

[Home](#)

BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (September 2015)



Guinea Fowl and chick - Zimbabwe (see article 105 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 **September 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>

(108) "This and That" - 27 September, 2015

During our early walk the other day, Diana remarked on the beauty of sunlit dew on mown grass. Every single blade was topped by a bright, tiny rainbow-jewelled orb.

On the nose

Miserable fellow that I am, I responded philosophically rather than ecstatically. "Why" I asked "does a rainbow-jewelled dewdrop on a blade of grass seem so much more beautiful to us than a rainbow-jewelled dew drop on the end of someone's nose?"

Good question. We ruminated on it for a hundred yards or so. Does our perception of beauty depend almost entirely upon context? Is beauty more subjective than objective. Can beauty bear being freighted with too much significance and meaning?

Mercifully we were then distracted to more frivolous speculation by a field of sheep. As is my wont, I bleated companionably to them. They regarded me with disdain except for one small lamb who appeared to call back. They were vigorously eating lush grass. "Is dew soaked grass tastier to sheep than dry?" I asked. Another good question. It led us on to the pros and cons of gravy.

Ben Jonson

The poet Ben Jonson touches on the subject of beauty in the following moving excerpt from an Ode he wrote in memory of a friend who died at the age of 20.

*It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be,
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sear:
A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night;
It was the plant, and flower of light.
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures life may perfect be.*

Jonson was a wild, mocking and cynical fellow who courted controversy. In 1598, while in Newgate prison charged with manslaughter, he converted to Catholicism. It was a particularly dangerous time to do so. War with Spain was expected and the persecution of Catholics was intensifying. He remained a Catholic for twelve dangerous years. One of his plays was banned for popery and he was interrogated several times. He forsook Catholicism when Henry IV of France was assassinated, supposedly at the instigation of the Pope. He returned to Anglicanism with characteristic panache. He drank a full chalice of Communion wine to emphasise his rejection of the Catholic rite in which the priest alone receives the wine.

Interestingly Jonson was buried upright in the north aisle of the nave in Westminster Abbey. Why upright? Probably for reasons of space. A smaller space was cheaper.

Anglican chant

I love Chichester Cathedral. Not least its Arundel Tomb, turned so memorably into verse by Phillip Larkin. Last Tuesday, the 15th of September, I discovered something more about it to love. David & Helen Woodgates invited me to accompany them to sung Evensong there.

The appointed psalm on the fifteenth day of each month is number seventy eight. Incredibly the choir at Chichester sings all of its seventy three verses. For lovers of Anglican Chant, like the

Woodgates and me, this is a treat beyond telling. It takes about fifteen minutes, with fascinating changes of chant. A lovely experience, followed by a fine meal in a local hostelry.

Prosperity versus adversity

Jesus said, *blessed are the poor*. Although many of us look back on our days of relative poverty with great nostalgia for being very happy, few take him seriously. Francis Bacon makes Jesus' point elegantly thus:

Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without comforts and hopes. We see in needle-works and embroideries, it is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a sad and solemn ground, than to have a dark and melancholy work upon a lightsome ground: judge therefore of the pleasure of the heart by the pleasure of the eye.

(107) "This and That" - 20 September, 2015

I look back on my past parishes with great pleasure. The first was All Saints' Gatooma, Rhodesia. I remember fondly baby chameleons hatching in a carton in my study, summer thunderstorms, swarms of flying termites, blazing bougainvillea, flaming flamboyant trees, sitting daily in an airy chapel, listening to bees humming frenziedly in a great gum tree outside its open window, two new little sons in a twin pushchair and lovely parishioners. I don't remember fondly Parish Church Council Meetings.

Two little daughters

The second was St Paul's Cathedral, on the Island of Saint Helena. I remember fondly the heavy epiphytic growth on tree branches upon which delicate, fluttering fairy terns nested, the gentle call of ground doves, the scent of wild ginger flowers in the cathedral chapel, the sea's horizon so high in the sky, fishing on the rocks, the birth of my first daughter and again, lovely parishioners. I don't remember fondly Parish Church Council Meetings.

The third was Christchurch Skipton in Victoria, Australia. I remember fondly satisfyingly blistered hands from digging sheep manure to keep the church solvent, power-hosing lichen off the roof and walls of the pretty church, Marg Smith's mellifluous voice in the choir, cutting wood for winter fires, George Lines' outrageous jokes, the happy cries of our final little daughter and lovely parishioners. I don't remember fondly Parish Church Council Meetings.

Lhangi Giran and Scottish Country Dancing

The fourth was Holy Trinity Ararat, Australia. I remember fondly the view of Lhangi Giran mountain from the kitchen window, accomplished duets in the choir from Wendy and Marg, walks in the bush with the youth group, wood-cutting expeditions with amiable parishioners, monthly parish barbecues in local beauty spots, the splendid Mrs Crebbin and holidays in her house by the coast. I don't remember fondly Parish Church Council Meetings.

The fifth was St John's Wodonga, on the River Murray in Victoria, Australia. I remember fondly the voice of Claire Moodie in the choir, Scottish Country Dancing, blossom on the crab-apple tree in front of the Vicarage, paving a patio in the back garden, fresh frost-chilled orange juice from the Rectory's prolific trees, al fresco meals, the arrival of Pippin our Jack Russel, and lovely parishioners. I don't remember fondly Parish Church Council Meetings.

Lorikeets, fruitbats and cockatoos

The sixth was St Augustine's Shepparton on the Goulburn River. I remember fondly daily

Eucharists in the lovely Lady Chapel, exquisite rainbow lorikeets and ugly fruit bats in the white mulberry tree outside my study, biking to the hospital each week, defending our walnut tree from sulphur-crested cockatoos, homeless Geoff an irascible but remarkable regular worshipper, and lovely parishioners. I don't remember fondly Parish Church Council Meetings.

Parish Church Council

What will I remember most fondly about Boldre? Possibly, for the first time ever, Parish Church Council meetings! What dazzling affairs they are. We all regret that they occur only times a year. How fortuitous, then, that we need a little augmentation. A new Treasurer from next year. A new Gift Aid officer now. Please offer your services. And would anyone like to oversee next year's Parish Fete to relieve Graham Edmiston who is now churchwarden?

The most effective way of giving to the Church

The P.C.C. strongly recommends the Diocesan administered *Parish Giving Scheme*. Diana and I signed up almost a year ago. Not only does this mean that when we are in the Falklands St John's will continue to get our church giving, it also means that Gift Aid comes back to St John's within two weeks, without troubling our Gift Aid officer, rendering that job far easier. All please consider joining this scheme. Information on it and forms for signing up are available from Andrew, the churchwardens or the Benefice Office. It makes giving easy and largely painless.

Take all, not part

Sign above a disabled parking bay in Normandy:
Si tu prends mon place prends aussi mon handicap.

(106) "This and That" - 13 September, 2015

To catch your face unawares in a mirror is salutary. The ravages of time are all too evident. Yet few of us would want to face-lift our visage as smooth and expressionless as a well dubbed football. Time writes character onto faces. A well-seasoned face, perceptively and sympathetically read, is more than merely fascinating:

*No spring nor summer beauty hath such grace
As I have seen in one autumnal face.*

A better and more ancient image than a football for an expressionless face is brazened. I needed just such a face a weekend ago.

Charitable wedding guests

We had been invited to attend a large and splendid wedding in the little village of Kington in Warwickshire. To get the most out of the trip we left at 6.00am to have breakfast with a friend in the village of Sherston in Wiltshire. We then pressed on to have lunch with other friends in the tiny village of Epwell in north Oxfordshire. After a delicious meal with these good folk, we unpacked our wedding gear. To my horror I discovered that my fine linen suit's trousers had been left behind.

What was I to do? Our host offered me a pair of his trousers. They in no way matched my suit jacket and his waistline was double mine. "You will have to attend the wedding on your own. I will go for a long walk," I said to Diana. She would have none of that. Such are her persuasive talents I brazenly attended the wedding in a fine linen shirt, a linen suit jacket, a pair of hardy, black, rough Australian shorts and sandals.

In one of Jesus' more difficult parables, a king's servants are instructed to bind hand and foot an unsuitably attired wedding guest and throw him into darkness to weep and gnash his teeth.

Our hosts and their guests were far more charitable and civilized. No one noticeably noticed or commented upon my unusual dress. The very few to whom I explained my circumstances assured me that I cut a fine figure. Some even suggested that they would seriously consider adopting similar dress themselves on such occasions, if only their legs were as shapely as mine.

The fall of every sparrow

Someone emailed me last week to say that enjoyable though these weekly columns are, perhaps last week's topic should have been more relevant. Given the distressing and heart-breaking reports and images to do with refugees, would it not have been more appropriate to comment on the state of the world today?

Probably, but commenting on world affairs is not this modest column's purpose. We are bombarded with information, images and comment to do with the world's great events, tragedies and happenings. As with God, so too now with us, not a sparrow falls to the ground without us being aware of it. Unlike God we cannot cope, are overwhelmed.

This column is deliberately different. It concentrates upon the unimportant, the humdrum, the quotidian.

*I come in little things,
Saith the Lord:
Yea! On the glancing wings
Of eager birds, the softly pattering feet
Of furred and gentle beasts, I come to meet
Your hard and wayward hearts. In brown, bright eyes
That peep from out the brake I stand confest.....*

Little things are important too. Sometimes, quite incidentally, they even throw light on bigger things. For example, every parent's difficulty in balancing discipline with compassion in the home, is a tiny echo of the balance Europe's leaders are struggling to find in these difficult times.

To give and receive

At a lovely Patronal Evensong last Sunday in St Mary's the collection bag was upon me before I was ready for it. The only coins in my wallet were two 5p pieces. The lowest note was £10. My serious Church giving goes to St John's in a monthly standing order, but I could not stoop to a mere 10p. So, a little regretfully, in went the £10 note. It is truly more blessed to give than to receive. There was champagne after the service. I was able to drink back a good portion of my £10.

(105) "This and That" - 6 September, 2015

It is back to school. From the age of eleven that was boarding school for me. Digglefold Primary School, set in Rhodesian farmland and named after a Mr and Mrs Diggle.

Digglefold

In 1943 they left their farm to be turned into a Polish School for girls. After the war it became a co-educational primary school. My brother and I went there in 1957. It was a good school, but I hated being away from home. Set in the lovely high veldt, near Marandellas, we were encouraged to study nature closely. We kept pied crows and mole snakes as pets, collected butterflies and wandered the bush.

There were conifer plantations all around the school and so the schools badge showed three tall pine trees over the motto "*Upright and Strong*". My mother invariably cried when we were dropped off after exeat weekends. She wore sunglasses to avoid shaming us.

Expelled

For secondary schooling we were sent to a “home” for missionaries children. It was run by a pair of renegade Anglicans turned Baptist. There were missionaries’ children from all over Africa boarding there, many of them American protestants. My sister, a couple of years older than me, went there first, then me, then my brother a year later. We disliked it intensely. Too much hypocrisy and cant. It inoculated all three of us for life against crude evangelicalism.

My brother, a highly intelligent redhead, was particularly rebellious. He had an insolent way of looking at those in authority that maddened them. In my third year and his second, we were asked to leave.

Guinea Fowl

We ended up at another oddly named bush boarding school: “Guinea Fowl Boys High”. There was a 250 mile train trip to get there each term. It had been an RAF training base during the war and our dormitories were painted, corrugated iron barracks. There were traces of runway tarmac in the surrounding bush. Sporting prowess was more important than academic prowess. Our fellow pupils were the sons of farmers and miners, a fair number of them Afrikaans, hence my vocabulary’s sprinkling with what are, hopefully, fairly mild Afrikaans swear words. The school badge was topped by a red guinea fowl. Its motto, more aspirational than descriptive of us: *Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*: (gentle in manner, vigorous in deed).

What was religious education like? Very poor. So how is it that I have remained in the Church, of the Church, a lover of the Church and a convicted believer in God?

Sunbeams on ancient stones

A week or two ago I read a laudatory review in “The Spectator” of An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Education. The book’s author is Tony Little, recently retired headmaster of Eton. The reviewer, Carey Schofield writes:

The chapter on spirituality is the least interesting element of this book. The author is good at morals, but religion at Eton, it would appear, is mostly sunbeams on ancient stones.

That witty charge could be applied to the religion of many, good folk in this part of the world.

Robust faith has diluted down to little more than nostalgic *delight in sunbeams on ancient stones*. “I do love St John’s, it is so lovely,” people say. I can only agree, but it is not the stuff to challenge the rise of Islam, add zest to life, purpose to existence and joy in sacrifice and service.

There are too few robust C of E Secondary Schools. This means children leave school assuming the simple bible stories they learned at primary school to be the essence of what Christians believe. I learned otherwise, not at school but at home. Partly through saying matins and evensong with my parents every day during school holidays. This meant that I got to know, query, discuss and argue that shocking book the Bible, to love the music of the Prayer Book psalter and to work out, to an extent, how to make sense of innocent suffering, a fallible bible and of sacrificing love as being of God and so life’s very *raison d’être*.

The relaxed recitation of matins each day at the Vicarage still enriches our lives, our marriage and our faith. If you need a lesson on how best to do this, simply ask.

[Home](#)