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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (September 2021)



Asking the way of a New Forest donkey

*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 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>

(419) “This and That” - 26 September 2021

St Jude, as the patron saint of lost causes, rivals St Andrew for the honour of being mine. Backing losers and espousing lost causes is my speciality. Thirty years ago I wrote a piece of verse that admits as much, it begins:

The Kiss of Death

*Like King Canute of old I stand a fool against the tide,
So every cause I've ever backed's been overwhelmed and died.
Consider me a Jonah, and my patron saint St Jude,
For long-term gain from my support has never once accrued.
In order to avoid the slight of failure and derision,
Always tip me overboard, or seek my opposition.
Support from me for any cause exacts a deadly cost,
The cause is doomed, is done for, finished, absolutely lost!*

Several of the stanzas that follow this one embarrass me for revealing some of the dubious causes I've espoused over the years which, most mercifully, were indeed lost!

An emoji refusenik

What brought this all but forgotten piece of verse back to mind was my instinctive dislike of emojis. I'm an emoji refusenik, I can't bring myself to use them. Ninety percent of on-line users do though. So yet again St Jude is breathing down my neck. Opposing emojis is a lost cause.

Their use, to the likes of me, seems regressive, a return to ancient hieroglyphs. Not so though. One of their advantages is to put back into the immediacy and speed of electronic, non face-to-face communication, what's lost by the inability to read and interpret facial expressions, or to hear and interpret tonal variations in speech that indicate mood and feeling. An enthusiast, Eleanor Tremeer writes:

“With a single emoji you can denote doubt, make a crafty joke, or reference a piece of fiction. Arguably, emojis are a vital tool for online communication, offering us a way to nonverbally express abstract ideas and convey emotion without having to laboriously explain ourselves. In this way, they're actually the opposite of clunky Egyptian hieroglyphs: Emojis are intended to enhance informal communication, whereas hieroglyphs weren't used as a popular writing form.”

She makes the point well, but I still can't bring myself to use them. Patronised by good St Jude, I'm unconvinced. Words are my métier, because, as Louis MacNeice suggests:

To Posterity

*When books have all seized up like the books in graveyards
And reading and even speaking have been replaced
By other, less difficult, media, we wonder if you
Will find in flowers and fruit the same colour and taste
They held for us for whom they were framed in words,
And will your grass be green, your sky blue,
Or will your birds be always wingless birds?*

The Goodwood Revival

After Matins and a baptism at good St John's last Sunday, I, Diana and two small plastic boxes stuffed with egg sandwiches, headed east in *Hilary* our Ford Fiesta. We were hell-bent. Determined to swap the peace, tranquillity, and quietude of St John's, for the hubbub and cacophonous clamour of the *Goodwood Revival*. There we were to meet up with my son David and grandson Thomas.

Having left behind the celebration and worship of the Christian God, sadly in the process of being discarded by too many of our fellow citizens, we felt immediately at home on our arrival at Goodwood.

For there too we found ourselves a part of celebrations honouring a god in the process of being discarded by the British: the internal combustion engine. As at St John's, the traditional, vintage version too. Fine old cars raced at noisy full throttle and were also on display and for sale everywhere. Incense from roaring exhaust pipes swirled, and worshippers were dressed up for the part. There were stalls, games, food and drink in abundance. Great fun. As with the Christian God, the internal combustion engine, surely, is unlikely to be quite killed off by the fanatical followers of a new-fangled creed.

(418) "This and That" - 19 September 2021

It's the familiar, personal, private and parochial that hold us together, dominate our lives and keep us going.

Sun shiny oyster guzzling

The year 1945, in the larger scheme of things, marks the end of an appalling world war. At the familiar, personal, private and parochial level of Boldre vicarage, it's more notable for the birth of Andrew Neaum.

Nine eleven 2001, in the world at large, marks the most appalling and horrific of terrorist atrocities. In Boldre vicarage, at a familiar, personal, private and parochial level, that year's more notable as the birthday of a lovely granddaughter in Tasmania and as a reminder of a sunshiny, oyster-guzzling, bird-watching, versifying and book devouring holiday in a coastal town of New South Wales. We happened to be there when that atrocity occurred.

We are even held in the Faith by the familiar, private personal and parochial. By God experienced in the routines and patterns of daily life, rather than out there in the world at large. Given my background and having been taught the language and music of God. I cannot but believe.

Unbalanced and unhealthy

Although I love the access to knowledge, art and music that my television and computer screens grant me, I don't love their obsessive reportage of cataclysmic world news. Life's yardstick and focus of interest is indeed local, is my study, library, vicarage, well-treed garden, Pilley, Boldre and lovely St John's. Too great a focus on worldwide cataclysm and disaster unhealthily unbalances things. It skews a true view of daily life, darkens vision, blinds us to God.

Intoxicated by freedom

There's a painting attributed to *Pieter Bruegel the elder* that makes a similar point. It depicts the fall of Icarus who, with his father Daedalus, was imprisoned on the island of Crete. They fly to freedom on wings they make with the help of feathers and wax. Icarus, intoxicated by freedom, soars too near the sun. The wax melts, his wings fail and he falls into the sea and drowns.

In the painting you have to look carefully even to see the legs of the boy as he's swallowed by the sea and drowns. A horse and ploughman dominate the picture as they steadily go about their business, the tragedy unnoticed. Likewise a ship sails serenely by. Auden wrote a fine poem on the painting called: *Musée des Beaux-Arts*, it ends:

.....how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

It is daily life and routine that best keep tragedy in perspective. Life goes on. Tragedy is but part of the picture. Hurrah for the familiar, personal, private and parochial. They hold us together, dominate our lives, keep us going.

A cure for arthritis

My diary for September 9, 2001 records the atrocity in New York with horror. Nearly all of that day was spent watching the terrible drama unfold on television.

Thereafter though, holiday-life goes on. The diary tells of our delight in the persistent tink, tink of bell birds and the whip crack call of whip birds. It records us watching a large goanna search for birds eggs in the hollows of trees and quotes interesting snippets from the books I was reading. There is also an account of a visit to a whaling museum, in a little town called Eden. There we learned of a British man swallowed by a whale, only to be released 15 hours later when the whale was cut up. He was almost blind, bleached by stomach juices, but alive. A treatment for arthritis in whaling stations was to cut a hole in a dead whale's flesh and take a two hour soak therein. Life goes on.

(417) “This and That” - 12 September 2021

To poke your nose into other people's business is not to be a nosy parker in Australia, it's to be a sticky beak. It's a slightly more dismissive term. Who would want a sticky beak? So, mind your own business, mate!

Swallows have sticky beaks. Not outside, but inside. It's a good thing too. To fly around open mouthed, without some sort of protective covering, would dry your mouth out nastily. Though the primary use of a swallow's sticky beak is to entrap and hold fast insects.

A big schozzle

A nose, to a face, is what a mountain is to a plain. It adds character, authority, proportion and beauty. Sooner a big nose than a small one.

Experts tell us that the large noses of Neanderthals evolved to enable them to move more air through their nasal cavity than their rivals—possibly in response to the higher energy requirements of their stocky bodies and energetic, hunting lifestyle. It is calculated that they required as much as 4,480 calories a day to keep them alive in the European winter. The recommended consumption of a modern human male is only 2,500 calories a day. A high calorie intake requires more oxygen to burn the sugars, fats and proteins in a person's cells to release energy, hence the need for a mighty nose.

Sliced noses

In Kyoto, Japan, there is one of the world's most bizarre and disturbing monuments. It is called these days the *Mimizuka* (Mound of Ears), but is in fact dedicated to the sliced noses of killed Korean soldiers.

It enshrines the severed noses of at least 36,000 Koreans killed during two savage invasions of that land by Japan in the late 16th century. The noses were brought back to Japan by warriors as proof of the mass killings required of them by their Samurai, *Hideyoshi*. He went on to order that these gruesome relics be entombed in a shrine on the grounds of *Hokoji* Temple, and he set Buddhist priests to work praying for the repose of the souls of the hundreds of thousands of Koreans from whose bodies they'd come. In no way does this ameliorate his savagery or absolve him.

What is in a name?

The shrine was initially known as *Hanazuka* (Mound of Noses), but some decades after it was built this came to be regarded as too cruel-sounding a name, and so was changed to the more euphonious but inaccurate *Mimizuka* (Mound of Ears). It retains this misnomer to this day. The British historian, Stephen Turnbull, said of the *Mimizuka* "... it is Kyoto's least mentioned and most often avoided tourist attraction." Few tourists, other than Koreans, are even aware of its existence, let alone visit it.

Shameful pasts

Is there any nation that does not have a shameful past? Are there any individuals that don't? Certainly there are things in my past that I am ashamed of.

Any acknowledgement of solidarity with the victims of injustice and barbarity is more impressive when balanced by acknowledgement of solidarity with the perpetrators of them. A finger pointed at others always cries out to be balanced by a finger pointed at the self.

Dining with W H Auden

The poet W H Auden, writes Alan Bennet, lived with his partner Chester Kallman in some squalor. “They weren’t homemakers, either of them, though Kallman was a good cook. The Stravinskys came round to supper one night. Madame Stravinsky—endearingly named Vera—was paying a call of nature when she spotted a bowl of dirty water on the bathroom floor. In a forlorn attempt to give the place a woman’s touch, she emptied the contents down the wash-basin, only to discover later that this was to have been the *pièce de résistance* of the meal: a chocolate pudding.”

The basin in Auden’s bathroom was routinely and unpleasantly polluted by Auden. Bennet comments: “Where, one wonders, did one wash one’s hands after one had washed one’s hands?”

(416) “This and That” - 5 September 2021

Immanuel Kant, whom I’ve never read and am unlikely to, has nonetheless bequeathed us a saying I hold dear: *Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.*

Working with crooked timber

We are flawed. There’s the rub. It is yet one more reason to remain within the loving, forgiving community that the Church aspires to be. The company of Jesus of Nazareth, a carpenter, works wonders with crooked timber. The yokes made in his workshop were easy and light.

There's a paradox to crookedness though. Is human perfectibility even desirable? The poet Robert Graves (1895-1985) points us to the beauty of flying crooked:

Flying Crooked

The butterfly, a cabbage-white,
(His honest idiocy of flight)
Will never now, it is too late,
Master the art of flying straight,
Yet has -- who knows so well as I? --
A just sense of how not to fly:
He lurches here and here by guess
And God and hope and hopelessness.
Even the aerobatic swift
Has not his flying-crooked gift.

Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-1972), a near contemporary of Robert Graves, contrasts the capricious beauty of feckless butterflies to the purposeful, dutiful diligence of bees and the earnest parenting of thrushes:

This Loafer

In a sun-crazed orchard
Busy with blossomings
This loafer, unaware of
What toil or weather brings,
Lumpish sleeps -- a chrysalis
Waiting, no doubt, for wings.

And when he does get active,
It's not for business -- no
Bee-lines to thyme and heather,
No earnest to-and-fro
Of thrushes: pure caprice tells him
Where and how to go.

All he can ever do

Is to be entrancing,
So that a child may think,
Upon a chalk-blue chancing,
“Today was special. I met
A piece of the sky dancing.”

Even the Galilean carpenter I so much admire and love had a soft spot for sinners and crooks. He preferred their company to that of self-righteous, goody-goody pharisees. Judge not, he said. Look to the plank in your own eye not to the speck in the eye of others. Only the sinless (i.e. no one) should even consider casting stones at the sinful.

Out of hibernation

The semi-eremital life imposed upon us by the pandemic is at an end. We’ve been entertaining children and grandchildren at the Vicarage, for the first time in a couple of years. The cleaning up and tidying away in preparation disconcerted several generations of daddy long legs, and even ourselves a little. We’d become all too comfortable in our cocooned hibernation and reclusion, a tad selfish.

It was good to be snapped out of it. We’re social creatures, made for fraternising and the face to face banter of family get togethers, parties and communal activities.

‘Virtual worship’, likewise, while invaluable to the vulnerable housebound, does fall far, far short of the real thing. Just as a loved one in your arms is far, far more than one merely on a screen. To be in each other’s company, full-face to God and neighbour is far and away the best.

We remain masked and distanced in church, but the buzz, once unmasked outside afterwards, is a joy of joys.

Home