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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (December 2019)



The distant village from the Hill Piece

*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 **December 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>

This and That” - 29 December 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (28)

Wed 3 October, 2012 continued

At our dinner with Kobus and Linda we got on to the problem of litter and rubbish. Recycling is taken seriously on the island. The possibility of compressing aluminium and tin cans to ship back to South Africa has been explored, but is economically unfeasible. Glass bottles are broken, ground and added to concrete. Waste is now dumped according to type, with an eye on possible future salvage. Cars have to be sunk out at sea, few if any are imported new and contend with a salty atmosphere.

Rocks crystals and a Buddhist

That the island is largely self-sufficient is remarkable. Locals are wary of expatriates with extravagant plans for innovation and change. Many hair-brained schemes have come to nought over the years. New ideas and ways of doing things have to be introduced cautiously to allow them to be “owned” by the Islanders.

Linda is a believer in rocks, crystals and their so-called mystic properties. Kobus is a Buddhist. They love fresh air and all their doors were open. It was cold. While we were present her maid called from Cape Town to report on the welfare of the cats, the maid’s name: “Sweetness”.

I have returned from my last Eucharist. Afterwards I went to see Maria and anoint her. She will be travelling on the Agulhas with us to Cape Town as a precaution, there being a few little worries about her imminent baby.

Thur 4 October, 2012 6.30am

Yesterday, as I was doing my priestly duties about the village, a team of ten climbed the Base mountain. Had they offered me the trip I would have forsaken duty and gone. As it was I was able to achieve things that otherwise I would have been unable to if today, as I hope, we at last make it to Nightingale island, our very last chance.

The Agulhas is now due to leave on Friday evening, which means today is our last full day on the Island. Diana is relieved to have written and posted all the cards we’ve purchased. They have a 25 pence Tristan stamp on them. Does this mean they travel surface mail from Cape Town on? Is there such a thing as surface mail these days?

In the afternoon we went to bless the new house of Geraldine and Paul. It is behind the supermarket on what used to be a quadrangle of land with a flag post in its centre and called “the Quarterdeck”. In my childhood on the island it was used for parades and ceremonial occasions. Their new house is a fine one with three bedrooms and a spacious, open-plan living area and kitchen. There are no eaves or veranda. Verandas are absent from most island houses. They hope to move in some time next week.

Yellow nosed albatross

After this we wrapped up little gifts and took them, with the PCC minutes, to all our Councillors. We also dropped off a little gift for each of the three servers. We managed all of this in the afternoon before six, when there was a school performance of songs and dances from the young pupils, and a fashion parade from the older ones.

The clothes modelled were made of recycled material by the children themselves. A new trainee islander teacher called Poppy inspired this. The Administrator in his words of appreciation applauded their promotion of recycling, it being a priority of the Island Administration. There was also a dance routine from the older children.

The hall was packed with almost the whole island population of 270 present. I heard that the trip up the Base Mountain was stunningly beautiful and that a good number of yellow-nosed albatrosses sitting on their nests had been encountered. If we don’t get to Nightingale today we

will take our sandwiches and head for Runaway beach. This is the rather fine looking one we gazed down to from the potato patches.

Diana heard the gong for a fishing day sound this morning, well before half past five. I didn't hear it and wonder therefore if she dreamt it, but there's a lot of activity, the sea is calm and so she is probably right. It is rare that I don't wake up for anything unusual.

This and That" - 22 December 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (27)

Wed 3 October, 2012 continued

We met the new doctors, a man and wife team, both recently retired and from Dundee. They arrived on the *Baltic Trader*, upon which passenger movement had been very restricted. Unlike on the *Agulhas* where we were welcome almost everywhere. They enjoyed the trip, rough though it was. Pam, the wife, had met Diana about the island earlier and on the strength of this popped in to see us to get a bit of a low down on the place. A friendly person, well familiar with Invergowrie, next door to Dundee, where I did a happy parish swap for three months in 2000.

A pink wedding dress

Yesterday afternoon I went visiting on my own, first to Daphne and Ernest. Daphne had done housework for us when I was a child on the island in the fifties. Ernest is now the island's oldest man at 86. I then called on James Green, a school contemporary from all those years ago. During that time he fell off the cliff and all but broke his back. He now has Parkinson's disease, but appears well and was pleased to see me. Now a widower he has six children. He offered me a beer but I declined, regretfully, it being too early. I then met Harold on the road who invited me in for a chat with him and Amy. It was his birthday and as I was leaving Geoffroy, the young Frenchman called to wish him well. He's spent a year on the island and departs with us when the *Agulhas* leaves. He's been monitoring seismic and possibly even atomic activity in this remote part of the world and his replacement is another young Frenchman.

Harold is one of wisest of elderly islanders, the son of my parents best island friends when we were here. He suggested that I return to the island as padre. My response was non committal. Our adventurous side would love to, but there is no deep sense of it being at all the right thing to do. I suspect we would find it stultifying at our time of life. A six month stint, like the two doctors, might be rewarding though.

I then visited Monica whose wedding my father had taken and of which we have several photos. She is now a lovely and merry, elderly woman whom I'd already met at church. I learned that she is the mother of Conrad the policeman. She said that her wedding dress was brought out to the Island by the Captain of the *Tristania* and was pink in colour. I gave both her and James a blessing as I left.

Cats forbidden

In the evening we went to Kobus and Linda's for dinner. He's the Island's CEO under the Administrator. Linda, his kindly wife, we became friendly with on the ship. She lives in Cape Town as a lawyer, unwilling to abandon her beloved cats. Cats are forbidden on Tristan, for obvious reasons. It was an interesting evening with a splendid spread of food and conversation didn't flag. We interrogated Kobus about the island and without being indiscreet he was most informative. The great administrative challenge is to ensure that the island is viable, which it nearly is. The only ongoing costs to Britain are the salaries of the doctor, Kobus himself, the Administrator, Education Adviser and perhaps one or two others. Except for occasional large infrastructure costs, the aim is for the Island to pay its own way.

The pension scheme is a drain on finances because contributions don't balance pay outs. He reaffirmed that the average wage is close to a modest £200 a month, and that the only ones who make much more are the fishermen.

Island ennui

He himself is very happy on Tristan and admires the islanders enormously. He suspects boredom to be the chief hindrance to island wellbeing. In days gone by there were organisations like scouts and guides, and sport and sports days, all of which are now gone. Into the void has seeped a generalised and sometimes rather more focussed sense of ennui. Leadership is difficult in such a close knit and interrelated community. Diana asked him if there are any role models for boys, most of the top administrative jobs being in the hands of women. Apparently not.

This and That” - 15 December 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (26)

Mon 1 October, 2012 continued

I've just returned from a trip up to the top of Hill Piece with Jim Kerr (an expatriate educational consultant), Simon his son, Emily his partner, Bethany, and Chloe a friend of Bethany's. The Hill Piece is a green hill, stepped all the way up and round by generations of grazing sheep and cattle. It is a "Piece" of hill because the sea is gradually eroding it away. On the seaward side there is a precipitous livid ochre and red-brown cliff falling down to a wild sea. From the summit, stunning views and an icy wind.

Jim told me that during an earlier stint on the island as a teacher he would take kids regularly up the Base mountain from behind the Settlement, and that in those days he would be up the mountain three or four times a week. He must have been fit. They had a project counting and ringing albatrosses nesting there. There are a variety of possible routes up the two thousand feet, but until well familiar with them a guide is advisable.

Attempting to understand island men

We are on a list to go to Nightingale Island tomorrow, but it depends on the weather and there was a strong, cold wind on top of Hill Piece. At the vicarage it's been still all day. The vagaries of that unpredictable island lee.

On the way back I noticed the pontoon heading in a strange direction on its way back from the Baltic Trader. I went down to the harbour to see what was happening. Groups of island men standing idly around evince a lack of willingness to communicate sufficient to tempt me not to bother. It's not animosity, but there is a barrier of some sort. Perhaps it's a macho solidarity that resists anything not artisan, or a mild xenophobia, or simply a lack of social grace. At dances many of the men hang about on their own outside, and at parties in houses, as often as not, they disappear to a room on their own. However, whenever I've made a determined effort they've been friendly and communicative. It turns out that the pontoon was picking up a few cray fish pots dropped on the way out to the ship.

A visit to my alma mater

The visit to my old school, St Mary's, Tristan da Cunha, to take the assembly was fun. Diana had printed the Twelve Disciples' names on pieces of paper for me, and so I called individual children up to hold them and talked about each disciple as I did so. The actual school building is not the one I attended, nor is it in the same place, so there was little sense of déjà vu. It is a far more imaginative building than the one I experienced. In its centre there's a glassed-in cloister around a quadrangle of lawn. Most pleasing and appropriate for wild weather. It gives an impression of openness without any of the disadvantages. It was odd to see a class room with desks for just two students. There are thirty five children aged from five to fifteen. Each class is made up of two years' worth of pupils. This means there are some really tiny classes.

In Assemblies they use a BBC book of songs with an accompanying pair of CDs. These might well be worth ordering for our Family Service in Shepparton. (This I have since done. It's provides some splendid songs and descants for the 8.30 Eucharist, let alone the 10.30am family service)

Demonic forces

I've printed an order of service for a House Blessing to be done this afternoon. The external drive I brought with me, containing all my computed resources for this sort of thing, has malfunctioned and so I had to troll a slow internet to help put together something suitable. I used as a basis a not unpleasing document that, while being Anglican in origin, did nonetheless need exorcising of its rather too robust concern with cleansing dwellings of "demonic forces"!

Tue 2 October, 2012

It is a lovely morning here in the village, though over in the west, out of the direct lee, white horses are in evidence and so there is no likelihood of a trip to Nightingale Island. The *Baltic Trader* is now "backloading". Crates are going back to the ship as well as the frozen crawfish. It should sail tomorrow.

"This and That" - 8 December 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (25)

Sunday 30 September 2012 11.18am continued

The supply ship, the *Baltic Trader*, is here. It's a cargo ship leased to the Fishing Company, apparently with a Russian crew not noted for easy cooperation with locals and so takes longer to unload than does the *Edinburgh*. It arrived during the night. When our berths on the *Agulhas* were summarily taken from us, we booked on the *Baltic Trader*. How glad we are that space on the *Agulhas* was found for us in the end, because the *Baltic Trader* on this voyage took ten days from Cape Town, so fierce was the weather. The vessel at times made only one knot and had to head north for several days to cope with too violent a swell. It would have meant a mere six days and no Sundays on the island instead of three weeks.

Rattling false teeth

After church we went to watch a pontoon from the ship offloaded. Items lifted by crane swung around a fair bit, even in the relative calm of the small harbour. No helicopter for passengers on this ship. They were offloaded by crane in a small, swinging, covered cubicle. Scary or exhilarating depending on your temperament. If the cubicle swung wildly enough to hit the side of the ship it would rattle false teeth. We are told that given the slowness of the crew and the amount to be unloaded it will take four or five days for the job to be done. There are a couple of cars to be offloaded, one apparently for the Administrator. We saw no evidence of this. He should be setting an example and not bothering with a car at all on so small an island. The most dangerous load was a pile of reinforcing mesh, the bottom sheet of which became detached, swinging nastily.

Socialism in microcosm

The island appears to have a leisurely work ethic, something to be proud of not ashamed. Every weekend seems a sort of long weekend. The single shop closes at 2.30pm on Fridays, as does everything else, or pretty well so. A sociologist or social anthropologist might well find the place worthy of a thesis. In some ways it appears a benignly functioning socialist state in microcosm. There's much commendable and attractive about this, such as mutual support, especially for the sick and elderly and strict egalitarianism in matters such as common ownership of land. Each family is allowed two cows and every individual two sheep. There's a downside too. Local leadership is difficult to find if it is likely to involve the censure or penalising of islanders, all of whom are related to each other in some way. Wages, by world standards, are modest and there are few folk, if any, who earn really substantial ones. To be a crayfish catcher augments a daytime job's salary healthily for the fifty or so days a year that are fishing days. However, if you are a Head of Department you are not allowed days off to fish and so many of the best men prefer to be number two to number one.

A last sermon

We were light in numbers at church this morning. Presumably because the *Baltic Trader*

is here and requires all sorts of primary and secondary labour and also possibly because folk are required to deal with the crayfish caught yesterday. The catch was a better one than the last time, four and a half tons instead of three, the females are now being caught as well. The Administrator's wife was at church, as too the expatriate Educational Adviser and wife.

My sermon was a partly autobiographical narrative based around the old man's comment on his need to return to Tristan, after the volcano induced exile, because in England he could "no longer hear the voice of God". For the first time I felt folk were with me as I preached. Later, on the way to the harbour, I got my first direct comment from an islander in her thirties: "that was a nice sermon you gave Father". It was my last on the island. I have still to compose an appropriate little service for the youngster ill in England and also a School Assembly for tomorrow.

I intend making fishcakes tonight. There's a great nog of unidentified fish defrosting as I write.

"This and That" - 1 December 2019

Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (24)

Friday 28 September, 3.30pm 2012 continued

When a calm stillness bathes the settlement area and the two flags in front of the Prince Phillip Hall hang limp, it can be very different out to the east and west. Go too far in either direction and there could well be grey, misty rain and strong wind, while well away, out at sea the waves are wind-whipped and white-capped. I speculate that the island's sheltered lee forms a sort of vacuum, like a boat's sail, which, in the case of a boat is what propels or rather pulls it along. Here on Tristan the lee of so mighty an obstruction as a 6,760 foot mountain appears to pull in the wind round either side of what is an actual and fairly intense lee.

Casting a pall over coffins

In the evening we discovered in the fridge what we thought was a joint of lamb. It turned out to be beef. Pieces of cartilaginous "hamstring" of all things. No roast lamb and mint sauce then. I boiled it all up to turn into a curry for tomorrow. Today, tinned-sausage-toad-in-the-hole.

Earlier we visited Judy, where I dandled her little grandchild. A lovely word dandle. Judy is my mother's godchild and she brought out to show us a bible inscribed in my mother's handwriting: "To Judy on her first birthday from her godmother, D.M.S. Neaum, 16 January 1954"

I've done a sermon of sorts, and now have to prepare a little prayer service for a young girl grievously ill in England. The weather has brightened up and Diana is at the church with other seamstresses repairing the funeral pall which has deteriorated with age. We don't use a pall in St John's. I like them. They discourage the wastefulness of excessively grand and expensive coffins

Saturday 29 September 2012 5.35pm

We still hope to be able to make the 25 mile trip to nearby Nightingale Island before we leave. Those who had made a private arrangement to go yesterday were thwarted. Their boat conked a little way out to sea. They had to hang around for an hour or two in a gentle swell awaiting rescue.

At a quarter to six today we awoke to the sound of the fishing-day gong. A still morning and calm sea, though a covering of high cloud thwarted the sun. It has now grown misty with a light rain and the horizon's blurred itself out of existence. We strolled down to what remains of Garden Gate beach now that the small harbour has swallowed much of it up. Gazing into the rock pools I caught sight of two of the sort of small fish we used to catch as boys. The pools have lost much of their boyhood invested magic and mystery, nor was the tide far enough out to do them justice.

Frenzied dancing

Yesterday's party was a final farewell from the Island to Bob the Dental Technician who has been coming to Tristan for years, but is now to retire. He appears to be well loved and respected. He gave a speech in so broad a Scots accent that I could catch only one word in three.

The party was also in honour of the sixty fifth birthday of a near contemporary of mine, Barbara, who must have been at school with me all those years ago, another friendly and lovely person. The visiting Dentist's little girl's third birthday was also acknowledged to her great excitement.

We stayed on a while to indulge in some fairly frenetic dancing. It was community dancing in that the elderly danced as much if not more than anyone, and little kids had a go as well. I danced mostly with Diana, but once with an island lass who asked me, and once with Carlene. We left at about half ten, me wringing with sweat for it was as hot as Hades inside the hall and I'd been kicking up my heels in a wild, terpsichorean frenzy.

Tristan in 1910, 1953 and 2012

Once home we finished reading aloud K. Barrow's "Three Years on Tristan da Cunha", a daily diary published in 1910 by the wife of the Island's priest. Closer in time to our three and a half years on the island in the fifties than to this 2012 trip of Diana and myself. It's a fascinating book. How isolated and primitive things were. It can be downloaded free as an e-book from the "Gutenberg Project".

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