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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (June 2022)



Tristan da Cunha

*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 2022** 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>

(456) “This and That” - 19 June 2022

Last Monday the tower of St John’s was encased in scaffolding. Its roof is in need of repair, its brickwork of a little repointing. It will cost us a mere £30,000 or so.

Melodious madrigals

Scaffolding is a highly skilled and ancient art. The walls of the Palaeolithic caves at Lascaux, in southern France, contain holes used for the primitive scaffolding that enabled their artistic occupants to paint the famous wall paintings. That was over 17,000 years ago.

Michelangelo, more a sculpture than a painter, was testy and demanding when, for 3000 ducats, he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The architect had designed scaffolding to hang via ropes from holes in the ceiling. This displeased the artist because it meant he’d have to paint around the holes. He insisted on standing scaffolding which was duly provided.

Michelangelo’s scaffolders might well have been serenaded by Sistine chapel choristers as they erected their contraption. On Monday, inside St John’s, melodious madrigals were being sung by the Woodgates and friends, filtering out to the delight of the scaffolders.

Ascenseur pour l'échafaud

The vicarage was scaffolded a year or so ago for its gutters to be replaced. It delighted us to walk round the outside of the building, at a height of twelve feet or more, to view the garden from new perspectives, peer into windows hitherto only peered from, spy birds nests from above not below, clear accumulated algae from long neglected windows and frames and plug the holes of masonry bees, while admiring their mining skills.

My favourite Liverpoolian band was *The Scaffold*. Possibly because they were less a pop group than a band of comics and satirists. Their name was taken from a Miles Davis LP: *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (Lift To The Scaffold). A more ominous sense of the word.

Medicinal compound

While St John’s is scaffolded I’d like to persuade Timothy to teach the choir to sing *The Scaffold’s* famous song: *Lily the Pink* as an anthem. The song features a church bell and the promise of heaven, so why not?

Lily the Pink, she turned to drink
She filled up with paraffin inside
And despite her medicinal compound
Sadly pickled Lily died

Up to heaven her soul ascended
All the church bells they did ring
She took with her medicinal compound
Hark the herald angels sing.

Travelling beautifully to town

The short trip to Lymington from the Vicarage, via leafy, twist and turning Church Lane and Undershore Road, is beautiful. It’s a privilege to be taken to the heart of a town without passing anything ugly along the way. Of all the places I’ve lived, it is only the trip from the Vicarage on St Helena to Jamestown that can rival ours to Lymington. Both journeys are of a similar distance.

Visiting Jamestown

On St Helena we left a green, agapanthus lined drive, with nesting fairy terns on the tree branches (in season), dodging vicarage geese, turkeys and chickens. We then turned left from Pounceys Hill, 1700 feet above sea level, to travel past Plantation House woods and, in a few hundred yards, out of moist green countryside into a harsher, semi-desert volcanic-clinkered area called Half Tree Hollow, dotted with colourful, matchbox houses. The harshness was more than ameliorated by a horizon, fifty or so

miles distant, beyond a glittering always changing sea. There were hills, headlands and mountains to the right. Before we tipped over a precipitous 800 foot cliff to the sea below, the road turned right at the top of Ladder Hill, with its pedestrian stairway of 699, 11 inch high steps down to sea level. They were walked up and down daily by Diana when she taught at Ladder Hill High School at the top. By car we zig zagged down a spectacularly steep, single lane road into Jamestown, nestled pleasingly in its ravine. A lovely, regular trip.

(455) “This and That” - 12 June 2022

It’s early morning in the Vicarage study. A family of great tits peck furiously at a column of peanuts hanging a few inches from the window.

Sluggo slumbring

Curious music by Johann Albrechtsberger lifts my spirit: a concerto for Jewish harp, mandora and orchestra. The particular version I listen to is likened by one critic to a concerto for a gurgling drain and an overly serious string ensemble. Yes indeed, but ideal for early morning. As the psalmist reminds us, “heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” It does, it does, to flood my being.

Joylessness, says Chaucer is “a rotten sinne”. In its train follow “slouthe, wanhope and sluggy slumbring”. The sin of joylessness, he goes on, inclines a person to “undevotion, through which a man is so blunt that he may neyther rede ne sing in Holy Church”.

Morning cobwebs in late summer

Chaucer’s right, Joy plays a major part in the faith of many of us. In 1955, C S Lewis published a partial autobiography entitled: *Surprised by Joy*. It describes his life from early childhood until his conversion to Christianity in 1931. He was brought back to faith, in part, by a deep yearning and longing for lost joy, characterised in an earlier work, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* as “that unnameable something, desire for which pierces us like a rapier at the smell of bonfire, the sound of wild ducks flying overhead, the title of *The Well at the World’s End*, the opening lines of *Kubla Khan*, the morning cobwebs in late summer, or the noise of falling waves.” In *Surprised by Joy*, he says: “...there arosealmost like heartbreak, the memory of Joy itself, the knowledge that I had once had what I now lacked for years, that I was returning at last from exile and desert lands to my own country.”

“Almost like heartbreak...” he says. Yes indeed. Joy and sadness are such close cousins, as this exquisite lyric by Lisel Mueller perfectly points out:

JOY

“Don’t cry, its only music,”
someone’s voice is saying.
“No one you love is dying.”

It’s only music. And it was only spring,
the world’s unreasoning body
run amok, like a saint’s, with glory,
that overwhelmed a young girl
into unreasoning sadness.
“Crazy,” she told herself,
“I should be dancing with happiness.”

But it happened again. It happens
when we make bottomless love—

there follows a bottomless sadness
which is not despair
but its nameless opposite.
It has nothing to do with the passing of time.
It's not about loss. It's about
two seemingly parallel lines
suddenly coming together
inside us, in some place
that is still wilderness.
Joy, joy, the sopranos sing,
reaching for the shimmering notes
while our eyes fill with tears.

What a find

I read a lot of poetry. Partly because these days great tomes and lengthy reads all too readily send me to sleep. A more important reason is because, as I get older, beauty and God have become more and more important, and the elusive nature of the Divine is best discerned in the allusive, suggestiveness of verse.

Yet another reason is because I send a daily poem to a circle of like-minded friends and acquaintances and do not like to send anything uninteresting or mediocre. This means I need to range the repertoire far and wide, a joyful, if time consuming, task. I discovered Lisel Mueller only last week. What a find!

(454) "This and That" - 5 June 2022

When the Queen was crowned, I was 7 years old and resident on the island of Tristan da Cunha, where my father, David, was chaplain for three and a half years. Here's an edited extract from my mother's diary:

Tuesday June 2 1953

Coronation Day. Holy Communion at 8.00am with special prayers for the Queen. A large congregation. The weather was perfect, though a chilly wind, but a sunny and smooth, blue sea and a clear, cloudless mountain.

At 9.15am there was the Official Service on the Quarter Deck (*a square of land for parades, with a mast, ship's figurehead and yard-arm for flying the ensign*). Phil, the island's Administrator, was imposing in his uniform, all white with a solar topee, a sword and a medal. With his beard he looked a real Empire Builder. We all stood around the 'Quarter Deck'. The Cubs, Brownies, Scouts and Guides marched down to the Centre. The Island men and women stood apart as usual. Members of the Island Council stood in a bunch outside the Fallons house. Everyone capable of attending was present. At 9.30am David and Phil walked to the little table in the Centre and the Service began. We sang "O God our help in ages past" then had the reading. We also sang "All people that on earth do dwell."

David said special prayers. Lars hauled up the flag without a hitch and it fluttered gently in the wind. My throat tightened as we all sang the three verses of the National Anthem, but I managed not to break down. The doctor had come out of his surgery and stood by me and I didn't want to be psychoanalysed. I felt intensely proud of being English and very homesick. Phil gave quite a good address and everything went smoothly.

We went to Scotts later and listened to part of the Service in Westminster Abbey. Reception wasn't too good, but we heard the actual crowning of the Queen. I felt very emotional but very happy to hear she was safely crowned.

A quick lunch and then all hands on deck for the sports. Susan came second in the 3-legged race with her best friend Pamela. I entered for the married women's race and was doing quite well till I fell down!

No trace of narkishness

Mary and Sophie were absolute gems and the tea arrangements passed without a hitch. They saw to everything and Mrs Stableford, Mrs Brown and I had hardly anything to do. They washed up afterwards and cleaned the floor. Mary discovered the young girls hadn't gone round the Islanders properly, so she went out herself and gathered them in and they all had a drink.

We had a quick cup of tea ourselves and got the children a bite and then it was time for the fireworks. They were a lovely show: sparkling coloured stars, catherine wheels and rockets whose bangs were echoed by the mountain. We put the children to bed, had a small supper and then went to the dance. It was a really enjoyable affair and there wasn't a trace of narkishness. A good many of the men had had a drink or two, but they were only happy and not in the least unpleasant! I danced nearly every dance. We were interested to see the older ones do the handkerchief dance and the men 'Black Tom.' I am sure the latter is a relic of pirate days. Louis asked me for a donkey dance and it was great fun. We went round in a line and then our partners grabbed us and we literally galloped up the room. I wonder my middle aged legs could do it. David had a lot of dances with me, as he is trying to learn, discovering he must wag his shoulders and bend his knees in this kind of dancing.

In the interval there was a rum punch and soft drinks to toast the Queen. I managed to stick to Oros. The ex-[pat. station folk went to Scotts for a drink later and I still stayed teetotal. I was very glad as I enjoyed it all much better and wasn't tempted to loosen up my tongue. The others wag theirs violently after a few drinks. We returned to the dance and stayed till the end - midnight. The whole atmosphere was jolly and friendly.

Home to a cup of tea and we read "Measure for Measure" together. Lights out at 2am. A memorable day.

Wednesday June 3 1953

The result of yesterday's capers left us so stiff and sore we could hardly walk. David got a real knock on the ribs in the tug of war which isn't right yet. We just did necessary chores and my stiffness has gradually gone.

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