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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (March 2015)



**St John the Baptist Boldre
February 2015 Snow**

*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 **March 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>

(82) "This and That" - 29 March, 2015

A king on a donkey! Now that really is a king. On a donkey. Hee haw. Hee haw. Not in a Mercedes Benz, Rolls Royce or Cadillac. On a donkey! Hee haw. Hee haw.

Hee haw, hee haw

A king with nowhere to lay his head. On the move. A wandering nomad. No palace, no court. Hee haw. Hee haw. No royal estates, grouse moors, or stately home. Hee haw. Hee haw. No old school tie from Eton, Harrow or Winchester. Just the local synagogue school. Hee haw. Hee haw.

A king with no police force, air-force, army, navy. Just twelve unarmed, buffoons, yokels, local lads. Hee haw. Hee haw. A King with no queen, no family, no heirs, no fortune. Hee haw. Hee haw. A King with no throne except a cross to hang from not sit on; to writhe on not relax on. To die on. Hee haw. Hee haw.

A King with no crown, except a twisted brace of thorns, jewelled with beads of his own blood. Hee haw. Hee haw. A king on a donkey. Hee haw. Hee haw. A King with no sceptre, save a broken reed, no followers, save a fickle rabble, no future but a sentence to death and with a God who will forsake him. A King on a donkey. Hee haw. Hee haw.

An ass on a donkey. Risible, cracked, loony, absurd, asinine. An ass on a donkey indeed. A clown on a donkey. A donkey on a donkey. Hee haw. Hee haw.

Hosanna, hosanna

Yet a king with more authority and more influence than any king who has ever lived. Hosanna, hosanna. With more wisdom, more devoted and reverential subjects than any monarch in history. Hosanna, hosanna. Kings, princes, governors, emperors, have bowed the knee before him. Hosanna, hosanna.

Men and women have died for him, have loved the diseased, the useless, the dying, the sick for him. Hosanna, hosanna. Have gone to America, Africa, China, India, Australia for him. Have gone to death for him. Hosanna, hosanna. Have given hundreds of pounds, thousands, millions of pounds to him. Hosanna, hosanna.

They've composed B Minor Masses, fugues, cantatas, oratorios, chorales of surpassing beauty for him. Hosanna, hosanna. They've built soaring cathedrals and exquisite parish churches for him, Hosanna, hosanna. They have given their hearts and their lives to him. Hosanna, hosanna.

I have given my heart to him. Hosanna, hosanna. I keep trying to grab it back and to have my cake and eat it, to worship both him on his donkey and King Mammon in the Rolls Royce. Hee haw, hee haw.

Hosanna, hee haw

But in Holy Week, I walk the way of the Cross. Gaze and ponder upon, enter imaginatively and emotionally into the drama of the King on a donkey. I defer to his asinine and clownish authority. Not to that of President, Prime Minister, policeman, headmaster, bank manager, bishop, but to the authority of the Christian God. So weak, so daft, so asinine. So lacking in greatness and yet so great. Hosanna, hosanna. Hee haw. Hee haw.

The two cries are synonymous. Hosanna Hee haw. Hosanna Hee haw. To the Son of David who walks this week to his cross, his throne.

(81) "This and That" - 22 March, 2015

There is something satisfying about a good insult. Especially if it is directed at someone else. My father passed on a memorable one to his children. It is drawn from his Derbyshire youth: *lend us thee feace to go rottin' wi'* (lend us your face to go rapping with).

Never admit the pain

We live in an age of complaint. It is a veritable industry. Television cameras focus upon pained, "hurting", miserable people in nearly every news bulletin. Far too many of them appear to flaunt and parade their pain and hurt. Especially those who demand "closure" and compensation. I writhe in embarrassment for them. How much more preferable is sweet reticence:

*Never admit the pain.
Bury it deep.
Only the weak complain.
Complaint is cheap.
Cover thy wound.
Fold down its curtained place.
Silence is still a crown,
Courage a grace.* (Mary Gilmore)

The bastard

Samuel Beckett, the lugubrious writer of sombre, pessimistic plays that are exciting and bracing only to intellectuals and would be intellectuals, did say a few fascinating things. One of them was: "*God doesn't exist, the bastard!*"

That is the sort of atheism I appreciate. If God doesn't exist he ought to. Faith, belief and church, as known and experienced by me, are beautiful. If for any reason I had to give them away it would break my heart.

Artificial insemination

As we gear up for the joys of another season of vegetable gardening, I am reminded of my last parish in Australia. There we had to hand-pollinate our courgettes each year. I think that this was because the local bees, dazzled by the plants' great, vulgar, yellow trumpets, would buzz their benign entrance, only to find that they were crawling with little ants. Pollen-deprived and angry, they buzzed off before formic acid dripping pincers fastened on to their little tootsies.

A good parson needs to be a jack of all trades. I am an expert on the artificial insemination of courgette plants.

Faith and Doubt of John Betjeman

An old friend has just sent me a delightful book: *Faith and Doubt of John Betjeman*. Betjeman is a man after my own heart. He dearly, dearly loved the Church of England. Although he could effectively satirise it, he did so just because he loved it dearly.

I too love the Church of England. I am an idolatrous Anglican. While most of my colleagues profess to being surer of God than of the Church, it has always been the other way round for me. I sense something of the same in Betjeman. He resisted all the

blandishments of clever friends to become a Roman Catholic, after his wife had converted. I love the following:

From “Septuagesima”

*There may be those who much resent
Priest, Liturgy, and Sacrament,
Whose worship is what they call ‘free’,
Well, let them be so, but for me
There’s refuge in the C. of E.
And when it comes that I must die
I hope the Vicar’s standing by,
I won’t care if he’s ‘Low’ or ‘High’
For he’ll be there to aid my soul
On that dread journey to its goal,
With Sacrament and prayer and Blessing
After I’ve done my last confessing.
And at that time may I receive
The Grace most firmly to believe,
For if the Christian’s Faith’s untrue
What is the point of me and you?*

(80) “This and That” - 15 March, 2015

I do not buy newspapers. I speed read them on the internet instead. The *Guardian* balanced by the *Telegraph* most usually, but with a paddle now and then in the *Independent*. Not the *Times*. The Murdoch press demand a subscription of me that I am disinclined to pay.

On the nose

On religion, more thoughtful, interesting good sense (though often critical) is to be found in the *Guardian* than in the *Telegraph*. However, the comments from readers that follow such *Guardian* articles are almost always dismissive, sneeringly contemptuous and insulting. This supports my contention that among the large proportion of *Guardian* readers who are trendy and university educated, atheism is now the default position. The best of atheists are not so nasty though. *An atheist*, says Simone Weil, *may be simply one whose faith and love are concentrated on the impersonal aspects of God*. Anyone at all who exemplifies the love, charity, compassion and forgiveness enjoined upon us by sweet Jesus of Nazareth is a fellow traveller and friend.

There is at least one *Guardian* reader who redeems them all though. Rowan Williams. He was the preacher on the BBC’s Sunday Worship last week. In his sermon he made a lovely analogy, likening being made “in the image of God” to looking at our own image in a mirror.

Our image “is there because we’re there, looking at it. And so when God makes human beings ‘in his image’, he looks at what he’s making and sees his own beauty and generosity reflected back to him. When he looks at us and we look back, that’s when the secret becomes clear: he asks us to mirror

him, to reflect the way he acts and the way he sees. So when we look away from God, we stop seeing things or people truthfully. We see them as if they had nothing to do with God - because we've cut ourselves off from God. We see them as raw material for our projects and ambitions; we don't see the dignity and the beauty."

The Service commemorated the coming together, in 1945, of the Christian churches to respond to the plight of the millions suffering in a devastated, traumatised Europe. This coming together led to the foundation of Christian Aid, Oxfam and the Ecumenical Refugee Commission. In such a context the sermon was illuminating and inspiring. I would be nowhere other than in the Christian fold.

An interesting atheist was the modernist poet Wallace Stevens. Much of his verse is too abstruse for an idle dog like me to bother with, but not all. In the following little verse, the last of *Six Significant Landscapes*, he suggests that there is more to reality than can be found by way of rationalism:

*Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses --
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon --
Rationalists would wear sombreros.*

A Swindling but witty politician

In the run up to a general election all politicians pall. It is good to remind ourselves of exceptions. Like, for example, Horatio Bottomley (1860-1933). He was a financier, journalist, editor, newspaper proprietor and swindler as well as a Member of Parliament. It is sweetly ironical that a swindler like him should have founded the Financial Times. I revere him for a single witticism. When sewing mailbags in prison he was visited by a friend who said, "*What, sewing Bottomley?*" To which he replied, "*No, reaping.*"

Wanted one donkey

We call gobbledegook "*double Dutch*". Our best definition of a donkey is "*a horse translated into Dutch*". Yet how admirable the Dutch and how lovable are donkeys. The friendly donkeys who join us at on Palm Sundays and at Christmas are not available for this Palm Sunday. Any alternative donkeys please step forward.

(79) "This and That" - 8 March, 2015

Mystification can be creative. It is a mistake to ensure that everything is understandable to children.

Mondegreens

I once asked a confirmation class to write out any prayer they knew by heart. Most of them fell back on the first verse of Charles Wesley's *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look*

upon a little child. Instead of writing the next line as pity my simplicity, several put pity mice and plicity. Although *plicity* is nonsense, it does make more sense to pity vulnerable little mice than one's own simplicity.

The children's mistake is called a mondegreen, a word coined by an American writer called Sylvia Wright. Her mother used to read ancient ballads to her, and the last two lines of the first verse of a favourite she heard as:

*They hae slain the Earl o' Moray,
And Lady Mondegreen.*

The correct reading is: *They hae slain the Earl o' Moray,
And laid him on the green.*

Mondegreens are most satisfying if they seem better than the original.

Church services have proved a rich source of mondegreens. Two Christmas carol examples: *Get dressed ye merry gentlemen* and *Barney's the King of Israel*. From the Twenty Third Psalm comes *Surely Good Mrs. Murphy shall follow me all the days of my life...* and from the hymnal: *Gladly my cross-eyed bear*.

Rejecting the apple

An all but penniless exile from Bob Mugabe's Zimbabwe, living an idyllic priestly life on the Island of St Helena, I became friendly with a young doctor. He possessed an early computer. I learned from him of all the wonders of word processing. Fascinated I set my heart on one. In about 1986, living an idyllic priestly life in rural Australia, I scraped together money and courage enough to buy one. It was not an Apple, in those days a less assured competitor to its alternatives. A fellow priest, whom I heartily disliked, trumpeted Apple's superiority, so I plumped for Microsoft. I have remained faithful ever since.

I write this article on a new machine. Making the transition yesterday, downloading old programs and copying over huge files was brain-scrambling. As disorientating as a shot of electromagnetic convulsive therapy. All is well now. I write in tentative delight.

Declaration of dependence

As we get older, so we grow more dependent upon others. It is unwise to resent this. William Henley's famous poem *Invictus* ends:

*I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

These sentiments are dangerously arrogant. None of us is totally independent and in control of our destiny. Nor should we want to be. Our dependence upon those we love is to be cherished. So to our dependence upon God, if we are Christian. No man is an island entire of itself. Bah to independence. How much more perceptive is the following poem by the fine Scottish poet Robert Crawford.

Credo

*As a candle-flame believes
in the speed of light
I believe in you.*

*As the shoelace of glass
believes in the full grown eel
I believe in you.*

*As Perth in Australia
believes in Perth in Scotland,
As an old hand's vein
believes in a baby's wrist,*

*Since what we cannot speak about we must,
As worlds have done, still do, will do, I make*

*For you, to you, in you, now and through this
My declaration of dependence.*

The poem is personal rather than political. Nonetheless, put that in your pipe and smoke it Alex Salmond!

(78) "This and That" - 1 March, 2015

It is pathetic and boring to complain, but my back is playing up. I type standing, my keyboard perched on an empty wine rack.

Organ Recital

In a recent and perceptive article on hypochondria in the Spectator, Theodore Dalrymple tells of a friend who having reached the age at which minor aches and pains are to be expected, found himself enumerating them to a friend of much the same age and likewise liable to such aches and pains. They decided that on meeting, each of them should have five uninterrupted minutes of 'organ recital'. Once it was over, the subject was forbidden. They found to their surprise that their litanies of woe sounded ridiculous even to themselves. They started to laugh at their ailments, and felt much better for it.

Our obsession with health, safety and security, says Dalrymple, (which have replaced faith, hope and charity as virtues) is not proportional, except possibly inversely, to risk or threat. The hypochondriac is not assuaged by statistics that show that his generation is the healthiest that has ever lived, or that death does not lurk in every food and every product and every situation. In the absence of a transcendent purpose in life, staving off death becomes all-important. Hypochondriasis, then, is in part a religious or philosophical problem.

Astonishing the brickwork

There have been some beautiful dawn and evening skies lately. There was a pale, lemon-coloured morning sky a few days ago. Particularly lovely when viewed through the silhouetted dense zig zag, higgledy-piggledy twig tracery of the Vicarage's leafless oak trees. It brought to mind an early verse by Philip Larkin:

Coming

*On longer evenings,
Light, chill and yellow,*

*Bathes the serene
Foreheads of houses.
A thrush sings,
Laurel-surrounded
In the deep bare garden,
Its fresh-peeled voice
Astonishing the brickwork.
It will be spring soon,
It will be spring soon --
And I, whose childhood
Is a forgotten boredom,
Feel like a child
Who comes on a scene
Of adult reconciling,
And can understand nothing
But the unusual laughter,
And starts to be happy.*

Sclerotic

My computer, a venerable but good laptop, is ill. Empathetic hypochondria compels me to diagnosis. It is sclerotic. It suffers from clogged circuitry. No matter what program I am using it keeps jamming. A sign reads: “not responding”. I have to walk round the study fuming for a minute or two until it becomes responsive again. An electronic equivalent of Warfarin is called for. Or is it time for euthanasia and the purchase of a new machine?

The Eighteenth Camel

A certain Arab had three sons. When he died, he left in his will instructions about dividing up his property among them. Everything was quite straightforward except for the camels. Of these there were seventeen, and the will said that half were to go to the eldest son, a third to the middle son, and a ninth to the youngest. The sons had no more success than you or I would have done in dividing 17 by 2, 3 or 9 and ending up with non-amputated camels; so finally in desperation, they went to a neighbour, an old friend of their father's, and asked his advice. The neighbour said: “I have a camel. I will lend it to you, and you will find that it will come out alright.” So he did; and, of course, once they had 18 camels, it was simple enough; the eldest son took half, that was 9, the second a third, that was 6, and the youngest a ninth, that was 2, making (and this is the point) 17 camels in all. The neighbour then took his own camel back, and all was well. (*This comes from a sermon by John Austin Baker who makes out a good case for Jesus being the eighteenth camel.*)

Hocus Pocus

Larry La Prise, the man who wrote the song “The Hokey Pokey” died peacefully at the age of 93. The most traumatic part for his family was getting him into the coffin. They put his left leg in, and then the trouble started.

Home