shore. We ventured out to see so small a boat land in inclement weather, while the *MV Edinburgh* steamed off east. The harbour offers only limited protection from wild weather, but we were too late to witness the small boat's entrance, though we did see it craned on to the wharf. No boat can be left afloat in the harbour. The entrance is too close to the wild ocean. Big waves play havoc with anything afloat. I had neglected to don my over-trousers and so got decidedly wet from wind-driven rain.

**Thursday 21 September, 2012 2.45pm**

We have been lying on a mattress outside in the front garden of the Rectory, under the wall and hydrangeas, out of sight from the road. It is the first relatively still, sunny day we have had since our arrival. At about six or half past this morning I heard the gong ringing insistently, signalling a fishing day. Again, the first since the day we arrived.

There appear to be nine fishing boats, each with a crew of two. However, all nine boats

have two crews and each crew fishes alternately. We hope to watch them come in and unload their catch and then go up to the factory to see the initial processing of cray fish that are exported frozen all over the world.

### **(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 .

**Home**