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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (November 2022)



Farewell to Tristan da Cunha 1956

see (476) below

*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 **November 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>

(479) “This and That” - 27 November 2022

The gas man euthanised the Vicarage boiler and with a flourish wrote its death certificate a few days ago. It's as cold as a morgue as I write on this Monday morning and it will be for several days, for the boiler is to be replaced only on Thursday. Denied a scalding shower as an early morning raiser of spirits, it has taken a horn concerto by the obscure Peter Joachim Fick, a poem by R S Thomas and a pint of coffee to drop me onto the doorstep of heaven for a spell.

Neaum's Ark

On the twenty first of August in 1985 we arrived in Australia. Neaum's Ark put down its anchor in Ararat, a pleasing town on the slopes of an extremely modest antipodean Mount Ararat, in the diocese of Ballarat. A couple of months later our daughter Rachel was born and shortly thereafter, early in 1996, I was appointed Rector of the parish of Skipton, a village of about 600 people, 70 kilometres south of Ararat, 52 kilometres west of Ballarat and on the edge of some of the finest sheep farming country in the world. We owe that fine little parish a great deal. It Australianised us and we loved it there.

Incense junkies

The diocese of Ballarat was crazy. It's bishop was John Hazlewood, an astute, likeable, bright, charismatic and eloquent Anglo Catholic of Anglo Catholics. He also had some serious moral failings, among the least of which was an over fondness for whisky. We got on well together, it is easier to do so with sinners than saints, but he was too charismatic. He attracted a bevy of young and fanatical Anglo Catholic priests to a solidly middle of the road, rural diocese. Many of these young fellows attempted to turn their rural, reticent and phlegmatic parishioners into genuflecting incense junkies. The result was at best quiet resentment, at worst open conflict. I succeeded one such priest and so, as is my wont, continued the tradition I inherited, but lightly, with no proselytising zeal. We got on famously and had fun adapting to rural Australian life and ways. There were four country churches, with decent congregations and in Skipton itself a daily Eucharist.

The price of wool was then at an all time high and at a great Parish Fair we organised on one of the large local properties I won a merino sheep. I sold its fleece for \$50 and then swapped it for the carcass of a young Suffolk and so gained a freezer full of prime lamb. My best ever church fete win.

We balanced the parish books with the help of an “Op Shop,” run by an elderly and lovely man and wife and by regularly crawling under shearing sheds to dig and bag sheep manure to flog to gardeners in Melbourne. It was hard work, but we would make a day of it with a picnic lunch. Here are the first four stanzas of an eight stanza light verse I composed to mark the camaraderie and fun involved in this innovative church fund raiser

In Praise of Manure

Under a shearing shed shovelling muck,
Crouching and grunting and down on his luck,
An Anglican Rector discovered the way
To keep cash-hungry bishop and diocese at bay.

The offertory plate each Sunday was light,
But he didn't despair at the pitiful sight,
Or rant and harangue the faithful few,
He flopped to his knees, but not in a pew!

Under a shed he got down to his praying,
In sweat and in effort, in action not saying;
And so there were filled lots of offertory sacks,
Piles and piles, a great mountain of stacks.

This wasn't achieved by the Rector alone,
He didn't perspire and beseech on his own.
Parishioners too came to kneel in the dung,
To pray with their muscle, not with their tongue.

Pilgrimages back

I left the parish after only four and a half years to take on a larger one, Ararat, where we'd spent our first three months in Australia. Skipton, however, remained and remains very dear to my heart. It Ozzified and delighted us all. There have been many pilgrimages back.

(478) "This and That" - 20 November 2022

In my priestly life, up until now, the sadness at leaving a parish, has always been mitigated by the joy of arriving in a new one. To depart has been to arrive. Not so this time, full retirement from Boldre means swapping a stall and altar for a pew, a vicarage for my own abode and sermonising for being sermonised.

Fleur or Bucephalas

Parish priesting is a privilege and a joy. It is to be *pater* or *mater familias* to a church community, though that Latin term is best understood, and exemplified if its last syllable is strongly emphasised, namely: *as...ass*. Because an effective parish priest aspires to be more like old *Fleur*, our benign, lovable, Christmas Eve and Palm Sunday donkey, than *Bucephalas*, Alexander the Great's proud, wall-eyed and fearsome charger.

Having left my first parish in Zimbabwe and been stranded for three months in Cape Town, we at last sailed out of Table Bay for St Helena on the twelfth of August 1982, full of anticipation. Our mere 698 tonne vessel was called the *Aragonite*, it had been custom built for ICI in Glasgow, twenty years previously, to transport explosives in and around the North Sea. It heaved and rolled mightily in the Cape Rollers and only slightly less so all the way to the island, but after two days we began to enjoy it. There were four of us, me in one cabin with little David, Margaret next door with slightly less little Peter. We made up a third of the ship's complement of passengers and with the crew of twelve were a happy and jovial band.

An emerald set in bronze

Just under a week later, at about 4.00am, I was awoken by the sound of activity above our cabin and, going out on deck, was thrilled to see looming black in the distance our island home, for the next two and a half years. As day dawned, a pod of twenty porpoises joined us to roll and dive in our bow wave, only deserting us as we slowed down to anchor in the island's lee, off Jamestown crammed in its steep sided valley. A boat, with the island's bishop aboard, spluttered out to take us ashore. So began the shortest of all my parochial appointments.

In those days there were three parishes, each with its own priest, on a rugged island only six miles by ten, with a population, then, of around 6,000. The resident bishop's diocese included Ascension Island, 700 miles of empty ocean away. Our vicarage was situated 1,700 feet above sea level in the green part of an island that has been likened to '*an emerald set in bronze*'. Most of the rain is orographic and so the island's perimeter receives almost none, while the centre gets around 30 inches a year. Travelling to the island's centre entails passing, within the space of a mile, from harsh, brown, clinkered semi-desert to lush green pasture and mountains.

Napoleon and Hudson Lowe

The large and lovely vicarage, beautifully sited, was built during the time and possibly under the auspices of the Sir Hudson Lowe (1769–1844). He was appointed Governor of St Helena in 1815, specifically as custodian of Napoleon, about to be exiled there. Hudson Lowe was not a happy choice, he lacked tact and imposed all sorts of petty and unnecessary restrictions upon the infamous exile. Their

relationship proved stormy and controversial. However, if Hudson Lowe did indeed have anything to do with building the Vicarage, we Neaums, unlike Napoleon, were grateful to him..

As Vicar of the Cathedral I had four daughter churches to mind, three of them exquisitely sited, and I also conducted 30 Home Communion each month, many of them involving lovely walks to remote and beautifully positioned little cottages. It was an idyllic parish and job, but I decided, regrettably, not to renew my two and a half year contract. In part this was because the job seemed rather too easy, unchallenging and lacking in intellectual stimulation.

Gambling on success

So we left on the RMS St Helena. I'd been offered and had accepted a parish in the Diocese of Ballarat in Australia, but had first to return to England to arrange, with some difficulty our immigration to the Antipodes. We took a punt upon success, though, sending all our possessions, including the piano, direct to Australia!

(477) "This and That" - 13 November 2022

All Saints' Gatooma (now Kadoma) in Zimbabwe was my very first parish as an incumbent. I was six foot and half an inch when I arrived, with a fine wife called Margaret, a great big red beard and no children. We were there from 10 November 1977 to 19 August 1982. Four years and seven months, less than half the time I will have been at St John's, Boldre when finally we leave at the end of January.

Two South Atlantic islands

Departing Gatooma was more of a palaver than will be departing Boldre. Our reasons for leaving then had more to do with a deep desire and longing to relive the Tristan da Cunha experience than with any wish to spare our sons, Peter (4) and David (3), from growing up under the rule of nasty Mr Mugabe. He was Prime Minister at the time, he morphed into President only in 1997.

I had been a curate for three years at the Cathedral of St Mary and All Saints, Harare, before Gatooma. One of the Deans, Richard Cutts, had moved on to become Bishop of Argentina who, in those days, had oversight of the Falkland Islands. He offered me a post there if only the incumbent at the time declined to renew his contract. He didn't, and so instead of becoming Rector of Christ Church Cathedral in Stanley, I became Vicar of St Paul's Cathedral on the Island of St Helena.

Dreaming and scheming

To swap a parish, a country, and a continent for a remote island without an airfield, all before the days of computing and the internet, necessitated a great deal of forward planning and patience. I had been dreaming and then scheming to move to an isolated island for some years before eventually departing. This meant that I was able to accept a post on St Helena with time sufficient to give bishop and parish 9 months notice before leaving.

Goods, chattels and provender

We were allowed by law to take out of Zimbabwe a mere \$2000 and so had to reduce our meagre worldly savings to that amount. We were, however, permitted to take goods, chattels and provender and so stocked up well. Zimbabwean rectories were fully furnished, which meant there wasn't much of that bulky sort to take except a fine Steinway upright piano, given to us by my father. This was duly packed and shipped to the island. We bought a fine camera and sophisticated Swedish workbench, Margaret's mother, in Johannesburg, gave us a sitting room suite and we bought tons of durable foodstuffs difficult or expensive to buy on St Helena: coffee, tea, dried milk, flour, pasta, tinned hams and the like. Clergy salaries on the island were pitifully small.

Murder

My journal for 30 March 1982 reports: *What a to do this packing. Murder! However we must press on. There's a phart at Clan Transport - the manager - called appropriately "Woolhead", who on Friday promised me some regulation sized boxes - just a couple. Rang him two nights ago - he'd*

forgotten - rang him last night, his wife said she'd remind him - still no boxes..... On Tuesday in Holy Week, 6 April, the journal reports: Well, the packers have been and gone, badly packing our stuff so that we were well over the quotation. However, we are below \$4000 and so all should be well. We now live in a house delightfully bare and begin to relax...

Thwarted by Mrs Thatcher

We left at the beginning of May, by train, to stay a few days with Margaret's mother in Johannesburg. My journal for 20 May reports: *Have been having a restful time here, recording records from the library on tape, basking in warm daytime weather, unwinding. Then tonight a bombshell. The RMS St Helena, upon which we are booked, has been requisitioned by the British Government for the Falkland Islands crisis - where an invasion seems imminent! Hell and damnation! The SABC News said something about alternative means being found to supply St Helena. Where that puts us, heaven only knows. Certainly we won't get there when planned, if at all!!* We were stranded for three months in Cape Town, the loveliest of places to be so. The diocese housed us until berths were found, at last, on a little twelve crew and twelve passenger tub. A great, 2,199 nautical mile trip.

(476) "This and That" - 6 November 2022

Leaving a parish, like leaving one's family, is not easy. The most final of all my departures from a parish occurred when I was 10 years old. On February the 6th in 1956 we left, seemingly forever, the South Atlantic's Tristan da Cunha and its population of 360 persons.

A rockhopper penguin

It was a bright, clear day with a chilly, south-east breeze. We were not the only ones to leave. At 5am on the same morning, a rockhopper penguin, moulting on a bank behind our house for four weeks, gave a loud "Craak", and waddled off to the safety of the sea, sleekly re-feathered and with new, bright gold eye tassels,

Once up and dressed, my sister, brother and I were sent to have breakfast with friends while our parents finished packing our belongings for oxcart carriage to the beach. My mother then dashed around the island to say tearful farewells to any elderly folk unlikely to make it to the beach. My brother and I were sent with a parcel of clothes to Alice Green, who gave us a tin of sweets.

On her way back, my mother popped into the Church to say a few quiet prayers and ask God's blessing on our voyage. We had hitched a ride on a BP tanker called the *British Flag*. It was due at about 5.00pm and shortly after it was first sighted, at 3.30pm, we processed dolefully to the beach. At cottages along the way people came out to hug and kiss us goodbye. It was touching, even to young lads like my brother and me. "I felt a wreck by the time we got to *Little Beach*," records my mother's diary, "and then, there, were crowds of women and girls waiting on the black volcanic sand, and so more tears," but by then the ship was drawing closer and we were hurried into one of the longboats.

Up the rope ladder with ease

The tanker anchored about 2 miles out. Looking back from our longboat, we couldn't see the island's mountain peak because cloud had come down. The wind having veered to the NE and although the sea was calm it wasn't as flat as earlier in the week. As the captain had promised, the ship was low in the water and so the rope ladder presented no problem to any of us. Once aboard we were taken to Captain Cole's cabin and given tea and biscuits, before being shown our cabins, towards the ship's stern. They were surprisingly luxurious. One had three berths with a washbasin, huge wardrobes and easy chairs as well as an adjoining bathroom and lavatory. It was far bigger than our parents' bedroom on the island. Next door was a two berth cabin with a settee and wash basin. Both had windows not portholes.

After a hasty look round, we went back to the Captain's cabin and then, before long, it was time to leave. From the deck we gazed sadly at the settlement's houses dotted like tiny models under the towering "Base" mountain cliffs, and at our own tiny home for three and a half years, nestled by itself, close to the cliff. There were final goodbyes with more hugs, kisses and tears and once all visitors had descended to the longboats, the men stood up, waved and gave us three cheers.

Yellow nosed albatrosses

We steamed away at 6.15pm and were given a high tea almost immediately: ox tongue, fresh tomatoes, bread, butter, an orange custard and strong tea. The sea was choppy but not rough, though the 16,000 ton tanker swayed and rolled enough to indicate a heavy swell.

The steward brought us sandwiches and tea in our cabin at 7.45pm and then, through our window, we were granted a most wonderful view of Tristan. The 7,500 foot peak reared crisp and clear, with a narrow strip of cloud below, barely obscuring anything. To the west were the twin peaks of Nightingale island, pale blue in the distance. As the sun set the sky behind the Island became a blaze of glory: bright red bars and small golden clouds, Tristan burnished by molten fire. We could not have wished for a better last view. Yellow nosed albatrosses glided around and one sat stiffly on the water.

My parents thought they'd never see the islanders again. They did though. On leave from their Rhodesian mission station they met most of them at Calshot, after the islanders' volcano-enforced, temporary evacuation in 1961. I, with Diana, returned to the island for three weeks to live in the vicarage and take services in 2012.

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