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## **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (October 2022)**



### ***Autumn - Burnt House Lane, Pilley***

*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 **October 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>

## (474) “This and That” - 23 October 2022

My 77th birthday arrives in the middle of next month, November. It's a doubly auspicious event to anyone daft enough to take numerology seriously, 7 being reckoned a lucky number. So too, though, are: 1, 3, 9, 13, 15, 21, 25, 31, 33, 37, 43, 49, 51, 63, 67, 69, 73, 75, 79, 87, 93 and 99, which somewhat dilutes the potency of number 7.

### Unchangeable crappiness

On reaching the age of 77 a more significant gift than mere luck, is venerability. To be so well and truly seasoned invites an old dog to look backwards as much as forwards. It's something I frequently do, with relief and deep, deep gratitude. Gratitude not least to Kingsley Amis for saying, surely with the likes of me in mind:

*... bloody good luck to you, mate,  
That you weren't born too late  
For at least a chance of happiness,  
Before unchangeable crappiness  
Spreads all over the land.*

There is gratitude galore too for the faith into which my parents baptized me, brought me up and so irresistibly exemplified. Kingsley Amis was less fortunate, he writes: “One of the great benefits of organised religion is that you can be forgiven your sins, which must be a wonderful thing. I mean, I carry my sins around with me, there's nobody there to forgive them.”

### Delighting in the sinful

There have, of course been sins aplenty throughout my seventy seven years of life, conventional ones and worse, but never enough to burden me with hopelessness or any sense of irredeemable guilt.

This is partly because the word 'forgiveness' has such pride of place in the Gospel. It occurs pivotally in the Lord's Prayer, is present in his last words on the Cross and is a virtue he enjoins upon us all to practise in daily life to the tune of seventy times seven. There's that number again!

Occasionally people say to me, half jocularly, that they are too sinful and bad to come to church. I have several stock responses to such claims. One of them is half jocular itself. “Come along if only for my sake! There's nothing more satisfying to a priest, when giving absolution, than to look down the church and see a truly evil and wicked person. It adds a satisfying weightiness to the absolution. Priests of an imaginative sort perceive a dark miasma rising from the penitent's head, to float aimlessly and fearfully about the church roof's rafters and then stream down, off and out through the church doors. Wow!

### Bysshe Vanolis

To boast wickedness and sinfulness can be itself a form of vanity, one of the nastiest of sins. As the poet James Thomson (1834-82) wittily points out:

Vanity

*Once in a saintly passion  
I cried with desperate grief,  
O Lord, my heart is black with guile,  
Of sinners I am chief.  
Then stooped my guardian angel  
And whispered from behind,  
"Vanity, my little man,  
You're nothing of the kind."*

James Thomson wrote under the pseudonym Bysshe Vanolis to distinguish himself from an earlier poetic James Thomson. Bysshe Vanolis Thomson is most famous for a long poem: *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874). It is an expression of bleak pessimism in a dehumanized, uncaring urban environment. I remember having a go at it at University with little joy

### **An electronic blessing**

There was much joy in our annual St Francistide *Blessing of the Pets* service. It's touching to be reminded of how deep is the bond between pets and owners. Our pew-sheet and recorded service is emailed to well over 500 friends of St John's all over the world. An Australian recipient emailed me back a photo of her arthritic and dearly loved cat, asking me to bless it in God's name from a distance. I was delighted to do so.

### **(473) "This and That" - 16 October 2022**

Social gaffes in English households are far more likely to be forgiven from Australians than from fellow Brits. Shortly after arriving in Boldre, lunching at a house with some pretensions to refinement, I asked where I might find the toilet. The dear lady of the house excused my colonial vulgarity with a gentle and quiet: "it is called a lavatory in this house."

#### **Enthroned in peace**

In the Rhodesia of my youth, a lavatory was called a PK, an acronym for *piccanin kia*: "little house". Before the advent of piped water and sophisticated drains, the latrines in most countries were sited in tiny outhouses. In the Rhodesian bush many of them on termite mounds for ease of digging. I remember one very fondly. When my parents were on long leave in England, my brother and I spent a school holiday on a farm with an outside PK. It was on a hill, shaded by lovely msasa trees and very private. You could sit with the door open, admiring the view, lulled to peace perfect peace by the crooning of turtle doves and the joyous, bubbly burbling of bulbuls.

#### **Making a splash**

Such PKs are known as long drops. In Southern Africa the equivalent of "Paddy", the Irish butt of so many English jokes, is the Afrikaner "van der Merwe". Once, in the South African Karoo, van der Merwe, an old farmer, fed up with never ending drought decided to have a borehole drilled on his farm. A rig was set up and drilling began, but after a couple of thousand feet no water was found and so the hole was plugged and drilling terminated. Not one to waste an opportunity, Van der Merwe decided to turn the bore hole into his PK, the longest of long drops.

A week later he arrived back from tending his scrawny sheep to find his wife missing. He searched all over until, finally and sadly, he found her dead in the new PK. The medicos were stumped as to the cause of death until her husband told them that she was in the habit of holding her breath until she heard the splash.

#### **Dunneken**

Outhouses, usually of a rudimentary sort, were a feature of most ancient settled communities. The bible advises the nomadic Israelites, before they settled down in Canaan, to leave the camp with a spade, to allow nature its course. Once settled, outhouses were built beyond the settlement's boundaries for reasons of hygiene, and because latrines were considered the abode of evil spirits. The very rich, disregarding the evil spirits, built carved, stone latrines set over a cess pit or septic tank in or near to their home. The very poor, as in every age, made do with anywhere they could find. With the Hellenization of the ancient world, communal latrines came into fashion, often associated with public baths, from which, in some of them, the water flushed away the filth.

In Australia a not uncommon, and to my mind attractive, word for a lavatory is a "dunny". Like so many uniquely Australian words it's derived from a British dialect word: "dunnekin" which means an outside privy, a compound of "dung" and "ken"(house).

English snobbery having ruined the words "toilet" and "lavatory" for a sensitive colonial such as myself, my preference is for either "dunny" or "PK".

### **Dunny etiquette**

These ruminations arise out of a small triumph in the Vicarage last week. The seat of our downstairs dunny had gone awry. It is one of those ingenious “slow closers” that encourage good dunny etiquette from male users. They render lowering the seat, after use, easy. Working out how to fix the sophisticated contraption involved a great deal of physical contortion, verbal confabulation, mental speculation and manual dexterity. The two of us discovered within ourselves ample reserves of all these qualities. The seat is again secure.

### **Exquisite anguish**

Another small triumph was learning to replace the light bulb in our venerable microwave oven. To get at the thing required taking off the whole covering of the machine and ordering a modern equivalent of a bulb no longer manufactured. Success. Cups of coffee boiling over can once more be viewed with exquisite anguish.

## **(472) “This and That” - 9 October 2022**

For four months, emerging from the Vicarage for our daily walk, we’ve been greeted by “pale as moonbeam” yellow, loveliest of lovely evening primroses.

### **Jacob’s Ladder**

I photographed this summer’s first blooms on June 13. Still they bloom, all through the night and well into the morning. Like foxgloves they build and climb their own Jacob’s ladder, higher and higher. Unlike foxgloves they defy the ladder’s inevitable end, and never run out of buds, producing what seems to be an endless supply of spiked new ones. Jacob’s ladder, connecting heaven and earth, a *new every morning* gathering of gloriously appraised angels right at the top, day after day.

### **Evening Primrose**

When once the sun sinks in the west,  
And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;  
Almost as pale as moonbeams are,  
Or its companionable star,  
The evening primrose opens anew  
Its delicate blossoms to the dew;  
And, hermit-like, shunning the light,  
Wastes its fair bloom upon the night,  
Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,  
Knows not the beauty it possesses;  
Thus it blooms on while night is by;  
When day looks out with open eye,  
Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,  
It faints and withers and is gone.

*John Clare 1793-1864*

### **Marmoreal legs**

My brother and I were confirmed, with a swag of African schoolboys, on St Bernard’s Mission, Rhodesia. The Bishop was Cecil Alderson, a scholarly man who, by conspiring to turn our Mission Station into an elite school for boys, instead of an ordinary one for girls mightily displeased my father. My own pettifogging, schoolboy mind recalls little about the bishop except that his legs, in shorts, were a startling, marble white.

We were prepared for confirmation by my father during our holidays from boarding school. It was an old fashioned preparation. Together we went through the Prayer Book Catechism and were made to learn it off by heart, word for word. “*What is your name? Andrew. Who gave you this name? My*

*Godfathers and Godmothers in my Baptism: wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven...*” Question and answer, after question and answer, by rote and also the Apostle’s Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer. The ceremony itself took place in a lovely, crumbling-walled, thatched roof church, with unglazed windows and geckos on its walls. It no longer exists, except in my memory.

One of my Confirmation presents was a small book by Bishop Walsham How, full of prayers and pious practices, with a running commentary on the Holy Communion Service and a pre-Sunday, Communion preparation exercise. This I practiced for some years until rampaging puberty drove me to a mercifully temporary, wishy-washy agnosticism. Here’s Wendy Cope on a confirmation present she received:

### **Present**

On the flyleaf  
of my confirmation present:  
‘To Wendy with love  
from Nanna. Psalm 98.’

I looked it up, eventually –  
Cantate Domino  
I knew the first two verses  
and skimmed the rest.

Thirty-five years afterwards,  
at evensong on Day 19  
the choir sings Nanna’s psalm.  
At last, I pay attention

to the words she chose.  
O sing unto the Lord  
a new song. Nanna,  
it is just what I wanted.

## **(471) “This and That” - 2 October 2022**

Tawny owls call so close to the vicarage that the double-glazed windows cannot totally buffer the thrilling sound from our ears. As soon as I hear them, I open wide the windows to rejoice, at full volume, in their eerie, haunting, melancholic call.

### **Mysterious owl calls**

One evening a week ago, happily at work preparing a roast vegetable tart in the kitchen, I was startled to hear a pair of owls call so loudly and clearly, it was as if the windows were wide open, though they weren’t. So loud, immediate and close were the calls it meant that the bird, or birds, were actually inside the house, or only just outside the back door. I opened the door quietly and peered carefully about. There was no bird to be seen, nor any more calls heard. I returned to my vegetable tart.

### **Owls in the kitchen**

A few days later, in the kitchen, but with Diana present this time, we were all of sudden transfixed by a similar loud, clear, call of a pair of tawny owls, again as if from inside the house. We looked at each other in wonder and then quietly opened the back door to peer out and about for a bird and mate who had to be very, very close. Again, there was neither sight nor sign of them. We went back inside, only to hear yet again a loud call, as if from my pocket, as indeed it turned out to be.

On my phone I have an app called *Chirp-o-Matic*, it identifies bird songs by comparing them to

recordings made in the wild. Its library contains the calls of most common and fairly common birds in Britain, they can be played at the touch of a finger. Mysteriously my phone sometimes turns itself on and activates the app, hence the kitchen call of tawny owls.

### **Cheese eating fish**

In 2004 we were loaned a cottage for a holiday on King Island in Bass Strait. It is about nine times larger than the island of St Helena, but not as mountainous. Its highest point is a mere 531 feet above sea level. Situated on the edge of the roaring forties and in the middle of a busy shipping route, its shoreline has wrecked over 60 ships with the loss of at least 2,000 lives. The island prides itself on a pristine environment and is notable for high quality cheese, beef, lobster, bottled rainwater and kelp. Its is home to under 3000 folk, many of whom are descendants of shipwreck survivors. While there we were given a whole, ripe brie cheese, as big as a cartwheel, of it my journal records: *it stinks like old socks marinaded in urine*. We ended up feeding most of it to gourmand fish off a derelict wooden pier.

### **Hospitality to strangers**

We flew to the island on a small plane, having been advised to look for our cottage owner's white Subaru four-wheel-drive station wagon in the airport carpark, its keys in the pouch between the front seats. We located just such a car, with its keys, but were surprised that it had a child's seat and some toys in the back, for there were no little ones in the family whose hospitality we were to enjoy. We drove off and made good use of the vehicle for our two weeks on the island. In the cottage there was a family photograph on the wall containing a reassuring picture of the car, though oddly with a different number plate. Before we left we filled its tank and gave it a good clean. A week or so after our return home we were told that we had been driving the vehicle of a perfect stranger for two weeks. There were no recriminations. The car's owner was as amused as we were apologetic. It was a lovely holiday on an interesting island. When we left I wrote in the visitors' book:

*Hospitality to strangers  
Opens hearts to joy and love,  
In boatsheds, homes or stable mangers,  
Down fall blessings from above.*

I can't find where it comes from. Did I write it myself? I think not, but I like it.

### **Birds galore**

Before going there I had phoned the local priest to ask if he fancied a break, and if so would take his church services. He jumped at the chance and so I ministered to a hospitable and friendly congregation. While on the island we identified 42 species of bird, but no owls.

## **Home**