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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (June 2021)**



#### ***The Season's First Dog Rose***

*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 **June 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>

## (406) “This and That” - 27 June 2021

After breakfast last Monday I boasted to Diana that I was about to do something no one else on earth was likely to be doing, or had ever done.

A foolish claim. Ordinary mortals like us can never think, say or do anything original. There’s always someone, somewhere who has got there before us. The Book Ecclesiastes is right: “..... *there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, ‘See, this is new?’ it hath been already of old time...*”

### A multi-task percolator

My stab at originality arose from a need to augment, a curry I’d made to allow for an unexpected guest. Two chicken fillets required a speedy defrost and so, having carefully sealed them, I popped them into the coffee percolator. This was then filled with warm water and the plunger used to keep them submerged. It was remarkably effective.

No one else on earth, surely, defrosts chicken fillets in a coffee percolator. I’m a true original. The curry was good too and a multi-task percolator is a treasure.

### Miserable puritans

In his later life the poet W H Auden’s face became almost as much a talking point as his poems. Its deep folds, fissures, runnels and seams were so severe, that to see who he was required a thorough smoothing out of his face.

Miserable puritans blamed this affliction on heavy smoking, too much alcohol, the regular use of amphetamines, a refusal ever to bathe or shower, and the effect of regular, sunburn skin-peeling summers in Ischia.

The real reason was an extremely rare disorder known as Touraine-Solente-Gole syndrome, an inherited condition that causes the skin of the forehead, face, scalp, hands and feet to become thick and furrowed. It brings with it peripheral periostitis in the bones, reducing a sufferer’s capacity for activity.

Auden was a thoughtful, idiosyncratic Anglican Christian. In the year he died he wrote the following haiku:

*He has never seen God,  
but, once or twice, he believes  
he has heard him.*

Where would he have heard God? Where does anyone hear God? Perhaps, like C S Lewis he was “Surprised by Joy”. Joy elicited by bird song:

### Bird-Language

*Trying to understand the words  
Uttered on all sides by birds,  
I recognize in what I hear  
Noises that betoken fear.*

*Though some of them, I’m certain, must  
Stand for rage, bravado, lust,  
All other notes that birds employ  
Sound like synonyms for joy.* *W H Auden*

When I was about fifteen and living on a mission station in Rhodesia, we moved for a while into a long unoccupied house on a farm called “Vuta”, fifty miles north east of what is now Harare. It was overgrown, wild and lovely. We were there while my father built a house on a nearby mission out-centre, soon to be the mission district’s new headquarters, with an orphanage, school and church.

School holidays at *Vuta* were magical. I was bird-mad and spent hours wandering the bush linking bird songs to their songsters: golden orioles, black-capped tchagras, Burchills coucals, and duetting black collared barbets. Ecstasy and joy in the Garden of Eden. There, we are told, in the cool of the evening God’s voice is indeed to be heard.

### An Epitaph for a Godly Man's Tomb

*Here lies a piece of Christ; a star in dust;  
A vein of gold; a china dish that must*

*Be used in heaven, when God shall feast the just.*

*Robert Wild (1609–1679)*

## (405) “This and That” - 20 June 2021

The most favoured, acclaimed and enduring melody in the western world is unlikely to be a current pop song. It requires a century or two to sift the best from the merely good. The supreme melody might well be *Ah! vous dirai-je, Maman*, better known to us as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*.

### Sentimental tosh

It is set to popular Christmas carols, or children’s songs, in France, Holland, Hungary, Spain, Greece and Turkey. Both Mozart and J.C.F. Bach composed delightful variations on the tune and Haydn, Saint Saens, Liszt and many other composers use the melody in one way or another.

The tune first appeared in mid eighteenth century France set to sentimental tosh about a shepherdess falling into a seductive stranger’s arms. The French nursery rhyme version’s words, that helped make the melody famous, parody the original tosh. Both begin: *Ah! vous dirai-je, Maman...*

### Simple Gifts

One of my own favourite melodies has also had many incarnations. Written by Joseph Brackett (1797–1882), it’s the Shaker song: *Simple Gifts*:

*‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free,  
‘Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
‘Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gain’d,  
To bow and to bend we will not be asham’d,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come round right.*

I loved the melody at first hearing, but also the words, because the simplicity of the tune perfectly matches the gift of simplicity celebrated by those words. So much so I half resent Aaron Copland’s sophisticated appropriation of the melody in his orchestral suite *Appalachian Spring* and Sydney Carter’s use of it for his hymn *Lord of the Dance*.

### The ‘Shaking Quakers’

Sydney Carter, however, is closer to the spirit of the song than I am. The tune was written to be danced to by a Quaker breakaway sect called the *United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing*, sometimes called, “The Shaking Quakers” because of their ecstatic behaviour and dancing during worship. All members practiced celibacy and so it’s little wonder that today only two members remain.

The tune is lovely though, and simplicity does need celebrating. Something St Francis profoundly understood. Contentment in life lies in simplicity of life, in learning to curtail and diminish wants and desires not continually and hopelessly attempting to gratify them. It is Franciscan spirituality that the world needs to cope with all its present fears and anxieties. The point is made perfectly in the last line of this minor masterpiece of a poem by Richard Wilbur.

### A Summer Morning

*Her young employers, having got in late  
From seeing friends in town  
And scraped the right front fender on the gate,  
Will not, the cook expects, be coming down.  
  
She makes a quiet breakfast for herself.  
The coffee-pot is bright,  
The jelly where it should be on the shelf.  
She breaks an egg into the morning light,  
  
Then, with the bread-knife lifted, stands and hears  
The sweet efficient sounds*

*Of thrush and catbird, and the snip of shears  
Where, in the terraced backward of the grounds,*

*A gardener works before the heat of day.*

*He straightens for a view*

*Of the big house ascending stony-gray*

*Out of his beds mosaic with the dew.*

*His young employers having got in late,*

*He and the cook alone*

*Receive the morning on their old estate.*

*Possessing what the owners can but own.*

## **(404) “This and That” - 13 June 2021**

During summer’s leisurely al fresco lunches at the vicarage, we overlook a falling sweep of lawn dominated by a venerable, rakishly-shaped and hollow-limbed Bramley apple tree. Halcyon days. Halcyon days.

Leisurely al fresco lunches at the rectory of our Australian parish, overlooked a lawn dominated by a lily-padded pond and fountain. On hot days the patter and splatter of water soothed the spirit. When a large, white mulberry tree, at the back door, was in fruit, visiting and glorious rainbow lorikeets, to vary their diet, sidled to the front garden to clamber over a feeding tray that hung from a large and shady maple tree. Halcyon days. Halcyon days.

### **Kookaburras**

Once, as if from nowhere, a great Kookaburra plunged into the pond to emerge with a wriggling, glistening, goldfish in its bill. Kookaburras are large, terrestrial kingfishers. They’re not at all averse to adding a fish or two to their more usual diet of lizards and snakes.

All true kingfishers are of the genus *halcyon*, a name from Greek mythology. Alcyone, daughter of Aeolus, was happily married to Ceyx, son of the Morning Star, but the loving couple managed to offend Zeus, who threw a thunderbolt at Ceyx’s ship causing him to drown.

His loving wife, in her grief, attempted suicide by throwing herself into the sea. Out of compassion the gods changed both Ceyx and Alcyone into “halcyon birds”, named after Alcyone. Kingfishers to us.

“Halcyon days” refers to the seven days on either side of the shortest day of the year, when Alcyone’s father Aeolus, god of the wind, restrains the winds and calms the waves, for his daughter to lay her eggs in safety.

### **Knysna loeries**

When our lives are difficult or poignant, solace is found in looking back to better times, to “halcyon days”. One such time for me was when I was a theological student in Grahamstown, South Africa. There, in love with the girl who was to become my first wife and mother of my children, I walked on air, and also all over the nearby wooded hills with a pair of binoculars, hoping to spy the secretive, but lovely red, green and blue plumaged Knysna loeries.

Another pastime during those halcyon days was listening to music on records from the local town library. One of them introduced me to an exquisite song by Henry Purcell entitled “Halcyon Days”. I listen to it now as I write: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8q1PLhy59A>]

*Halcyon days, now wars are ending,*

*you shall find where-e'er you sail*

*Tritons all the while attending*

*with a kind and gentle gale.*

The song’s beauty invests the very word halcyon with magic sufficient to effect the peace and calm of those golden times past within my being now, today. Halcyon days. Halcyon days.

### Setting sail for Boldre

On 13 June eight years ago Diana and I had just left Melbourne for Boldre on the MV Bahia. Changing ships in the USA we arrived in Dover, via Antwerp, 2 months later.

We were the only passengers and our cabin was on the top deck, centre ship, below the bridge. Its three windows gave us a view over containers to the ship's bow. As we passed through the Heads, out of Port Phillip Bay, my son Peter phoned us to say he had our ship in computer view live from Point Lonsdale and that we should be on deck, as he had hooked the view up to the family in Benalla and possibly in England too. So up we went to wave from the side of the bridge, visible as black and gesticulating blobs. Before that, passing under the Gateway Bridge, I felt a deep stab of sadness at leaving a land that had blessed us all in so many ways. Mercifully, the adventure of what lay ahead soon softened that. Halcyon days. Halcyon days.

### (403) "This and That" - 6 June 2021

"The victim" argues Theodore Dalrymple, "is the modern hero and also the highest moral authority..."

If so, then that's me done for. Privileged, fortunate, and blessed beyond measure or deserving, I'm no victim, nor can be one. So I'm destined to be an unheroic parson, deficient in moral authority. What a bummer.

*He who would valorous be,  
Let him go thither;  
A victim he must be,  
Come wind, come weather.  
There's no discouragement  
Can make him once relent  
His first avowed intent,  
To be a victim.*

### A fling with the Spanish dancer

To be born English, at the end of World War II, when a reassuring proportion of the atlas was still coloured pink, was to inherit advantages, privileges and blessings beyond deserving. As the psalmist says: "*The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground, yea, I have a goodly heritage....*"

There have been bleak times. It's part of the human condition. There was a brief and frightening fling with the dread Spanish dancer. Mercifully it came to naught, thanks to an early diagnosis and a good surgeon.

There was a premature, undeserved and heart-breaking bereavement, redeemed only by the courage of a loved wife dying, and later by the serendipitous grace of a totally undeserved or unasked for second chance. All in all though, what a trot I've had. Laus deo! Laus deo! Laus deo!

### Un-Sturgeon Scotland

A time of particular blessing was a four month parish exchange with a priest from Invergowrie, near Dundee, in the year 2000. He flew out to take over my Australian parish, rectory and car in Wodonga, on the river Murray. I flew over to take on his, in Invergowrie, beside the river Tay. My wife Margaret, our two daughters, Elizabeth and Rachel and I rejoiced in it. It was a time of happiness and blessing.

We loved un-Sturgeon Scotland, as well as the village, vicarage and fine church. The job was easy. Half the vicar's role was to be a chaplain at Dundee University, but the summer vacation began two weeks after we arrived. The Bishop of Dundee was a good egg, he evinced surprise when I suggested that I was not at all stretched: "You are not here to work are you?" he said. So I decided not, and we did plenty of jaunting, exploring and picnicking.

### As good as it gets

The word "picnic" comes from the late seventeenth century French word: *pique-nique*. It's derived from the verb *piquer*, meaning 'pick', 'peck', or 'nab', and *nique*, which means 'thing of little importance', 'bagatelle', 'trifle'.

The greatest difficulty with picnicking is settling on the right site to stop and feast. A suitably beautiful site to one of us is deemed unsuitable by the others. So we press on, and then on again and again until rumbles abdominal become something phenomenal and enough is enough. When at last a dozen beautiful sites have been rejected I stop wherever. On one occasion, near Montrose, for which my daughters still mock me, I headed hopefully down a track through dreary wasteland until, behind a great mound of heaped soil and sand, we stopped to eat finely cut sandwiches unedified by any natural beauty whatsoever. We then set off morosely. Round the corner, behind the mound, a glorious vista of sea, sand and hills dazzled us.

We had a picnic with grandson Thomas on Bank Holiday Monday. We offered him the beach, a forest river, or donkey-dense heathland. He pondered deeply and decided that best of all would be to sit on the bench outside our drive, spotting and noting down all the different variety of cars on Pilley Hill. In warm oak-dappled shade, the excited cries and wild gesticulations of a bright-eyed six year old on identifying a new variety of car was as good as it gets.

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