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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (August 2015)**



**Near Cambridge, *Les Coquelicots* (See article 100 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 **August 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>*

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## “This and That” - 30 August, 2015

I am unlikely ever to be caught in a tattoo parlour, consulting an astrologer, reading the Mail, Mirror or Sun, tweeting, listening to rap, or watching Jonathan Ross.

### Fish fingers

Up until two weeks ago I would have added eating fish fingers to that list. To our shame, however, Diana and I have twice recently eaten and enjoyed them.

It was all to do with catering for the likes and dislikes of a house full of visitors. One and a half packets of fish fingers, originally bought for visiting small children, had been left in our freezer. We rarely throw food away.

For the most part the imminent arrival of visitors is an excuse for adventurous shopping sorties. Extravagance is justified in the name of hospitality and generosity. Instead of judging a bottle of wine purely on its price, account can be taken of its appearance, and provenance. An economical cut of meat is disdained in favour of a double rack of Welsh lamb. Bland cheeses are snubbed in favour of England's very best. The delicatessen counter at Waitrose is lingered over with fond intent.

Should visitors happen to be vegetarian, extravagance is not enough. Imagination is called for as well. Vegetarian haggises are surprised out of blandness. Baked to a crisp brown and served with a medley of roasted vegetables and a spiced gravy they are good eating. Thickly smeared with a pungent mushroom, garlic, olive and lime paste and wrapped in rough puff pastry they are turned into most acceptable vegetarian haggis Wellingtons.

Once visitors depart the relics of extravagance and munificence litter the fridge and freezer to be enjoyed at leisure. Among them fish fingers. Fried crunchily crisp and eaten with homemade sauce tartare, slow roasted cherry tomatoes and fried potatoes as well as with gem squash and beans straight from the garden, how good they are. Not as fish though. It is crisply fried, luridly coloured, coagulated breadcrumbs that are so good.

### Mackerel and tuna

I love fish. It is something I share with Jesus of Nazareth, I like to think. He had a way with loaves and fishes. His alfresco breakfast of charcoal-barbecued fresh fish on the seashore, in the company of his dear fishermen friends, is one of the loveliest of resurrection stories.

I enjoyed just such a breakfast myself once. Before dawn, on the island of St Helena, we had been fishing for mackerel in the island's lee. Kept alive in the tank of our fishing boat they were to be used as bait for tuna. As the sun rose we motored out to the tuna fishing grounds in a slight swell. Otto, the captain of our boat, took some of the fresh mackerel and dexterously beheaded and gutted them. He then fried them to perfection on a small paraffin stove enamelled with grease and cockroach saliva. Lightly sprinkled with vinegar how delicious they were. Fish, fishermen, common endeavour, warm companionship, an unutterable sense of well being and natural beauty. Eucharistic. As Roy Campbell perfectly captures in a poem I've aired before:

### Mass at Dawn

*I dropped my sail and dried my dripping seines  
Where the white quay is chequered by cool planes  
In whose great branches, always out of sight,  
The nightingales are singing day and night.  
Though all was grey beneath the moon's grey beam,  
My boat in her new paint shone like a bride,*

*And silver in my basket shone the bream:  
My arms were tired and I was heavy-eyed,  
But when with food and drink, at morning-light,  
The children met me at the water-side,  
Never was wine so red or bread so white.*

A very fine and generous local fisherman brought us a lobster and crab, a week or so ago. Lobsters I am reasonably proficient at dealing with. The crab was another matter. But what fun we and our houseful of guests had in making a mess of it! On hearing about this another kind and lovely person presented me with a dressed crab as a gift. Two acts of kindness. Eucharistic. Lovely. And the next crab will not be messed up!

## **(103) “This and That” - 23 August, 2015**

I was a supply teacher in the Borough of Ealing in the early seventies. It was enough to turn anyone to God. I put up with it for about a year and a half.

### **Wild colonials**

Most of the teachers I stood in for were having a nervous break from their impossible pupils. I never ever quite lost control of a class, but it was a close run thing at times. A trained teacher of English, I “taught” art, technical drawing, typing, maths, geography, French, never English.

One of the nastiest students was a plump Greek Cypriot boy with the surname *Hercules*. It was pronounced unclassically as a two syllable word to rhyme with “rules”. He rushed into my first art class, picked up half a dozen paintings from my table and ripped them into pieces before my eyes. Where is he now, I wonder? In gaol, murdered, or a Greek Orthodox priest?

A student I remember with more pleasure was a pretty West Indian girl. Observing my arm, as I leant over to correct her book, she said, *Ooh Sir, you aren't arf 'airy!*

London school staff rooms were less than welcoming. Supply teachers in those days seemed to be disdained by conventionally employed teachers. Perhaps with good reason. Most of us were wild colonial boys and girls. We were in London to have a good time, our supply teaching more mercenary than vocational.

### **Finding the way back and forward**

Not for me though. I was in the process of rediscovering God. Isolated from my Rhodesian family and friends, I had time to brood and think. I began to pray seriously once more and to read a little theology with the assistance of the local library. I then had a remarkable and life-changing epiphany. This helped me realise that if I was to remain a teacher it would need to be of pupils who valued being taught. So I obtained a job on St Vincent in the Windward Islands. Providentially this fell through. So I wrote to the Bishop of Mashonaland about being ordained.

He arranged for me to attend an ACCM conference. I was selected and accepted for ordination in Woking, England. I went for theological training to Grahamstown, South Africa. I was deaconed and priested in Mashonaland, Rhodesia.

### **A Johnny do it all**

As I look back on forty years as a priest, I now see that I was made for the job. Not because of any particular merit, but because I happen to be a “Johnny-do-it-all”. I am a Jack of all trades, if master of none. This is just what a parish priest needs to be, or used to need to be, in the rural settings where I have exercised my priesthood.

Not only because over the years I have been called upon to be a bit of an architect, builder, plumber, carpenter glazier, gardener, farmer, fisherman, marriage guidance counsellor, cook and peacemaker, as well as a sort of writer, editor, teacher, versifier, philosopher, choirmaster and visitor of prisons, hospitals and asylums.

But far more importantly because to be genuinely a Johnny-do-it-all, a Jack of all trades, is willy nilly to be interested in pretty well all and everything that anyone does. Is to be able to enter imaginatively into anyone and everyone's pastime or occupation and so to engage with them, take them seriously and relate to them.

Throughout my ministry my opening gambit with strangers is almost always to ask them what they do, and then to be genuinely fascinated by their account of it.

In my first parish one of my more troublesome and fanatically godly parishioners managed the local sewage farm. A truly interesting job, upon the subject of which we were far more able happily to dwell than upon God. I once introduced him to the visiting son of a fellow parishioner who stuck out a friendly hand to him and said, "Thomas Jones, C.I.D." To which my troublesome parishioner replied wittily and without a second's hesitation: "Andy Smith, S.H.\*.T."

## **(102) "This and That" - 16 August, 2015**

A bald head, like a lawn bowling ball, needs careful maintenance. Unless regularly oiled it becomes dry, flaky and all but irresistible to exploratory, scratching fingers. A finger-nail ravaged head is not a pretty sight.

### **The best of aphrodisiacs**

After my shower each morning I polish up my own bald head with *CoQ10 Repair*. This is a Canadian cleansing milk to which Diana introduced me. It purports to smooth wrinkles, cleanse, hydrate and support "cellular renewal". Furthermore, and immodestly, it commends itself for *safe, effective, certified, natural skin care without synthetic fragrances, phthalates, harsh sulfates or parabens*.

That is all rubbish I am sure. Margarine, butter, lard, olive oil or even engine oil would serve just as well. Except, that is, for their scent. A head buzzing with flies or wasps would be unpleasant. A head whiffing enough of engine oil to attract the likes of Jeremy Clarkson, with a propensity to punch you in the face, would be downright dangerous.

I was a teacher of English in Salisbury, Rhodesia, when I first became aware of impending baldness. One sunny Saturday morning I was squatting on the touch line watching the under fifteen rugby team I inexpertly coached, when one of the reserves walked past. He looked down upon my blonde and luxurious curls and said, "Oh Sir, you are going bald". I nearly threw him a Jeremy Clarkson punch, but it was the truth. It presaged, I imagined, an end to romance and to the admiration of women.

It took me some years fully to appreciate that intelligent women find wit a better aphrodisiac than good looks and an ability to make them laugh more desirable than physical perfection.

### **Never mock a bald man**

Hair is important in the Old Testament. If you desired to give your life, or part of it, to God you could become a Nazirite. This meant taking a special vow, a part of which was to drink no alcohol and to refrain from cutting your hair. Because of its inexorable growth, hair was seen as a symbol of life itself. At the end of your vow you cut your hair and offered it to be symbolically burned on the altar.

Samson was a Nazirite for life. All the shenanigans with Delilah and his loss of strength when she cut his hair is symbolic of a falling away in his relationship to God. It was not his hair that gave him strength. It was his relationship with God expressed in his Nazirite vow.

Once blinded and in captivity he came to his senses, began to live his vow again, and to find God, all symbolised in the regrowth of his hair. Restored in his relationship with God, he triumphed mightily in his death.

Never mock a bald man of God. One of the most horrifying stories in the Old Testament, rarely if ever read in church, is about a group of young boys who mock Elisha, on his return from seeing Elijah's apotheosis. They jeer: *Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!*" And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys.

### **As wayward as a butterfly**

As wayward as a butterfly I too often flit from task to task and back, instead of completing the first before tackling a second. I also think tangentially, shooting off at all sorts of angles to all sorts of conclusions. Hence my pleasure on discovering the following verse by Robert Graves:

#### **Flying Crooked**

*The butterfly, a cabbage-white,  
(His honest idiocy of flight)  
Will never now, it is too late,  
Master the art of flying straight,  
Yet has - who knows so well as I? -  
A just sense of how not to fly:  
He lurches here and here by guess  
And God and hope and hopelessness.  
Even the acrobatic swift  
Has not his flying-crooked gift.*

Graves comments: *scientists fail to understand that the cabbage-white's seemingly erratic flight provides a metaphor for all original and constructive thought.* I am comforted.

## **(101) "This and That" - 9 August, 2015**

I downloaded *Windows Ten* last week. It did not go sweetly. I had to call in my Australian guru and son Peter to help identify and deal with problems. It took us hours.

I love my computer. Not to goggle at, but through. To have to focus on the thing itself in order to fix its problems is exasperating. It is a window, a door, a means to an end, not an end. "*A man that looks on glass, on it may stay his eye, or, if he pleaseth, through it pass, and then the heaven espy.*"

As I write I look up. Not at my window but through it. I espy a throng of lovely poppies and a female blackbird and chaffinch grubbing in the gravel. On the feeders are a coal tit and a greater spotted woodpecker.

At my desk much earlier today, freshly showered and with a pint mug of Moroccan spiced coffee to hand, I also looked up. Not at my computer, but into and through it. First to Australia, by courtesy of their Broadcasting Corporation. All seemed normal in the land of Oz: the media tearing at the reputation of its leaders and politicians.

### **Naked of nude?**

I then turned with relief to what is always my second site of choice: *Arts and Letters*. From there I was prompted to a review of a book by Mark Haskell Smith in *The Literary Review* called: *Naked at Lunch: The Adventures of a Reluctant Nudist*. This, by Michael Bywater, was a perfect

mix of wit and perception. I read it to Diana before we said matins:

*Naked is what you are when you haven't got your clothes on. Nude is what you are when you have, with intent, taken your clothes off. Nakedness is a state; nudity is an upside-down metonym. It invites the very sexual speculation it claims to obliterate.....*

Says Bywater of the book's author:

*He looks, he reports, he blushes from time to time; mostly, he worries about sunburn and skin cancer. The book is, in part, a hymn to Factor 50. But the subject's a tough nut. Where once our ancestors were covered in woad, we are covered in confusion.....*

I would not want to buy the book, but would love to read it. A visit to the local library is called for. Why not an internet library though? Surely there can be devised a means to download books temporarily, in a way impossible to pirate?

### **Burberrys**

Michael Bywater is described by Suzanne Lowry in *The Young Fogey Handbook of 1985* as:

*...[a] 30-year old Punch columnist and former trendy who once worked in films, [at one time he] made bold to criticise Burberrys for the inferior quality of their product - 'the trench coats are not what they were in the days of the trenches'. Burberrys riposted that indeed they could live up to their past, and made Bywater a coat to the 1915 design devised by Kitchener and Burberry - complete with camel hair lining to protect a gentleman officer's flesh on the field.*

So before matins began last Tuesday, we moved on from nudity and Michael Bywater, to a discussion of Burberrys, trench coats and fashion. The computer is indeed a window, a door, a means to an end, not an end. "A man that looks on glass, on it may stay his eye, or, if he pleaseth, through it pass, and then the heaven espy."

### **God in the ordinary**

That quote from George Herbert about looking on glass sums up my personal understanding of life and art as being sacramental. Auden, writing of William Blake, says:

*[he] heard inside each mortal thing  
Its holy emanation sing.*

Someone else said of the artist and poet David Jones .....*he proceeded from the known to the unknown, rediscovering the sacred in the ordinary.* That is it. God is to be seen, if at all, in the ordinary. It is a matter of perspective. The aim of Christians, with William Blake, is

*To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.*

## **(100) "This and That" - 2 August, 2015**

Out of my study window I view a fine clump of poppies. Not the showy, fancy versions, but the corn poppy, the common poppy, Monet's lovely *Les Coquelicots*.

Most are a little past their best, full blown and carefree. They grow on a mound that last year was all ivy, weeds and bramble. This year, after serious attention, it is covered in lavender and marjoram as well as the poppies.

### **Seeds succeed on stony ground**

Some of our poppy seed fell onto the forecourt. So here and there, triumphing over tyre-packed gravel, stand tiny, upstart poppies, no more than four inches high, blazoning their colour. Splendid little fellows, they appear not at all resentful of their larger cousins.

Nonetheless they bring to mind the *tall poppy syndrome*. An affliction more talked of and prevalent in Australia than England. There, in the early nineteen thirties, Jack Lang, a populist Premier of New South Wales described his egalitarian policies as *cutting the heads off tall poppies*. A sentiment shared, I suspect, by Jeremy Corbyn.

Even then it was not an original image though. The first century Roman historian Livy tells us that *Tarquin the Proud* once deliberately walked into his garden to sweep his stick across all the flowering poppies, cutting off the heads of the tallest. This was to illustrate, for his son's benefit, the advisability of killing off prominent and influential people likely to challenge a ruler's authority.

Egalitarianism is all very well, but as someone wise once remarked, you cannot add to the stature of a dwarf by cutting off the legs of a giant. I am happy to have tall poppies in my garden as well as small. Is it the Gospel though that causes me to admire and delight most in the upstart, four inch high, gravel-defying, colour-blazoning midgets?

### **Tierra del Fuego at last**

In 1982 I applied for the job of Anglican priest on the Falkland Islands. At that time it was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of the Argentine. I had been his curate when he was Dean of Salisbury, Rhodesia and so knew him well. He told me that the job was mine should the incumbent at the time not renew his contract. He did. I went instead to the Island of St Helena.

The desire for lonely South Atlantic islands arises from three and a half years on Tristan da Cunha as a boy. In Diana it arises from accompanying me on a return trip to Tristan three years ago, but also and more importantly, from her five and half happy years on St Helena. One of those years coincided with mine. It is a coincidence that has had consequences for Boldre. Had it not occurred we would not be here.

Last week we booked a holiday on the Falkland Islands. In November we fly to Punta Arenas for a few days, during which we hope to tread Tierra del Fuego, and then to the Falklands for three weeks. On the way back there will be a couple of days in Santiago before we return to the Christmas rush here in Boldre and Pilley.

### **Cricket**

An English born Australian citizen, I support Australia at cricket in England, and England when in Australia.

Last week we dined with a delightful relative of Diana's who not long ago was a distinguished member of the women's England Cricket team. I doubt if she would fully appreciate this little masterpiece, written in less enlightened times by one of my favourite poets, Vernon Scannell:

### **Wicket Maiden**

It is a game for gentle men;  
Entirely wrong that man's spare rib  
Should learn the mysteries of spin.

Women should not be allowed  
To study the subtleties of flight;  
They should bowl underarm and wide.

Or, better still, not bowl at all,  
Sit elegant in summer chairs,  
Flatter the quiet with pale applause.

It shouldn't happen, yet it did:  
She bowled a wicked heart break - one,  
That's all. God help the next man in.

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