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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (December 2022)



Photo: acknowledgement; <https://australian.museum/learn/animals/birds/yellow-tailed-black-cockatoo/>

Yellow tailed black cockatoo

see (480) 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 **December 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>

(483) “This and That” - 25 December 2022

The first mention of the irresistible parish of St John’s Boldre, in my Australian journal, occurs on 22 February 2013. A little later, well past retiring age, I resigned from Shepparton to cross the Pacific and Atlantic oceans by freighter. One took us through the Panama canal to Philadelphia, a second to Antwerp, whereupon we ferried to Dover, drove up the M20 to London and down the M3 to Pilley Hill. There, Diana and I, took up residence in Boldre Vicarage on 9 August 2013. It was an unusually fast appointment, thanks to an ingeniously concocted curriculum vitae, a compliant Bishop of Southampton and a decisive Neil Smart and Boldre PCC.

Slimehead

That 2013 journal entry goes: *...48 minute Skype chat to Neil Smart last night, after choir practice, he’s the incumbent of Brocklehurst in Hampshire and appears interested in appointing me to Boldre near Lymington, which has a lovely, ancient church, ... I have to send him a CV. All very encouraging because, one way or the other, it could be finalised by the beginning of May and how splendid to have somewhere to go directly, instead of applying for positions only on arrival...*

The journal then passes on to rather more important topics of interest: *Orange Roughy with potato cakes, home grown tomato, beans and courgette last night for dinner....* My journal entries, like those of my mother in her journals, provide an excellent record of all the meals I have enjoyed. *Orange Roughy* is a firm fleshed, delicious fish, also known as *red roughy*, *slimehead* and *deep sea perch*. Vulnerable to over fishing it is notable for its extraordinary lifespan, attaining over 200 years. We caught identical, or very similar, red-coloured, deep sea fish on St Helena, known there as *Bullseye*.

In exile

We loved Boldre Vicarage at first sight. Its barely tamed garden, secluded from neighbours and the road by dense oak, hazel, laurel and rhododendron, delighted us. For me it was particularly good to be back in the rural England I had left at the age of six and to which, until now, I had never returned. My year and a half teaching in England, in the early nineteen seventies, had been in London. For all the years spent abroad ways I defined myself as an Englishman in exile, it was good finally to be home, though now, nine years later, preparing to leave Boldre, I feel, happily, an Australian in exile.

What fun it has been

To someone of my ilk there could be no more satisfactory an appointment than Boldre to conclude a life of parish priesting. We are made for each other. A parish with the gumption to respond wholeheartedly to an uncouth colonial and promiscuously adjectival scribbler of a parson. To one unfashionably liberal theologically, unfashionably traditional liturgically, but blessed by that old fashioned and increasingly rare conviction that parish priests are servants of all and sundry, believers or unbelievers, saints or sinners, patricians or plebs. Even better has been the irrelevance that comes with age, it’s allowed your priest to disregard and ignore the diocese and its functionaries and to be content to be disregarded and ignored by them. Best of all, though, is to be married to a spouse as committed as myself, if not more so, to just this sort of parish priesting. What fun it has been.

An authentic church

I ended my homily at the recent funeral of a fine local identity, Ian Wild as follow: *The Church, this church, to be authentic, must be, has to be, a loving, forgiving community, and it is! It is! We meet regularly, not because we think God needs us to tell him he’s wonderful and that we love him, but because we do love him and because we find him in each other, that is, in community, in loving and forgiving each other.*

*I’m soon to leave Boldre after more than nine years here as a part of the St John’s community, I’ve loved being here and have **been** loved being here. It’s painful to leave, because we’re a family. We do indeed love each other, and although we know little if anything about life beyond life, life beyond death, one thing is for sure, it’s unlikely to be about angels plunking harps on clouds, or about pavements of gold and gates of pearl, but it will be, must be, a community of love.*

(482) “This and That” - 18 December 2022

I was inducted as Rector of St Augustine’s, Shepparton in late October 2003 and as priest in charge of St John’s Boldre at the beginning of September 2013.

Elementary mathematics

Elementary mathematics reveals that I spent 3,500 days in Shepparton and that I will have spent 3,438 days in Boldre by the end of January when my contract ends officially. However, in 2010 I took 6½ months leave from Shepparton and so, strictly speaking, I’ve spent 203 more days in Boldre, which makes my time here longer than anywhere else I’ve ever served. Well, well, well, an interesting statistic. We must have enjoyed Boldre.

I moved the 105 miles south west from Wodonga to Shepparton all on my own on 14 October and was inducted on the 17th. My family, Wodonga choir and many folk from Wodonga were in supportive attendance.

Margaret, Rachel and Elizabeth finally joined me only after Rachel’s school finals were complete. They arrived, with all our stuff, on the 1st of December. This meant that I got out of much of the packing, contentedly camping in a nearly empty Shepparton Rectory, with just my office equipment transported, unpacked and fully set up. Not a complete slouch, I did return to Wodonga after church on Sundays to help pack up.

Glittering with icons

Shepparton is a fine parish with a beautiful, terra cotta coloured, unglazed-brick church, just five yards from the Rectory. Outside our front door, facing the church’s south door, was a sasanqua camellia that seemed in flower for most of the year and to the right a large white mulberry tree that attracted brightly coloured rainbow lorikeets and, at night, large, squeaking flying foxes. I was particularly fond of the lady chapel, where each day I said the morning office and celebrated the Eucharist with assistant priests and a parishioner or two, and before which listened to a Bach cantata, read verse and said my prayers. It glittered with icons and was the cosiest of refuges, hallowed by a sand tray of devotional candles, usually with one or two alight.

Glass fibre cows and Rakia

The glittering icons were there, in part, because we had oversight of the local Macedonian Orthodox community. Shepparton is situated on a flood plain, at the confluence of the significant Goulburn river and the rather less significant Broken River. It has suffered from serious flooding in the past few months. The city has a population of around 60,000 and is an agricultural and manufacturing centre with glass fibre cows grazing on public spaces. It’s the hub of the Goulburn Valley irrigation system, one of the largest centres of irrigation in Australia. Most of the Macedonians were orchardists and as well as making their own wine they distilled their own fiery spirit, Rakia, with which I soon became well acquainted. Their funerals and weddings are far more colourful than ours and for the year following a funeral there were regular, small ceremonies at the graveside which involved censing the grave, prayers and the forming a cross on the ground beside the grave with sweetened, boiled wheat and poured wine, wheat being a symbol of eternal life, death and resurrection. These ceremonies ended with a feast of cold fried fish, olives and fetta cheese, home baked bread, little pancakes, spinach and cheese pastries, and a shot or two, or three of Rakia. When thanked with a handshake afterwards, a ten, twenty, or fifty dollar banknote was discreetly palmed from the chief mourner’s hand to mine.

A loving and cherishing community

While we were at Shepparton my wife Margaret was diagnosed with lung cancer on 23 February 2007. She died at home on 23 January 2009.

South African born, but English at heart, she would have loved Boldre. St Augustine’s, though, was the Australian parish in which she felt most at home and at peace. During her courageously borne illness the parish rallied around us superbly. It proved to be the loving, cherishing community that local

churches are called to be. Her ashes are in the memorial garden there, her name on the stone wall we helped design and erect. Half of my ashes, and my name, will join her. May she rest in peace and St Augustine's prosper.

(481) "This and That" - 11 December 2022

The parish of St John's Wodonga, in Victoria, was the first to require an interview, by a small group of parishioners, before offering the post to a priest. All my previous appointments had been made by myself in conversation with the bishop. Those were the days.

Sewage, drainage and worse

Wodonga is sited on the southern bank of the river Murray, not far below the mighty Hume Dam and is a pleasing 300 mile journey from Ararat. The interview took place on a bright and sunny day and, afterwards, I was taken for a drive round the town with several members of the interview panel. The most voluble of them had been involved in town planning for years and so I ended the drive far more knowledgeable about the town's innovative sewage and drainage system than about its demographics, religious life or economic vitality. My informant was delightful and his enthusiasm for sewage and drainage contagious, I was captivated. So it turned out to be more human shite than bull shite that sold the parish to me. Though doubtless it was bull shite that sold me to the parish..

A sickening fug

When we actually moved there, in 1996, cat shite too played a minor part. The long trip from Ararat was undertaken in our eight-seater Mitsubishi van, derisively nick-named "the vegie van" by the schoolmates of our children. It was packed to its roof with two adults, four children, boxes of fragile crockery, a sewing machine, bric-a-brac-all-sorts, several budgerigars and Twinkle the cat, confined in a cage she detested. Her revenge occurred 20 miles out of town. We arrived in a sickening fug of cat shite. Things could only improve. They did.

Wodonga has a population of over 40,000 and is something of a poor relation to Albury, on the other side of the river, in New South Wales. St John's Wodonga, is a modern building, as wide as it is long, and pleasing in its own way, with bright, abstract, stained glass windows and a fine large narthex which was used for social events, including meals, meetings and Scottish country dancing until, in my final couple of years, we put up a fine, spanking new hall, built in a very similar, A-frame style and called the *Dawn Richardson Memorial Centre*. For its opening I composed a ballad that begins:

*Adjacent to St John's, unique,
unlike any other,
This Centre, like a baby whale
slip-streams next to mother.*

*St John's now has her miniature,
an echo, shadow, clone,
Her architectural love child. She
no longer swims alone.....*

The parish was large enough to merit and afford a full time curate and during the eight and a half years I was rector we had three, all of them good and talented in very different ways. We looked after two country churches, one on the shore of Lake Hume, and the other just over the hills beside the lake. There was also another church in the town that we shared with the *Uniting Church*. They were busy times, but happy and rewarding ones. The Rectory and Church faced on to a double carriage road, with a beautifully treed median strip, and my little study's outside door opened into a carport open to the road. I had frequent drop ins of all sorts and types.

The study's most useful feature was the proximity of its phone to the outside door. I could curtail long phone calls by reaching outside to press the bell and say without fibbing, "Oh, someone's just rung

the bell.... I must be off.” We turned a window in the dining alcove into French doors, opening on to what became a lovely garden and, best of all, were a couple of orange trees that provided a glass of fresh, sweet, frost-chilled orange juice every winter morning for months.

A feisty parish

We left, after 8½ years to go to take on what became my final Australian parish, Shepparton, because the Bishop asked me to. I was one of very few theologically liberal, pro-women priests in the diocese and the healthily feisty parish of Shepparton, considered difficult by the bishop, was unlikely to accept any other sort.

(480) “This and That” - 4 December 2022

We moved to Holy Trinity, Ararat, in 1991. It’s a pleasing town on the southern side of a scenic ridge that to the north looks across to Australia’s rugged version of the Scottish Grampians. The town itself is about 55 miles west north west of Ballarat and is surrounded by very fine wineries. The quality of our local Communion wine was as good as it gets.

Home of the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos

Grape vines climb the posts of shop verandas in the town’s main street, which has a pleasing dog-leg kink in it. The fine bluestone church and substantial rectory are close to its centre. From the rectory kitchen window there’s a view, over the roof of a large supermarket below, and across the town to lovely *Mount Langi Ghiran* aboriginal for: *Home of the yellow-tailed black cockatoos*. The supermarket is built on land sold by the church to finance a parish hall, office and flat.

We arrived, still Poms, but now well adjusted to Australia from four and a half happy years of acclimatisation in Skipton. It was to prove the busiest time of my life. Thoroughly embroiled in the frenzy of Diocesan politics, I edited the diocesan paper, produced my own pew sheets, and parish magazine, formed and ran a church choir, was chaplain to two prisons, a large mental asylum, a hospital and several old age homes and I looked after and took services in the four churches of local villages round about. My four children were young and active and the church ran a lively youth club. All my thinking, writing and praying took place in the early, early mornings, much of it in the church’s tiny chapel, with a large, crudely carved and colourful representation of the Virgin Mary on the wall behind the altar:

On bitter cold and wintry mornings,
Under Mary’s eye,
Black-becassocked, hunched and cloaked,
A priest at prayer am I.

Outside the bluestone sweats cold rain,
The wind through tiles sifts
And inside, round the empty church,
It coldly curls and drifts.....

In 1990 my fine mother died in Brisbane and some years later my father joined us in Ararat to live in the curate’s house as an unpaid and popular assistant. He also sang bass, tenor or alto, as required, in the choir.

As well as a conventional prison in Ararat, there was also a forbidding, bluestone gaol for the criminally insane: J Ward. There I took regular Holy Communion Services in a pair of cells joined together to form a small and gloomy chapel with a tiny, stained-glass window to mark it as such. The congregations were small, six or seven beefy, tattooed lads, always with a couple of warders. My homilies needed to be colloquial, unscripted and flexible enough to allow for interjections, blown raspberries and sometimes serious, sensible questions. Most memorable of all was when a well muscled young man came forward to receive the sacrament and after his sip of wine, smacked his lips noisily and exclaimed with satisfaction: “Good tucker that! Knocks the demons out of yer”. As indeed it does.

A turncoat

The clergy of Ballarat Diocese were vehemently opposed to the ordination of women in those days. So was I, until I saw the light and turned my coat. Natural conservatives, tend to be suspicious of change, believing that “*where it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change*”. Much change, however, does eventually turn out to be necessary, hence the not infrequent need to turn one’s coat. Turncoats are deemed traitors by straight-coats. A new bishop sacked me as editor of the diocesan paper. I retaliated by producing a rival: *The Ararat Chronicle* in opposition to *The Ballarat Chronicle*, but I’d had enough, when offered a parish in a neighbouring diocese I was glad to accept and be gone. After six and a half years we were on the move again.

When I announced my departure a young girl in the congregation rushed from the church in tears. How sad! How gratifying! It turned out to be my daughters’ departure she was mourning, not mine.

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