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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (April 2021)



Rhododendron - Vicarage Garden

*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 **April 2021** 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>

(397) “This and That” - 25 April 2021

Worse than the increasing decrepitude and ill health associated with growing old, is the prospect of becoming a grumpy old man. Another Victor Meldrew drivelling on about things going to pot and how glorious they used to be in our youth. *Laudator temporis acti* (a praiser of times past).

The poet, John Heath Stubbs gets it right, as good poets so often do.

A Few Strokes on the Sand,

Old men, as they grow older, grow the more garrulous,
Drivelling temporis acti into their beards,
Argumentative, theoretical, diffuse.

With the poet, not so. One learns
To be spare of words; to make cold thrusts
Into the frosty air that comes.

“The final message – a few strokes on the sand;
A bird’s footprints running to take off
Into the adverse wind.”

That’s the way to go. As was the Duke of Edinburgh’s fine funeral. No blah blah. No panegyric eulogies or pompous preaching. That was left to the hypocritical press who so delight in pulling down, finger-pointing and excoriating, and yet are prone to periodic and compensatory fits of excessive sentimentality.

No qualms about plastic surgery

It was another poem, though, that last week brought grumpy old men to mind. One that set me thinking about how different the world is now from the one in which I grew up, and how what seemed acceptable and good back then, is now no longer. The poet is A. E. Stallings:

How the Demons Were Assimilated and Became Productive Citizens

The demons were more beautiful than the angels.
They had no qualms about plastic surgery.
They took to wearing black: didn't show dirt
In the city like Innocence, which anyway
Couldn't be worn between Labour Day and Easter.
They tired of grudging angels their gilded hair
And had theirs done. Their complexions were so pale
The blond looked natural, only more so.
They shrunk their wings into fashionable tattoos
So cashmere suits draped better from their shoulders.
Elocution lessons turned hisses to lisps.

The demons converted. They became Episcopalian,
Name-dropped high-ups in the Company of Heaven.
As for Evil, it became too much trouble:
The demons started to shirk the menial jobs
Which like good deeds, took one among the poor,
And bruised the manicure of rose-petal nails.
They preferred to stand by and watch Evil happen,
Or offended by odours and noise, even turned away.

They had become so beautiful, even the angels
(Who never looked in mirrors to comb their hair,

Afraid to be called vain, and never bought clothes
Since the old ones didn't wear out, just got shabby)
Left the lovely demons to languish, dropping all charges
On the spoiled creatures. They were that good.

Replete with irony, it's a clever poem to do with evil masquerading as good, as too easily it does. Much of what was bad in my generation masqueraded so successfully as good, we were all convinced. Those who remain convinced become old man grumps. Insistently praising times past.

A different sort of discipline

In mitigation, though, the idealism of my flower-power and anti-Vietnam War generation seems to have been less based on fear, alarm and self-interest than much of the idealism and enthusiasm driving today's concern for the environment and planet. Or am I falling into old man grumpiness in saying so? *Laudator temporis acti!*

The Lenten discipline adopted this year by one of our feisty parishioners, in her eighties, was not to give up any goodies, or to burden herself with noble deeds. Instead she resolved to come to terms with, accept and learn to approve of homosexuals. I love her for it.

(396) “This and That” - 18 April 2021

Edinburgh of the Seven Seas is the most remote of all permanent human settlements on earth. It is named after the Duke of Edinburgh.

Not Philip, but Alfred

It's the one and only settlement on the island of Tristan da Cunha, population around 300. The nearest other human settlement is Jamestown, on the Island of St Helena, 1,350 miles away. The Duke of Edinburgh visited Tristan da Cunha, unannounced, on *HMS Galatea* in 1867. Pleased and honoured, the islanders named their settlement after him. Though unless Prince Philip was even older than we've been led to believe, it had to be another of Edinburgh's dukes, as indeed it was. The Commander of *HMS Galatea* was the second son of Queen Victoria, HRH Prince Alfred. He was Duke of Edinburgh from 1866 until 1893.

This earlier Duke of Edinburgh, after calling on Tristan and the Cape of Good Hope, became the first member of the royal family ever to visit Australia. He was received with great enthusiasm and stayed there nearly five months.

In Sydney he was shot in the back, just to the right of his spine, by a certain Henry James O'Farrell. Tended for two weeks by six Florence Nightingale trained nurses he made a full recovery. O'Farrell was hanged for his pains. The Duke, for his, had a major Sydney teaching hospital named in his honour: *The Royal Prince Alfred Hospital*.

Not Alfred but Philip

The only other member of the royal family to visit Tristan da Cunha was Prince Philip. I missed that visit by 11 months. He arrived on the *Royal Yacht Britannia* in Jan. 1957. We left on the *British Flag*, a BP tanker, in Feb. 1956.

Prince Philip's visit was to a spruced up and well prepared village. According to the Tristan Community News it was “the single most important social event in the island's history”. He visited island homes, the hospital, church and crayfish canning factory, endearing himself to everyone by his informality, lively interest in people and sense of humour. A football match between the islanders and the ship's crew ended in a two all draw. In the afternoon the Prince laid the first stone of what became the *Prince Philip Community Hall*, it remains today the centre of the island's social activity. He also attended an island dance.

HMS Magpie

During my time on the island there occurred a prior Duke of Edinburgh connection. On 1 October 1955, *HMS Magpie* arrived, bringing with her the Archbishop of Cape Town, Geoffrey Clayton. From 1950-1952 *Magpie* had been commanded by Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh.

My mother's diary records the ship's arrival and, as our tiny little wooden house was to accommodate the lame and hefty Archbishop, she had been busy: "*Magpie* arrived at 3.00pm.... a terrific rush all day. Weather perfect. Sea flat calm. Wind NW with sunny periods. Dashed up to Church and got things ready. House spotless (More of less).

"We seemed to have to wait for ages on 'Big Beach', and it got very cold. The frigate came extremely close in.... the last longboat to beach brought the Archbishop in his chair, which he spurned immediately he got ashore and proceeded to walk with a limp, but quite ably, up to the house. I dashed home to make tea. He takes it without milk or sugar. He's an old villain, a grand chap!!.....He eats anything and is most accommodating. My fears have almost vanished! He went to bed about 9.30pm."

An Island Confirmation

The main purpose of his visit was to take a Confirmation service, one of the candidates being my sister Sue. It all went off satisfactorily: "...a wonderful Confirmation Service at 4.30pm..... I felt so worked up about Susan being Confirmed that I forgot to be nervous of playing the harmonium. The Church was packed to the doors. Andrew, Peter and Martin had to sit among my books!!"

Then later "the sea is definitely making up. All naval personnel have been ordered back to the frigate before the dance. However it was too rough for the signalling party to get off! Very cold, a keen NNW wind. The ship let off fireworks, Verey lights, rockets etc..." then, on 5 Oct, with all aboard, "...*Magpie* steamed past for the last time at 9am, dipped her flag, blew her siren, fired a salute of 15 guns, a lovely sound, and disappeared. towards Cape Town...."

(395) "This and That" - 11 April 2021

A glorious Easter Day. Blue sky, crisp breeze, bright sunshine, late daffodils, early bluebells, a billion celandines and happy worshippers. All warmed by the presence of each other and, like Mary Magdalene, a risen Lord.

Inspiration is not the point

Doubling up the number of morning services at St John's on Easter Day allowed us to accommodate (distanced and sanitized) 147 adult worshippers and 18 children. The online, pre-recorded service has, so far, been viewed 134 times, many of them, surely couples.

In the diary column of the Easter *Spectator*, Andrew Sullivan writes of heading back to church after a year of Covid-avoidance. He asks himself what he's missed:

.....it isn't a weekly revelation. I don't expect to feel something profound every time I go..... The one thing Catholicism teaches the bored and distracted churchgoer is that your own mood doesn't really matter. The consecration will happen regardless. Your inspiration is not the point.....physical ritual.... is what I really miss. I miss the silent genuflection; the chanting in unison with others; the standing up and kneeling down and standing up again. I miss the messy democracy of the communion line, and the faces I recognise from decades in my parish, and the faces I don't. I miss enacting something ineffable with my body, using words I never chose myself, and use only in this space. I miss the irrational, collective order of it all. And beneath all this, only poking above ground every now and again, I miss the weekly reminder of what I deeply believe within the folds of my consciousness: the command of universal love; the fact of life after death; the radical truth of experiential mystery.....

Missing God

For our Lent Study this year we considered each week a different poem. One of them, by Dennis Driscoll, was called Missing God. There's a lot to miss. He gives us 19 stanzas of varying lengths, here's a selection of them:

.... Miss Him during the civil wedding
when, at the blossomy altar
of the registrar's desk, we wait in vain
to be fed a line containing words
like "everlasting" and "divine".

Miss Him when the TV scientist
explains the cosmos through equations,
leaving our planet to revolve on its axis
aimlessly, a wheel skidding in snow.

Miss Him when the radio catches a snatch
of plainchant from some echoey priory;
when the gospel choir raises its collective voice
to ask Shall We Gather at the River?
or the forces of the oratorio converge
on I Know That My Redeemer Liveth
and our contracted hearts lose a beat.

Miss Him when a choked voice
at the crematorium recites the poem
about fearing no more the heat of the sun.

Miss Him when the gamma-rays
recorded on the satellite graph
seem arranged into a celestial score,
the music of the spheres,
the Ave Verum Corpus of the observatory lab.

Miss Him when the linen-covered
dining table holds warm bread rolls,
shiny glasses of red wine.

Miss Him when a dove swoops
from the orange grove in a tourist village
just as the monastery bell begins to take its toll.

Miss Him when our journey leads us under
leaves of Gothic tracery, an arch
of overlapping branches that meet
like hands in Michelangelo's creation.....

There's no need to miss him. He's with us every second of our life and gloriously, every Sunday,
at St John's.

(394) "This and That" - 4 April 2021

There's a portrait of Jesus, in my mind's eye. I'd love to share it but, sadly, Mr Google is unable to
locate it in any of the world's art galleries.

Noli me tangere

It is what I think is an early Dutch painting that I saw for the first and only time in a gallery
somewhere or other, many years ago, and have never ever forgotten. It depicts Jesus wearing no kingly
crown, nor crown of thorns, but instead a high-crowned, broad-rimmed, gardener's hat. He's in a

graveyard, addressing a heart-broken Mary Magdalene by name: “Mary”. A greeting that led to that flash of recognition that turned her tears of grief to tears of joy.

It’s a pictorial account of one of my favourite Gospel incidents, though, small-minded as I am, it’s the hat that fascinates me above all else. Did gardeners in late medieval Holland really wear such hats? I don’t know, but Jesus the gardener, in such a hat, is so, so lovable.

The artist’s name I’ve forgotten. As too the title of the picture, though it’s quite likely to be: *Noli me tangere*. (“Do not touch me”, or rather “cease holding on to me” or “stop clinging to me”). There are many paintings with this title and in some of them too, Jesus wears a gardener’s hat, but in none, save the one in my mind’s eye, does the hat have so high a crown. I love the artist, the hat and the Jesus.

Noli me tangere! It would make a good Covid “keep your distance” slogan. “Do not touch me”. Indeed. Indeed.

A million celandines

Three times last week, like Mary Magdalene, I stood beside an empty tomb in a graveyard. The sun shone warmly from a blue, cloudless sky, birds trilled and chirruped from bud-bursting trees and a million celandines gleamed and beamed gratitude back to the sun on behalf of us all. In such circumstances graveside funeral ceremonies have much to commend them. There is something good and right and proper about being outside, in the real and natural world, when doing something as natural as laying to rest in mother earth a person whose life on earth is ended.

No pleasure without pain

Easter last year, thanks to the lockdown, was the most peaceful I have ever experienced as a priest. On Good Friday afternoon, instead of falling asleep whacked, I listened devotionally to all of Bach’s St Matthew’s Passion. Each service had a congregation of just two or three: me, Diana and sometimes her sister, who was staying with us.

This year has been very different and hugely busy. It’s not the actual services that are onerous, they are a joy. It’s the preparing of them that has taken so much effort and time. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Day services have all needed radical revision and reprinting, so as to include the words of hymns, usually provided by hymn-books now too complicated to sanitize before every service. Suitable recorded hymns have had to be hunted down on YouTube, uploaded to my computer and downloaded to my phone. The words of hymns, though easily found on line, have to be carefully matched to recordings because for every hymn there are at least a dozen alternative versions.

Timothy too has spent hours of time splicing a harmonious whole from the individual voices of our choir, recorded singing at home, as well as gathering and putting together the disparate parts of our sure to be widely appreciated pre-recorded version of Easter Day service. It has been quite a week. So there’s an outside chance that on Easter Day we will be singing doleful Good Friday hymns, without a single Alleluia, because I have mixed things up.

There’s no pleasure without pain though. Easter will be all the more glorious for the work put into it, and how joyful will be your tired, bashed in old priest as he broaches his first bottle of beer after six weeks of abstinence. Froth wiped dreamily from his upper lip. A leisurely, pleasurable, sonorous burp from rosy well nigh desiccated from a six week flirtation with total tea-totalism .

There’s a buzz in the air

This year it is not only Christians who are celebrating Resurrection. The whole country is rising from the dread deadness of lockdown. Like Jesus’s resurrection, may it be for real, permanent, life enhancing, hope engendering, sheer unutterable joy. There’s a buzz in the air. Alleluia. Alleluia.

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