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



#### **Falkland Island Kelp Geese (November 2015)**

*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 **December 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>

(121)                                   **“This and That” - 27 December, 2015**  
  **[To the Falklands 3]**

8 November 2015, Port Stanley: From the viewpoint of its lengthy water front Stanley is a pleasing, small town. Diana and I delight to walk along the front, both east and west from the Deanery, almost invariably in a stiff wind.

**Stanley**

Many of the houses have brightly coloured corrugated iron roofs and are made from a variety of prefabricated materials, often with a veneer of mock clapboard. The streets that run parallel to the bay are pleasingly narrow and irregular. Those at right angles to the bay, run steeply up the hillside, a dangerous bicycle rush down.

From the ‘bypass’ at the back of the town things are less pleasing. Messy industrial sites, to do with deep sea oil exploration, shipping, fisheries and the military have been less than well planned. At both ends of the town are a significant number of new houses, more are being built.

There are few substantial brick or stone buildings. The Cathedral is the finest. A striking brick edifice, it is often pictured with the remarkable whalebone arch that is sited in a little park next door. The post office (with British red pillar and telephone boxes outside), the Town Hall and Police Station are also substantial. Further west is Government House with a notice outside saying ‘visitors welcome only by appointment’. Sir Ernest Shackleton stayed there during his famous expedition. He described the experience as being “far colder than any time on the ice”.

Stanley’s climate is indeed cool and windy. Although well into long summer days and short nights I wear long-johns. It is classified a ‘tundra climate’ due to these cool summers. The mean temperature is less than 10°C in the warmest month and it has been known to snow in every month. From 1961 to 1990 temperature extremes in Stanley varied from - 11.1°C to 26.1°C. Distributed evenly through-out the year, annual precipitation is a low 21.4 inches

**Remembrance Sunday**

Today, the day after we arrived, is Remembrance Sunday. We went to the service in the Cathedral. The island is haunted by the 1982 Argentinian invasion. Coils of razor wire around the Mount Pleasant airport are reminders that this is still primarily a military base. Along the road from there to Stanley remain fenced off, un-cleared mine fields. A team of Zimbabweans is slowly rendering these safe.

There is a street near the sea front called Thatcher Street. A bronze bust of the Iron Lady is displayed on a nearby plinth. We were told that when the roof of the hospital was painted blue, there was a storm of umbrage in a teacup because the Argentine flag is largely that colour. The roof remains blue I am pleased to say. So too does the sky, at least some of the time.

At the Remembrance Day Service there were no names of those who fell in the 1982 conflict read out. They are remembered and celebrated on Liberation Day, the fourteenth of June. On a walk yesterday we came across a Memorial Wood to the fallen in the 1982 conflict, every fatality commemorated by a windblown tree.

The Cathedral service was simple and dignified, and the sermon, by a temporary Roman Catholic priest, was excellent. He built it around the little prayer book given to soldiers in the First World War. This, among much else, contained instructions as to how to bury a comrade. He also creatively compared military life to monastic life. The Cenotaph ceremony, with Army, Navy, Air Force and Local Defence Force all represented, was also well done and very moving. Ships based in the Falklands played a part in both World Wars: the Battle of the Falkland Islands in the First, and the Battle of the River Plate in the Second.

We called on the Roman Catholic priest the next day. He has been on the island for a couple of months and is a sub prior of the Norbertine Order, known sometimes as the White Canons. Amusing and interesting, his plump and gleaming face owes more to a professed enjoyment of fat Falklands mutton than to any Moses-like face to face encounters with the Divine, methinks. We walked past his house on Remembrance Day and there was a Rhodesian Flag in one of its windows. November 11, he had reminded us, was the anniversary of Rhodesia's ultimately futile Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

**(120) "This and That" - 20 December, 2015**  
**[To the Falklands 2]**

8 November 2015, Port Stanley: I sit in the study of the Deanery in Stanley on the Falklands. Out of the window, through a tracery of light grey, tree twigs coyly budding into leaf, lies the harbour bay, rippled by wind, but not furiously. Seabirds, too far off to identify, flutter and hover over possible food stuff. On the grass over the quiet waterfront, ubiquitous upland geese graze. Of all the birds on the islands, they are the only ones it is legal to shoot. The low hills on the other side of the bay are a light khaki colour where grassed, and a deep olive green to brown where bushed with low, local heath. The house is beautifully sited, well furnished and a pleasure to live in.

**Stunted by cold**

The hour and a half trip from Punta Arenas in Chile was trouble free and speedy, once we had negotiated the painfully slow immigration and customs officials at the airport. Given the purported hole in the ozone layer in these southern latitudes, and my sunburnt pate from a long walk yesterday, we went in search of sunhats in Punta before taking a taxi to the airport. We found one for each of us, though in doing so I scalped myself on a burglar-proofing portcullis arrangement that had been left too low over a shop door. Forty five years ago, as a young man in Madrid for a month, I noticed how I towered over nearly all Spaniards. I discover the same in Punta Arenas, although age has now shrunken me by nearly two inches. Perhaps people in Patagonia, like the trees, are stunted by cold.

We were met at Mount Pleasant airport by Keith Biles. He is the Speaker for the Islands' Legislative Assembly, a well travelled, now retired banker and an Island resident. His wife Kathy, formerly a non-stipendiary assistant Anglican priest, is now interim incumbent for two years.

Keith answered all our questions informatively and good humouredly as he drove us the 37 dusty miles to Stanley. The road has a speed limit of 40 miles per hour, the highest speed allowed on the island, and it requires careful driving. Short stretches are concreted, the rest is stony dust and dirt.

**Darwin's drear truth made numinous**

The landscape is far from lush. Undulating, bleak, brown grassland is interspersed with darker areas of heath land. It is exceedingly rocky and rugged with strange 'rivers' of large, broken rocks that must be hellish to cross on foot. Great slabs and outcrops of rock help some of the hills to rear into stony, moderately high mountains. The highest point on East Falkland is Mount Usborne at 2,313 feet. Mount Adam on West Falkland is 2,300.

Charles Darwin said of the Falklands: *After the possession of these miserable islands had been contested by France, Spain and England, they were left uninhabited..... An undulating land, with a desolate and wretched aspect, is everywhere covered by a peaty soil and wiry grass of monotonous brown colour.* He is as dead right on this, as on evolution.

Yet there is something about the bright clarity of the light, broadness of sky and glimpses of limitless blue ocean, that lifted my spirits and bathed Darwin's drear truth with something numinous and lovely. It is good to be here.

To those of us with faith, even the drear truth of evolution is invested with numinosity. To insinuate love and goodness into a world brutally red in tooth and claw lightens our darkness. It is good to be alive, if but one foot or even one toe is already in the land of the blessed Trinity.

The Deanery in Stanley where we are staying is comfortable, well furnished, and beautifully sited. We are able to stay here because Keith and Kathy have a house of their own in Stanley, and so the Deanery is available to us. Once we have gone it will be rented out.

The study, our bedroom and the lounge all look out onto the long, clear, cold waters of the harbour bay. So far these has been remarkably tranquil. Every time I look up and out, the beginning of Arnold's 'Dover Beach' comes to mind:

*The sea is calm tonight.  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits;*

We are told that dolphins are sometimes to be seen sporting in the bay. We have so far spotted oyster catchers, kelp geese, upland geese, ashy headed geese and flightless steamer ducks, but no dolphins.

## **(119) "This and That" - 13 December, 2015 [To the Falklands 1]**

*6 November 2015, Punta Arenas:* Today, Friday, has been a perfect day, the sun shining, the wind gentle though cool. A long walk this afternoon left us both sunburnt.

A cold-climate Latin city is hard to fit into the scheme of things, but is all the more interesting for that. Punta is a not at all an unpleasing town. Its centre is a fine square with a great statue of Magellan in the middle and there are some imposing buildings around it. The houses beyond the city centre are made largely of wood, corrugated iron, pressed tin, or some other prefabricated substance, often with a mock clapboard veneer. The roofs are brightly painted corrugated iron. We detect hints of Newfoundland, shanty town South Africa and even of Madrid, in miniature.

### **Lots of wind, little rain**

The city is notable for wind, especially in summer, but not rain. The surrounding plains are characterised as 'cold steppe lands', or even semi desert. Only further south does rainfall become prolific, and indeed further north too, where there are impenetrable forests and great glaciers.

We arrived in a bitter wind. It was so strong that the gangway to leave the plane could not be used. We descended down old fashion steps to a buffeted walk across the apron. This was a great contrast to London, from which we left an hour late, due to the dead stillness of autumnal fog.

The latitude of Punta Arenas is a mere 53.16 degrees south. This is much the same as is my home town of Belper in Derbyshire north. There is no Gulf Stream to interfere with things in these parts though. The Falklands and Humboldt ocean currents are cold nor are there great continental masses to obstruct and complicate the westerly systems that sweep across the Southern Ocean unimpeded.

There are reminders that it is spring. Daffodils and tulips on graves for example, occasionally in gardens too, though it is most certainly not a garden city. Then there are the dandelions. They are everywhere, never have I seen more. In sheltered places they are robust and rudely healthy, their shaggy leonine heads greedy for the sun. Out on the plains they have hardly any stem at all. Thus they avoid the inevitable, wind-induced, eastward list that afflicts trees, bushes and tussocks. A list that would deny them every afternoon's sun.

Our flight was easy and trouble free. We changed planes at Sao Paulo and Santiago and stopped also at Puerto Montt. The whole journey, with stops, took twenty five hours. Until we crossed the coastline of Brazil all of it was over the ocean. It took hours to cross Brazil. Travelling from Melbourne to Singapore last year I was surprised that after six hours Australia remained below us. Brazil was equally surprising and little wonder. Australia is a mere 2.97 million square miles, Brazil 3.29.

### **Hostel living**

Where we stay is fun. It is one of many reasonably priced hostels that cater for backpackers in these parts. It provides a reasonable breakfast, including homemade bread and homemade yoghurt, a good, hot shower and a room to ourselves. We meet a constant stream of interesting folk from all over the world. Last night I talked at some length to a young and delightful Irishman, a nurse, who has taken four months sabbatical to tour South America. He flew in from Ushaiah and went off this morning to the famous and very beautiful hiking area called Torres del Paine.

A few days ago we made a thrilling two and a half hour crossing of a rough Magellan Strait to Tierra del Fuego. There we visited a small colony of about 35 most beautiful King Penguins.

Almost as fascinating was a long ramble around the necropolis that is the local cemetery. Not only are there huge mausoleums, but also tower blocks for the less wealthy dead. These are four or five storey high coffin resting places, with a window-door end to enable flowers, photos and sentimental nick-nackery to be replenished with attentive and loving regularity.

I must now be off to the kitchen to put together an easy but tasty pasta dish. Tomorrow we fly to the Falklands. There it will be mutton and fish, I hope. Seaweed for vegetables perhaps.

## **(118) "This and That" - 6 December, 2015**

It is getting colder. Padding around the house barefoot is no longer comfortable. This I regret. Since I left England at the age of six my feet have been sandaled or completely unshod for at least half of every year. As a result my feet are in good condition. Save for one misshapen toe nail. I have no need ever to trouble a podiatrist.

I admire podiatrists. Attending to mouldy, cold-climate and shoe cramped feet requires a strong nose, ingenuity and a will to help others that is highly commendable. Filing and scraping callused lumps and protuberances, digging out corns and verucas, bandaging bunions, prizing apart buckled and deformed toes, blow-torching and disinfecting fungal infections, must require more than skill and a desire to make a living. There has to be a good dose of altruism too.

### **Crumpled Feet**

The closest I ever come to podiatry is on Maundy Thursday. At the moving service that commemorates the institution of the Last Supper, I symbolically emulate Jesus by washing the foot of a selection of congregation members. After washing each foot I kiss it. The variety in shape, size and colour of those feet is remarkable.

## **Every Sunday Palm Sunday**

For the rest of the year I have more to do with hands than feet. There is the strange ritual at the church door each Sunday, shaking hands. The appearance of hands that are shaken goes unnoticed, it is the feel that is most striking. There are firm hands, limp hands, little hands, big hands, hot hands, cold hands, dry hands and moist hands.

At the Communion rail it is different. Hands held up for the sacrament are observed not felt. Their variety is moving. Farmers' hands: callused brutes, tough and cracked. Mechanics' hands: no matter how well-washed, evidence of oil and grease. Elderly hands: seasoned, worn and sometimes arthritic. Housewives' hands: even in washing machine days evidence of detergent erosion. Boys hands: grubby with scribbled messages and traces of hobbies and pastimes. Pampered, manicured, refined hands. Mankind's work reflected in mankind's palms. Handiwork. All there at the altar rail, open to God, reaching for God.

### **Egg-Shell Fragile**

Most moving of all at the altar rail are the egg-shell fragile heads of little babies, brought up for a blessing, fontanelles gently pulsing. They are so warm to the touch. If the child sleeps, the blessing hand has to be as light as thistledown, as gentle as God's gift itself.

Feet, hands, heads, babies. It is little things like these that help make the parson's job the delight that it is. It is little things like these that make life itself a delight.

### **Babies In Church**

The more babies in church the better. For sensitive mothers bringing little ones to church can seem hellish. So demanding small children can be, so difficult to keep quiet, their parents have little or no chance to experience the peace of God which passes all understanding. Their whole time is taken up attending to the needs of their little ones and controlling them. Church-going can appear futile.

### **The Very Best Of Prayers**

It need not be so. With the author of Ecclesiasticus, mothers need to see and understand that in church with the children, *their prayer is the handiwork of their craft*. In minding, feeding, worrying over, amusing and loving their child in church, they are uttering a prayer as valid and as beautiful as any merely verbal prayer.

Just as the priest in the sanctuary prays with gesture, movement, taking, blessing, breaking and giving thanks, so too does a mother in the minding of her little ones in the pew. If it moves a hard-bitten priest like myself to lay my hand gently upon the egg-shell fragile head of a little baby, its fontanelle pulsing so warmly and vulnerably, how much more pleasing must it be to our all loving God and Father?

We are a child-friendly church. Should anyone turn round, tut tut or frown at any noise a child makes, the parents have my blessing and permission to stick out their tongues in response.

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