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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (November 2014)**



***Ted Cannan  
Bishop of St Helena  
1979-1985***  
( See article 61 below)



***The Island of St Helena ( See article 61 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 **July 2014** 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>*

#### **(65) “This and That” - 30 November, 2014**

Waiting for us on our doorstep when we arrived home well after midnight last weekend was a perfect cauliflower and an exquisite cabbage. A gift from some delightful, expert gardener. Fresh, straight-from-the-garden cauliflowers are very beautiful. Peeling away robust, crisp, protective leaves to reveal the white, tightly furled, crinkled flower is an act of worship. To sink your teeth into a floret steamed to the perfection found in the narrowest of margins between too crisp and too soft, is heavenly. Thank you anonymous donor.

#### **Cauliflowers**

My father wanted my mother’s bouquet at their wedding to be just such a cauliflower, laced with violets. My mother would have none of it. She was no vegetable gardener.

One of my own failings as a gardener of vegetables is to see so much beauty in a

bed full of perfect vegetables that I find it all but impossible to violate that beauty by reaping them. My harvests tend to be overblown, past their best. Teresa Hooley celebrates cabbages thus:

### **Cabbages**

*If God were as ungenerous as man,  
He would make cabbages, to feed the kine,  
On some unbeautiful and heavy plan,  
Meet for mere beasts. But in his craft divine  
He fashions them, and colours them instead  
With gold and misty blues amid the green,  
Softly with purple, gallantly with red.  
He curves their leaves and traces veins between;  
Bejewels them with drops of rain and dew;  
Caresses them with wind, and, crowning boon,  
With lunar light transfigures them anew —  
Great silver roses beneath the autumn moon.*

### **Sometimes a light surprises**

I write this on a frosty, sunny morning. Although I rejoice in the sun I do love grey weather. So much so that I nurse a desire to settle for a while in the gloomy Aleutian Isles, am fascinated by Tierra del Fuego and tried very hard once to secure a job on the Falkland Islands. This love of gloomy and wild weather comes in part from having spent so many years in hot and sunny climes. Also because the sun is all the more welcome and intensely appreciated after days of gloom and damp, as William Cowper's lovely hymn attests:

*Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings;  
It is the Lord, who rises with healing in His wings:  
When comforts are declining, He grants the soul again  
A season of clear shining, to cheer it after rain.*

Cowper's hymn is set to a tune composed by Joseph Haydn's younger brother Michael. It is as lovely as the words. Joseph Haydn considered his brother Michael's devotional compositions to be superior to his own. I have just listened on Spotify to Michael Haydn's heart-stoppingly beautiful devotional piece: *Adoro te o panis caelice*.

### **Learning to crawl**

We are soon going to be challenged to be more generous to our church, in order to wipe out its alarming annual deficit. Such challenges are always unpopular. As is illustrated by the following extract from an American Southern Baptist sermon:... 'Before this church can do great things for God,' shouts the preacher, 'It's gotta learn to crawl!' 'Let it crawl Reverend! Let it crawl!' shouts back the congregation. 'And when it's learned to crawl,' the preacher continues, 'It's gotta learn to walk!' 'Let it walk Reverend!' responds the congregation, 'Let it walk!' Then fixing them with a glaring eye, the preacher shouts: 'And when it's learned to walk, it's gotta run, and we all knows a church can't run without MONEY!' There is a momentary silence, then the congregation shouts back as one man: 'Let it crawl Reverend! Let it crawl.'

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## “This and That” - 23 November, 2014

My younger daughter and I share a particular passion: eggs. We love them. Be they soft boiled, hard boiled, fried, poached, scrambled, coddled, devilled, curried or an omelette. If we happen to be cooking a meal together that involves boiling vegetables, we pop in a couple of eggs along with the vegetables, enabling a pre-dinner snack. A hard-boiled egg dipped in well peppered salt, lovely.

As a university student I worked on a farm in Rhodesia that provided hundreds of eggs each week to a bar called “The Chalet” in Salisbury (now Harare). Its mostly African patrons enjoyed hard boiled eggs with their beer. My daughter and I are not all averse to partnering our pre dinner egg with alcohol. Though in our case it is the glass of wine that is the mere accompaniment to the all important, even more enjoyable, hard-boiled egg.

### German Precision

It was my birthday last Sunday. Not a momentous one. I remain clinging to my sixties for another year, but the giving and receiving of presents, even in one so young, has lost most of the importance it had when I was a child. Which does not mean that I am at all unhappy to have the new biography of Philip Larkin sitting on my desk to tempt me away from this little article. I was also given a wonderful example of fine German engineering by Diana. It is a “*Clack Precision Boiled-egg Topper*”. It has a 70 gram stainless steel ball which, on a 16 centimetre shaft, takes 0.181 seconds to fall down the shaft, attaining a velocity of 1.77 metres a second. This exerts a force of 0.6867 Newtons on a stainless steel, bell-shaped cap placed over a boiled egg’s head. It is just the right amount of force to cut a perfect ring around the top of the egg without damaging the rest of the egg shell. The bell at the shaft’s end is perfectly shaped to grip the top of any sized egg. When the Clack is lifted away, the cut part of the shell comes away too, leaving a perfectly tinsured egg to be enjoyed. Oh what joy we have had with this wonderful implement, picked up for a song at the Bazaar in the Memorial Hall a couple of Saturdays ago. How many boiled eggs we have delighted in during these past few days.



As a boy on the island Tristan da Cunha I sampled penguin eggs and yellow-billed albatross eggs. The latter I greatly enjoyed, though my parents declared them unacceptably fishy. A single specimen filled a frying pan. The penguin eggs were less pleasing. We ate them boiled and the “white” was a translucent, very pale blue, the yolks a livid, garish orange.

### Isinglass

For the times of the year when the island’s hens went off the lay, we preserved eggs in the traditional fashion that was used in England right up to the nineteen fifties. We stored them in jars full of isinglass for up to three months, a substance that is bacteria-resistant and so helps thwart nasty organisms intent on penetrating the eggs shells, as well as preventing evaporation of the water content of the eggs. Interesting stuff is isinglass. It is obtained from the dried swim bladders of fish and is a form of collagen used more usually for the clarification or fining of wine and beer. Originally it was made

only from sturgeon, especially Beluga sturgeon, until William Murdoch, in 1797, invented a cheap substitute using cod, breaking the Russian monopoly. Wines and beers that still use isinglass, although acceptable to pescetarians, would surely be unacceptable to vegetarians.

Is the writer of an article like this, which has nothing to do with faith, hope, charity, God or Church, a good egg, a bad egg or a curate's egg?

## (63) "This and That" - 16 November, 2014

We have been reading the book of Proverbs during Matins for the past few weeks. I was delighted by a phrase to do with children in relation to their fathers. It prompted me to shoot off an email to my children as follows:

At Matins today, from the Book of Proverbs:  
*...and the glory of children are their fathers. (hem hem)*



Anyone who read and enjoyed the books about a 1950s prep-school boy, Nigel Molesworth, will know what I mean by "hem-hem". Nigel tells us that he is the "goriller of 3B, curse of st custard's which is the skool i am at.... The only good things about skool are the BOYS wizz who are noble brave fearless etc. although you hav various swots, bullies, cissies, milksops greedy guts and oiks with whom i am forced to mingle hem-hem."

*Nigel Molesworth*

### **Dixi Custodian**

At Matins and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer the Psalter is read right through every month. Each psalm has a Latin title derived from its opening words in the Latin Vulgate Bible upon which Miles Coverdale based his incomparable translation. These Latin titles fascinated me as a child and still do. Some of them have passed into general usage, having been set memorably to music innumerable times. Allegri's famous "Miserere" is Psalm 51. Handel's "Dixit Dominus" is Psalm 110. Oscar Wilde, among many others, has helped immortalise Psalm 130 "De Profundis". It is the title given to his famous letter written in Reading Gaol. That our modern prayer books dispense with these Latin titles as redundant is contemptibly unimaginative and small minded.

One of my favourite psalms is "Dixi Custodian", Psalm 39. Part of it has been set beautifully to music by Orlando Gibbons: "*Behold thou hast made my days as it were a span long: and mine age is even as nothing in respect of thee; and verily every man living is altogether vanity.....*" How true, how true, and yes indeed, our beauty does "*consume away, like as it were a moth fretting a garment...*"

### **Fretting**

I love the picture of moths "fretting" a garment. It combines two probably unrelated meanings of the word "fret". The primary meaning comes from the Old English "fretan": to devour or consume, and moths certainly do this to garments. As do the years to mankind's beauty. However, anyone who has contemplated the ravages of moths on

a favourite jersey will have noticed that they often eat only the fluff, and so lay bare the parallel ridges or ribs of tightly wound wool, that is, frets similar to the ridges or frets on the fingerboard of a guitar. This usage of the word fret dates from about 1500 and is of unknown origin. Then of course “to fret” also means to worry, and as such begins Psalm 37, another favourite: “Noli aemulari”, “*Fret not thyself because of the ungodly....*” Good advice, though the reasons given for not fretting are more questionable: “*for they shall soon be cut down like the grass: and be withered even as the green herb.*” Hmm.

To return to moths, one of the unforgettable, acrid smells from my youth is that of moths and other nocturnal insects incinerating themselves on the Tilley lamps of our home on an African mission station in the late nineteen fifties and early nineteen sixties. That memory triggers another of a lovely little poem and prayer by the Irish novelist and poet James Stephens. Only four feet ten inches in height he was known affectionately as “Tiny Tim”:

### **A Prayer for Moths**

<i>When</i>	<i>— That the small creatures,</i>	<i>To sin.</i>
<i>— At the mid of moon,</i>	<i>Terrified and blind;</i>	<i>My light</i>
<i>At end of day —</i>	<i>The gold and silvern moths</i>	<i>is innocent!</i>
<i>My lamp is lit,</i>	<i>Of lovely kind,</i>	<i>Grant</i>
<i>Grant me a boon,</i>	<i>Do not whirl to my taper,</i>	<i>— That it may be</i>
<i>I pray,</i>	<i>Nor, therein,</i>	<i>Harmless,</i>
<i>And do</i>	<i>Die, painfully,</i>	<i>And helpful,</i>
<i>So order it</i>	<i>And bring my light</i>	<i>And remarked of Thee.</i>

## **(62) “This and That” - 9 November, 2014**

What do I know about the two World Wars, or about war at all? Born in 1945 I have never ever been called to bear arms. I have lead a contented and fulfilled life, largely untroubled by violence. What I need to do on Remembrance Sunday is keep silent. Let others speak.

Three folk far better qualified to speak than me are Charles Causley, Vernon Scannell and Sir Fabian Ware.

### **The butcher bird**

Charles Causley was a working class Cornishman who joined the Royal Navy in 1940 and rose to the modest rank of Petty Officer. An ordinary, unheroic but dutiful serviceman he did his quiet best, but was more than glad to be demobbed. He then trained to be a teacher and grew into a very fine and much loved poet. His verse is full of exotic and arresting imagery as well as of the sea and naval slang. I have recently read his biography. One of his most chilling poems to do with War uses the beautiful song of the Australian butcher bird as an image for the allure of recruitment:

Under the willow the willow  
I heard the butcher-bird sing,  
*Come out you fine young fellow*  
*From under your mother’s wing.*

*I 'll show you the magic garden  
That hangs in the beamy air,  
The way of the lynx and the angry Sphinx  
And the fun of the freezing fair.....*

.... caught in the snare of the bleeding air  
The butcher-bird sings, sings, sings.....

all the way from Syria and Iraq, still, today.

### **The deserter**

Vernon Scannell's verse I have admired for years. My daughter gave me a fine biography of him by James Andrew Taylor for my birthday. A highly respected Second World War poet he was also a drunk, wife-beater, professional pugilist and a serial deserter from the army. He spent more than 300 days on the run or in prison during four years of active war service from 1941. His poetry is very fine indeed.

His most famous war poem is "*Walking Wounded*". It describes injured soldiers "*stragglng the road like convicts loosely chained, dragging at ankles exhaustion and despair.....*" He goes on to say that remembering them after eighteen years

....in the heart's throat a sour sadness stirs;  
Imagination pauses and returns  
To see them walking still, but multiplied  
In thousands now. And when heroic corpses  
Turn slowly in their decorated sleep  
And every ambulance has disappeared  
The walking wounded still trudge down that lane,  
And when recalled they must bear arms again.

### **The triumph of Everyman**

Sir Fabian Ware's vision, insight and energy lie behind the formation and amazing work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. His story is told in "*Empires of the Dead*" by David Crane, a fascinating read.

Against daunting objections from the privileged, wealthy and powerful, Ware was able to extend near total democracy and equality to the war dead. Dead bodies up until this time had always been seen as belonging to the next of kin and burying one's own dead as a fundamental human right. In the First World War, thanks to Fabian Ware's work, all the fallen, aristocrat and peasant, commissioned officer and trooper, hero and coward were to be granted equal treatment. The wealthy and privileged were refused the right to repatriate their dead.

For the first time in our history it was not only the great who were to be especially honoured and memorialised. To give your life in the service of your country, eagerly or reluctantly, heroically or unheroically, as a noble or a commoner, that in itself was sufficient.

This was a moving and hugely significant triumph of "Everyman". To experience that triumph and be moved by it, all that is needed is a visit one of the great, immaculately kept, devastating European war cemeteries.

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## **“This and That” - 2 November, 2014**

My life as a priest has been spent in small dioceses. One of them, the Diocese of St Helena, is possibly the smallest in the world. In those days, one bishop, four priests and four parishes, to serve a population of less than 6000. The Bishop could walk to each parish in an afternoon. Except for one, a long swim to Ascension Island, 700 miles away. It was the best run diocese of any I have been a part of. The bishop in my time was Ted Cannan, the finest and most discriminating of fellows. After all, he appointed me his Archdeacon. An honour only marginally less illustrious than the Archdeaconry of Nanky Poo.

### **On the periphery of things**

In all my dioceses I have known my bishop well. Worse, I have been well known by him. Moreover I played, or imagined myself to play, a fairly important part in the life and governing of those dioceses. Even in the first, the Diocese of Mashonaland, I was appointed to the Bishop’s Senate as a newly ordained young priest.

To become a semi-retired, “House for Duty” priest in a huge diocese like Winchester is very different. It is to be marginalised, pushed to the periphery of diocesan affairs. The movers and shakers in the diocese are younger than me. They do not know my name. They have no idea how bright, capable, significant, and interesting I am. My ecclesiastical stage has contracted.

### **What a dust am I raising**

This is a blessing. As we grow older our world should contract. Of necessity we learn first to potter and then to totter instead of to strut or swank. Cutting a dash, making an impact, self aggrandisement, being noticed, all cease really to matter. The wisdom that one desires and sometimes acquires with age has all to do with the diminishing of the ego. It is lovely.

I am already wise enough to wonder if ever I did cut much of a dash or make much of an impact. A favourite proverb is an old Roman one that I suspect has some application to myself: *The house fly sits on the axletree of a chariot and says, “My, my, what a dust am I raising.*

### **Fragments of Queen Jezebel**

To the annoyance of an Australian bishop I once criticised the diocese’s selection of ordination candidates by printing the following imaginary conversation between a bishop and a candidate: “What part of the Bible do you like best?” asked the bishop. “I like the New Testament best.” “What book in the New Testament?” “The book of Parables, bishop.” Would you kindly relate one of these parables to me?” “Certainly. Once upon a time a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves and the thorns grew up and choked him. He went on and met the Queen of Sheba, and she gave the man a thousand talents of gold and silver and a hundred changes of raiment. He got in his chariot and drove furiously. When he was driving along under a sycamore tree, his hair got caught in a limb and left him hanging there. He hung for many days and many nights, and ravens brought him food to eat



and water to drink. One night, while he was hanging there asleep his wife, Delilah, came along and cut off his hair and he dropped and fell on the stony ground. It began to rain and it rained forty days and forty nights. He hid himself in a cave and then went on and met a fellow who said, 'Come in and take supper with me', but he said, 'I can't come, for I have married a wife.' The fellow went out into the highways and byways and compelled him to come. He went on and came to Jerusalem and he saw Queen Jezebel sitting high up in a window and she saw him. She laughed at him and he said, 'Throw her down out of there' and they threw her down. And he said, 'Throw her down again,' and they threw her down seventy times seven and of the fragments they picked up twelve baskets full. Now whose wife will she be in the day of judgement?"

The Bishop responded, "Never have I heard such a marvellous and compelling conflation of the Biblical narrative. You have a more complete view of the Bible than those who come from the Theological Colleges brandishing a Bachelor of Theology degree! I will ordain you next Saturday. Well done."

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