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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (August 2020)



Harebells

*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 **August 2020** 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>

(363) “This and That” - 30 August 2020

Outside in the sunshine at the Vicarage, eating homemade bread and Stilton cheese for lunch is bliss.

The dread virus of twenty years ago

The laughing rather than weeping willow tree we planted in a wet patch of lawn, six years ago, is now about 29 feet high. On Monday, in a rising wind, its shimmering, glistening, swaying, silver-green foliage formed a pleasing contrast to late summer’s roaring, dark green, oak trees. In the foreground hundreds of purple verbena heads gracefully bowed and nodded as the last of the wild poppies, now blanched orange, died. The ancient apple tree in the lawn’s centre dropped plump Bramleys to remind us how heavy it is with fruit.

As we ate lunch in that rising wind we read *Boldre’s Millenium Year as Seen from the Bridge*, lent to us by Carole Morris. A short article about the busyness of Christmas in 1999 resonated strangely: “.....*the dreaded virus meant that one of the Nine Lessons and Carol services had five replacement readers, the last one notified ten minutes before the service started...*” Ordinary flu we presumed.

In 1999 I was Rector of Wodonga, on the river Murray, in Victoria, Australia. A pleasing parish. At present, in 2020, the town and all of Victoria is under lockdown. There was a great viral scare 20 years ago too. It threatened computers not human beings, the millennial computer bug, and it turned out to be almost harmless. Estimates of its cost to the world range from \$200 to \$600 billion.

Reductionism, bah!

Daily life is brightened by flashes of insight, stabs of joy, tiny epiphanies. A poem by Emily Dickinson provided just such a moment last week. It bedazzled me with delight.

Split the Lark—and you’ll find the Music

Split the Lark—and you’ll find the Music—

Bulb after Bulb, in Silver rolled--

Scantly dealt to the Summer Morning

Saved for your Ear when Lutes be old.

Loose the Flood—you shall find it patent—

Gush after Gush, reserved for you—

Scarlet Experiment! Sceptic Thomas!

Now, do you doubt that your Bird was true?

Not an easy poem, it does make one obvious and beautiful point in a flash. There are truths, beauties and entities beyond the reach of empirical observation and proofs. The beautiful, true and significant are usually immeasurably greater than the sum of their parts. Down with reductionism. To reduce Mona Lisa to an analysis of the pigments of paint on her canvas, misses beauty and truth beyond telling. To reduce our world, human consciousness, love and beauty to quarks, baryons and mesons likewise. Up with theism.

Dissipating doom and gloom

How many people these days watch the news assiduously. I do not. It is too doom-laden. My daily skim through the website of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation does sometimes lift my spirits, though.

Wheat, the largest crop grown in Australia, is apparently under threat from climate change. Rainfall in its main growing regions is shifting from autumn and spring into more summer rain, essentially wasted moisture for winter crops. In the southern parts of Western Australia there has been a 20 per cent drop in May to July rainfall. Gloomy news indeed, but not entirely. Doom and gloom mongers rarely take sufficient account of human adaptability and ingenuity.

A new genetic trait in wheat is being tested. It enables wheat plants to grow a longer coleoptile (the first shoot that comes out of the wheat seed when it germinates, making its way to the surface to become the first leaf). This longer coleoptile will allow farmers to plant seeds much deeper in the soil. A great advantage when summer rain moisture is far deeper in the soil than the normal four centimetres depth at which the grain is conventionally planted. If all goes well farmers will be able to plant seeds way down into summer rain moisture for immediate germination, rather than wait for the first autumn rain. Doom dissipates!

(362) “This and That” - 23 August 2020

Few things we say are irrefutable. Especially in sermons. When I was newly ordained, a senior and learned priest said to me, “much as I appreciate your sermons, Andrew, I always want to say at the end: ‘Yes, yes, but...’”

Sermon put downs

It wasn't a put-down. He was right. To hold attention sermons need to be, incisive and concise. There's little time for nuance or alternative and opposing points of view. No room for qualifications, footnotes, acknowledgements, caveats, provisos and parentheses.

Now that we are recording services at St John's I occasionally find myself actually listening to myself preaching. I do so ruefully, wanting to say at the end: ‘Yes, yes, but]...’ Sermons aren't worthy of put downs. A mere yawn or glance at a wrist watch says all that's necessary.

Versifying is another matter. After the successful recitation of a long-laboured over piece of verse, with appreciative applause still tickling the ears, just now and then, an envious fellow versifier sidles up to dangle the word doggerel from words of faint praise.

An unappreciative and prosaic bishop tried this on me once. I resorted to verse in response. He was the sort who gathered around him lackeys and boot-lickers, rather than people of real talent (like myself!!). Politicians are tempted to do the same. Only the best resist.

On a Bishop

He gathers round him men so dim
that even someone dull like him
appears a beacon almost bright
for shining from so dull a light.

In writing and publishing this as widely as possible I made sure, to appear balanced in my views, to publish a companion quatrain:

On Another Bishop

He gathers round him men so bright
he shines in their reflected light
Their sparks fly out to him on loan
Their wit and brains ignite his own.

In small dioceses you get to know your bishop well. Until coming to Boldre I had worked under and with eight. Only with two did I most emphatically not click. As much my fault as theirs.

Sunday in Shepparton

I am on holiday for a few days. So for want of inspiration here's a random, extract from my Australian journal.

Monday 15 May 2006 ... A busy Sunday yesterday. Because I didn't have to go out to Dookie I sat in the pew for the 8.30 Eucharist. A salutary experience. A pretty ordinary service. Jemima's sermon was no disgrace, but she's not a biter of bullets, too platitudinous. Not without merit though, nor too long. I then celebrated the 10.30 Eucharist with Children's Church. Both the Philips and the Jones boys misbehaved, but it went reasonably well nonetheless. Then a baptism at which I met an I.T. man from Sydney, his wife a godparent, and he a Cambridge physical science graduate - we had an interesting talk about religion. It began with me saying “You can't be a believer then?” and he replying, “I wouldn't say that...” A delightful couple and the service went well.

Grave blessings, baptisms and bereavement

Then on to a Nedelkovski grave blessing at which I stayed on afterwards for olives, pastries and potent, peach-flavoured rakia. I had an interesting chat about Macedonian Orthodoxy with a convert by marriage from Catholicism. She said faith meant more to her as an Orthodox Christian, stressing the loveliness of house shrines and domestic piety. Old George was very friendly. He's off to Macedonian for four months with Stan in a few days time. I got back in time for a Macedonian baptism interview. Nice Petrovski there from Geelong. Then off to see the suicide's husband. I found him, his two daughters and mother. We had a good talk. They're still devastated, but I might have done a little good. Certainly the warmth of greeting and a kiss from the girls indicates that my ministrations have been appreciated. Back for evening prayer and a chicken dinner.

(361) “This and That” - 16 August 2020

“Will we meet a tokoloshe” I said, as we set out on one of our early morning walks last week.

The Tokoloshe

What prompted that? There’s a trigger for everything we think and say. Yet for the sudden irruption to mind of tokoloshes there seemed none. A case of *Deus ex machina* then. The word came from over, beyond and outside the relentless chain of cause and effect. A relief to a theist.

The tokoloshe is a malevolent, goblin-like, folkloric Southern African figure. It is thought to have originated as an answer to the inexplicable night-time deaths of Africans sleeping in their rondavels around wood fires on grass mats during cold, high-veld winters.

In reality the culprit was the fire. It replaced oxygen with noxious, heavier than air carbon monoxide. Anyone sleeping on the ground could succumb to the curse of the tokoloshe. Sleepers on beds or benches not.

Tokoloshes are said to be hairy and only about hip-high. As well as randomly stealing lives in the night they are noted for biting off sleeping people's toes.

Welsh rabbits and Palestine soup

The reference books that used to weigh down our shelves are now redundant. The internet has replaced all the thesauruses, dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias, commentaries, lectionaries and almanacks. I keep a few, for old times sake, but rarely refer to them.

I do still dip into two particular favourites though: *Fowler’s Dictionary of Modern English Usage* and *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Fowler, by the way, was an atheist, Brewer a clergyman. Both are fascinating..

Fowler (1858-1933) is refreshing for a common sense approach to the English language: **Split Infinitive:** *The English-speaking world may be divided into (1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is; (2) those who do not know, but care very much; (3) those who know and condemn; (4) those who know and approve; and (5) those who know and distinguish. The first, those who neither know nor care, are the vast majority, and are a happy folk, to be envied by the minority classes. Welsh Rarebit: Welsh rabbit is amusing and right. Welsh rarebit is stupid and wrong.*

Brewer (1810-1897) is an utter delight to dip into for his idiosyncrasy, biases and for the fascinating but interesting irrelevance of some entries. **Palestine Soup:** *Soup made of Jerusalem artichokes. This is a good example of blunder begetting blunder. Jerusalem artichoke is a corruption of the Italian Girasole articiocco — i.e. the “sunflower artichoke.” From girasole we make Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem artichokes we make Palestine soup. Pagan: properly means “belonging to a village” (Latin, pagus). The Christian Church fixed itself first in cities, the centres of intelligence. Long after it had been established in towns, idolatrous practices continued to be observed in rural districts and villages, so pagan and villager came to mean the same thing.*

Mbuya Nehanda maternity hospital

In the mid nineteen seventies I was a curate at the Cathedral of St Mary and All Saints in Salisbury, Rhodesia. I was also chaplain to the Lady Chancellor maternity hospital. It was named after the wife of the first British Governor of Southern Rhodesia, Sir John Chancellor. It is now named Mbuya Nehanda maternity hospital after a spirit medium of the Shona people. She had fomented resistance to the conquest of Mashonaland. The British hanged her for ordering the decapitation of native commissioner Henry Pollard and so she became a martyr.

As chaplain I was sometimes called upon to baptize premature babies in incubators. In protective gear I used a small dropper to administer the symbolic water. The nurses were aware that the Church teaches that in extremis any Christian, not just a priest, can perform a baptism. They usually preferred to call me in.

In St John’s last Sunday we held the first post-Covid baptism. In reflecting on how best to do this I remembered those long gone days and decided that a pandemic is in extremis. So with me directing

proceedings, saying the words and providing water and the oil of chrism, little Cordelia Brushwood was baptized by Mum and Dad. One better than me. I was baptized by my priest Dad alone.

(360) “This and That” - 9 August 2020

A Derbyshire childhood enlivened my father’s sermons, coruscated his conversation and helped ensure that neither he nor my mother ended their days in an old age home.

They’re takin me Joe

An encounter, as a small boy, with a man carrying his old father piggy-back down the street of his hometown, was one of my father’s savoured reminiscences. The old man shouted out: “They’re takin’ me Joe, they’re takin’ me!” When asked where, he replied in anguish “Ter t’wukkus.” “Ter t’wukkus.” (To the work house).

As my parents grew old, if ever care-homes were mentioned in their company, they would say with mock ruefulness: “They’re takin’ me Joe, they’re takin’ me!”. Little wonder that my mother died in my father’s care. My father in my wife’s and mine.

Mumpers’ Inn

All this came to mind in our much enjoyed poem a day read through the Collected Poems of Charles Causley. The verse that sparked the memory, comes from a poem titled “A Short Life of Nevil Northy Burnard”

*.....At last, the dragged November sun on high,
Burnard lay in a mumpers’ inn to die.
At Redruth Workhouse, with the stripped insane,
Banged on death’s door and did not bang in vain;
Rocked in a gig to sleep in pauper’s clay
Where three more warmed his side till judgement day.*

“Mumpers inn” sounds like yet another of those intriguing Causley images, but it’s one altogether appropriate. The word “mumper” means beggar, so a Work House would be the only hostelry available for mumpers.

Nevil Northey Burnard (1818-1878), was a naturally gifted Cornish sculptor who’s talent became evident at a very early age. He grew to be much celebrated and in high demand, but the death of his much loved daughter tore him to pieces. He took to drink, lost direction in life, his wife and commissions and returned to Cornwall as a tramp.

*Packing only his heart, a half hewn stone,
He left house, clothes, goods, blundered off alone:
London to Cornwall and the spinning moor,
Slept in stacks, hedges, barns, retraced the spoor
Of innocence, through the lost shallows walked,
Of his dead child, they say, forever talked.*

It’s a sad story, arrestingly told by Causley and all the better for bringing my raconteur father to mind.

The wedding

Our small, family wedding at All Saints Fulham was lovely. As too, I hear, was the one held in St John’s on the same day. Necessity made into a virtue. Weddings stripped down to little more than their essence, undiluted by detail, falderol, expense and extravagance, needn’t spoil everything. The momentousness of what is going on is all the more easily discerned and taken to heart. If modest weddings become fashionable, then the widespread profiteering of the wedding ‘industry’ could well be curbed.

The day for us began at 8.30am. We took a largely untrafficked A31 into a largely untrafficked A3, zipped along the Hogsback past Guilford to Surbiton. There we had coffee and cake with the lovely Anne Barker. In her garden ten years ago, among many other kindnesses, she hosted the wedding reception of Diana and myself.

After a change of clothes and a sprucing, off to Fulham. Again along largely untrafficked roads, except for the last half mile to Putney Bridge. A shady parking space directly opposite the church gate allayed our remaining, minor forebodings. All was well. All was going to be well.

A bring your own picnic in the garden next to the church at 2.30pm began proceedings. The wedding itself was at 4.00pm, followed by a glass or two of fizz with snacks and great conversation, this time in the rose garden. All sweetly uncomplicated, relaxed and smooth-flowing. Demanding only of the weather, which gave of its best.

The ceremony itself dispensed with a best man and bridesmaids. J S Bach and a fine organist provided all the music and the Officiant was gloriously apparelled in the needlework of the lovely bride's mother. Splendid.

(359) "This and That" - 2 August 2020

Few of us are strangers to gloomy times. Back in the fondly remembered sixties, it wasn't the NHS that was in the front line, it was manicurists. They were all but overwhelmed repairing fingernails bitten to the quick during the Cuban missile crisis.

Gloomy times

During the seventies, I was an assistant priest at the Cathedral of St Mary and All Saints in Salisbury, Rhodesia. A bad old order was giving way to an even worse new one. Violence and death stalked the land. Gloomy times indeed. My journal for 15 May 1977 reads:

Yesterday I went off as co-driver to the Bishop all the way to the very beautiful but dangerous Honde Valley. Apprehensively. All too aware of ambushes and landmines (sweet potatoes the Africans call them). We left at 7.00am from Bishop's Mount with Sister Alice. It was a good and lovely drive on a clear, warm day. We stopped off at various places to drop pamphlets in Shona to advise communicants of what to do if they couldn't make their communion because of terrorists.....

We travelled right along the lovely Honde Valley, twelve miles beyond Ruda, a big military base, to one of the new defensive "keeps" being set up. It seemed a primitive affair. A dug-in fortification or "keep" just inside the gate of a large fenced area of bushland. Except for a watch tower or two there seemed little else. All the villages around had had their houses stripped of thatch which had been brought in to the fenced area for eventual self-built houses. Everyone was camping in the open, there seemed to be no latrines. Not a reassuring visit.....

We showed them how to put up a modest marquee we were donating. The old bishop didn't have a clue. After sharing our tea, oranges, sandwiches and other victuals with Sister Alice's family, we headed back, stopping to drop leaflets for Fr Gwatido. He, we have since learned, has been forced to flee.....

Things got worse and worse. In my first parish after leaving the Cathedral we travelled in armed convoys to take services in one of our district churches. Curfews were imposed on our own town. While many folk were killed, most survived and accommodated themselves to new ways of doing things and still living life to the full. As we do today.

Hence loathèd melancholy

Handel's oratorio *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, is based on two poems by Milton, with additions. It begins with a solemn, deliberate tenor voice declaring: *hence loathèd melancholy.....* I couldn't agree more, and for me it is music above all else that sends gloom packing.

L'Allegro... so, so beautiful, contains one of the happiest little airs and choruses in all music. Sung by the Kings Consort it trembles my timbers with unutterable delight:

Tenor: *Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful jollity,
Quips and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods, and becks, and wreathèd smiles
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek,
Sport, that wrinkled care derides,
And laughter, holding both his sides.*

Chorus: *Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee
Jest, and youthful jollity;
Sport, that wrinkled care derides,
And laughter, holding both his sides.*

There are pieces of music so lovely you never forget your introduction to them. Whenever I hear Purcell's duet for two counter tenors "*Sound the Trumpet*" I recall the glance of unutterable joy tossed my way by my father when we heard it for the first time. The little piece above, as sung by the King's Consort, I first listened to with my daughter Rachel. Our delight at the sopranos' trembling laughter in the chorus set us alight. She comes to mind whenever I listen to it.

The last aria in *L'Allegro...*: "*As steals the morn upon the night*", is one of the most sublime of all duets. The solo oboe and bassoon parts are as moving and beautiful as the voices. There is an exquisite YouTube, original instruments, recording of this aria by Amanda Forsythe and Thomas Cooley: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVCtCxnJyKY>

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