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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (January 2015)



Anglican Cathedral Liverpool with the Roman Catholic in the background (See article 73 below)

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*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 **January 2015** 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>

(73) “This and That” - 25 January, 2015

We visited Liverpool last week. An odd place to visit in mid winter. We stayed there for a couple of nights, in the heart of the city, in the beautiful flat of a friend.

Tracey Emin

It is an impressive city to visit and walk around, even in a bitter wind. Liverpool Cathedral, apparently the largest in Britain, I found austere and impressive, but I hated its pink, neon, Tracey Emin “installation”. My daughter, whom we visited in Oxford on our back took me to task for this. Perhaps justifiably. I am an extremely prejudiced old git. The bright pink neon “installation” reads, in Emin’s scrawl: *‘I felt you and I knew you loved me.’*

Since coming home I have read a not unappreciative interpretation of it by Catherine Pickstock. A theologian and thinker whom I admire, she ends her piece thus: *To say whether this installation “works” or not would be beside the point. Its singularity is—fortunately—not the self-celebration or mere illustrativeness of “art.” Rather its iconoclastic intrusion of pure electrified writing genuinely reveals—the absence of the icon, the absence in the contemporary market of any revelation, in the heart of a space dedicated to the revelation of love.*

In spite of that I still consider the “installation” to be a trite and garish banality. You can intellectualise pretty well anything into acceptability. John Donne worked philosophical and poetical wonders with a mere flea. William Blake convinces us that a world can be seen in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower. In pink neon though? Not for me.

Two great bishops

The Roman Catholic Cathedral was also interesting to visit, though nowhere near as overwhelming. Exactly half way between the two Cathedrals, in Hope Street, is a bronze statue of two influential and unifying Liverpool religious leaders, the Anglican Bishop David Sheppard and the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Derek Worlock. The statue was commissioned in 2005 by *The Liverpool Echo* and paid for by the people of Liverpool. It marks the two bishops’ life and work.

The sculptor was Stephen Broadbent, mercifully not Tracey Emin. The work consists of two fifteen feet high bronze doors decorated with symbols and newspaper headlines from the two men’s lives and ministry. Through the open doors a viewer can see both cathedrals, signifying the unity the two church leaders strove to achieve. The two bishops were dubbed, affectionately “fish and chips”. They were always together and never out of the papers.

Keeping in touch

We have an extensive Contact List of the names and addresses of over three hundred individuals for St John’s and St Nicholas’. This is a heartening number, even if many rarely come to church. We assume that all have some sort of connection with and regard for our parish churches. Phone numbers, street addresses and email addresses are constantly being updated.

We intend, either this week or next, to begin sending to all those whose email addresses we have, a copy of the weekly Pew Sheet. Those who do not wish to receive it will be asked to let us know immediately. They will be removed from that mailing list. This will be a way of keeping in touch with what is happening at both churches. The current pew sheet can always be read on the web page, but stays up for only one week.

Becoming Australian

After living in Australia for twenty eight years I decided to apply, at last, for Australian citizenship. It proved to be remarkably easy. After submitting my application forms and certified copies of this, that and the other, I was phoned after but a few weeks by a friendly man with a strong Indian accent. He told me that all was well and that I would soon be receiving a letter from Canberra informing me of the approval of my application. He went on to ask me why I had waited so long to apply and I told him that it was a mixture of idleness and inertia. I then asked him if I would have to undergo the Australian Citizenship Test. He replied, "Oh no, there will be no need, we respect senior citizens far too much for that!"

In the interests of authenticity we are thinking of hanging corks round the eaves of St John's for our Australia Day celebration next Sunday.

(72) "This and That" - 18 January, 2015

There are few home environments as stimulating as a vicarage. Even for pets. A worldly wise budgerigar called *Henry The Second*, for example.

Massaging bald heads

Although vicarage-born and so well used to the friendly foibles and frailties of parishioners, *Henry's* early background was less than happy. He had been damaged in the nesting box of our garden aviary, bullied by his siblings, We brought him into the house a little cripple. He had a crabbed walk and was unable to fly properly. In vibrant vicarage company he blossomed into rude and perfect health.

His cage was no cage at all. It was a refuge, its door almost always open. He had the run or flight of the house. Lying on my bed reading a book alone in the Vicarage, I would suddenly hear little chirps. Desirous of company *Henry* was wandering disconsolately down the passage, calling for me. Walking idiosyncratically sideways, he would scuttle through the door with a chirrup of triumph and fly up happily to perch on my head. His little claw-footed little dance of triumph on my bald head was strangely satisfying. An avian massage. I was often seen about the parish with little olive-green and white guano gems bejewelling my head.

Death's vacuum

Life in a vicarage can be hazardous. *Henry the Second* had some traumatic experiences. The first was being pounced upon by *Twinkle* the cat. This was very early on in his vicarage life. *Twinkle* was an "outside" cat, but sneaked in though the back door, saw *Henry the Second* on the floor, and leapt at him instinctively. I took him from her jaws uninjured. The doughty little youngster did not even need trauma counselling.

His second brush with death was at my hands. I was vacuuming the lounge, sucking up his tiny, pie-bald pebble droppings from a favourite perch on the back of a chair. Fool-hardy *Henry* flew to the perch to see what I was up to and was sucked in. Fortunately not head first to disappear up the hose and into a dusty bag. He was simply transfixed grotesquely against the nozzle, sideways. I was able to pull him off undamaged. Again he needed no trauma counselling. It was I who did. I am still haunted by his reproachful look as he was held there helpless.

Maternal Solicitude

His third brush with death was nearly fatal. When greeting a parishioner at the front door *Henry* decided to perch on my head. Something caused him to take fright and he over-flew me out of the door. The Vicarage was on a busy road. We looked for him everywhere and had all but given him up for lost when we spotted a pathetic, flapping and fluttering little clump of feathers in the gutter. It was *Henry*. He had been hit by a car. I picked him up, a sad and seemingly all but dead little bird with glazed and blood-shot eyes.

My wife's solicitude and tender care in his extremity not only pulled him round, but augured well for me if ever I was injured or severely ill. She cradled him in her hands for the whole day, wrapped his cage with towels, warmed it with hot water bottles, hand-fed and watered him and so brought him through a long convalescence to full, perky and happy health.

His luck ran out in the end. He was trodden on and killed. Trauma counselling all round. He is fondly remembered for his risk-taking, carefree, happy and humanity-loving life.

(71) “This and That” - 11 January, 2015

A portly bishop, “fat and well-liking” to use the felicitous terminology of the psalmist, enjoyed being invited to dinner. When asked to say grace he would cast a critical eye up and down the table. If there was a multiplicity of wine glasses, a dazzling array of cutlery and a sideboard creaking with laden tureens, he would begin his grace with the words: “Munificent and bountiful God.....” If the table was devoid of wine glasses, sparing of cutlery and showed little promise of bounty, he would begin: “For the least of these thy mercies O Lord.....”

How many people still say grace before meals? We do at the Vicarage. If either of us has succumbed to temptation and snatched a taste of the meal before grace has been said, then the one who has not succumbed does the honours. The words I say are those we used in our home when I was a child. If I feel something a little more substantial is called for, I use the grace we said at my theological college in South Africa. I do not favour improvisation, chiefly for fear of long-windedness.

Even when eating in restaurants I like grace to be said. Unostentatiously, quietly and briefly, of course, but with a robust sign of the cross made. I love to observe this from strangers at other tables and assume that fellow Christians will likewise be heartened to see it from me and mine.

Why say grace?

There are two main reasons why I still say grace before meals. The first is that Jesus of Nazareth did so. As you might have gathered I am a huge admirer of him. The second is because our world is awash with resentment, envy and dissatisfaction, and so to be of a grateful disposition is to be light on a hill. Saying grace is an acknowledgement of the sweet givenness of things. The more of this the better.

For special occasions I love writing a grace in verse. I have done so for wedding feasts, Shrove Tuesday pancake feasts, fish and chips nights, harvest festival suppers, significant birthday parties and more. Mary Bates celebrated her ninetieth birthday recently with a splendid party. I was honoured to compose and say the following grace for the occasion, with much love and great pleasure.

Grace for Mary Bates On the Occasion of Her Ninetieth Birthday Celebration

Mary....

*The birthdays come, and come again
Until you're four score years and ten,
Remaining brisk, petite, bright-eyed,
Taking all within your stride.*

*As once you did as Mary Bell,
Cunard's purser, pride and belle,
Sailing oceans, stopping hearts,
A lady of so many parts.*

*Devoted wife, a splendid mother
To first a son and then his brother,
Then two girls, a major feat,
A balanced family now complete.*

*For years St John's has known your worth,
Loyal, able, down to earth,
Church of England to the core,
The sort I love, and pray for more.*

*And so with love and admiration,
We're gathered here in celebration,
Our voices, glasses, hearts to raise
To you and God in thankful praise.*

*Thank you Lord, for all she is,
For parties, friends, perzazz and fizz,
For laughter, wit, good food and wine,
And lives that friendships intertwine.*

*For this, for that and so much more,
For blessings past and more in store,
For all your bounty on us poured,
Thank you, thank you, gracious Lord.*

.....Amen.

(70)

“This and That” - 4 January, 2015

I cough, splutter and am full of cold. It is necessary to look elsewhere than into my own mind for inspiration. To a review of a scholarly biography in *The Spectator* of Ben Jonson by Ian Donaldson (OUP). I must order a copy from the library.

A face like a warming pan

Jonson, the London based 17th century poet, playwright, critic and much more “.....*was a bruiser, intellectually and physically. He was poet, soldier and brickie. That was when poets were hard. He once walked to Edinburgh and back for a bet. He put his own shoulder to the wheel when scenery needed rotating for his masques. Towards the end of his life he weighed 20 stone. Ugly bugger, too; he was described by his sometime associate Thomas Dekker as ‘a staring Leviathan’ with ‘a terrible mouth’ and ‘a parboiled face ... punched full of oilet holes, like the cover of a warming pan....’*”.

An irresistible book surely. It has the space to list the items on the menu that was rustled up by the Merchant Taylors' Company to welcome Prince Henry into their ranks in the summer of 1607 “...*Swans, godwit, shovellers, partridges, owls, cuckoos, ringdoves, pullets, ducklings, teal, peacocks, rabbits, leverets and a great turkey... along with 1,300 eggs, three great lobsters and 200 prawns, salmon, salt fish, plaice, sole, dory, carp and tenches, sirloins and ribs of beef, mutton and lambs' dowsets, neats' tongues and sweet breads, and to conclude the evening, figs, dates, prunes, currants, almonds, strawberries, gooseberries, cherries, pears, apples, damsons, oranges and quinces. Twenty-eight barrels of beer were provided to slake the diners' thirst, together with more than 440 gallons of wine.*”

What a wonderful thing it is to leave the contemporary world (just as full of interesting folk if only one knows where to look) in order to lose oneself in that mad, bad, religiously tumultuous, fascinating seventeenth century!

Pessimism

Some years ago, in Australia, Diana and I listened to an interview, on our car radio, with a very articulate monologist, author and actor called Mike Daisey. During the interview he chose to play a song that was so unutterably pessimistic, we were transfixed.

There is something compelling about pessimism. My mother's favourite Old Testament Book was Ecclesiastes, a splendidly pessimistic, hopeless read, and I too love it for that. “*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun....*” It is necessary to acknowledge the futility of things. Relentless optimism is wearying because it is only half the picture.

The song that transfixed us is “*No Children*”, sung by a band called “*The Mountain Goats*”. The second half goes:

*I hope I cut myself shaving tomorrow
I hope it bleeds all day long
Our friends say it's darkest before the sun rises
We're pretty sure they're all wrong*

*I hope it stays dark forever
I hope the worst isn't over
And I hope you blink before I do
And I hope I never get sober*

*And I hope when you think of me years down the line
You can't find one good thing to say
And I'd hope that if I found the strength to walk out
You'd stay the hell out of my way*

*I am drowning
There is no sign of land
You are coming down with me
Hand in unlovable hand*

*And I hope you die
I hope we both die*

On reading and considering the lyrics later, some of the shock was taken away by the realisation that it is the song of an alcoholic. So rather than being sheer, unutterable, mind-blowing pessimism, the song has possibly a didactic purpose, namely to depict alcoholism in such a way as to pass judgement on it. If so it is a pity. Listened to when suffering from a bad cough and cold it seemed to get things about right.

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