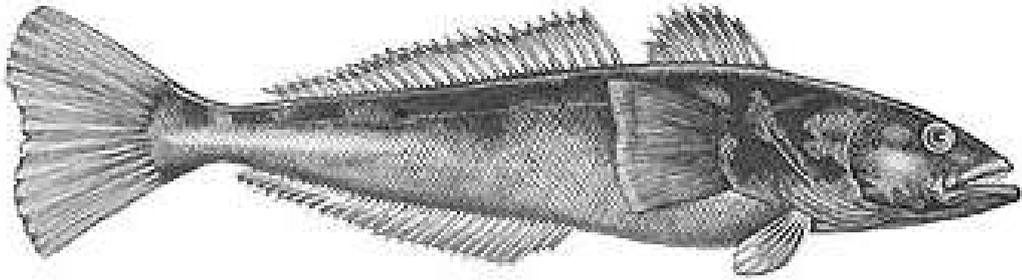


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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (January 2016)



Patagonian Toothfish - White Gold (Drawing: Bruce Mahalski)

See article (122) 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 **January 2016** 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>

(126)

“This and That” - 31 January 2016

[To the Falklands 8]

Good raconteurs make excellent company. My father was one. So too is Peter Robertson of West Falklands. Over lunch one day he told a good corpse story.

Travails with a dead body

An old alcoholic died on the Settlement some years ago. A friend of the deceased helped make his rather less than well cared for body presentable. He popped his fingers into the corpse's mouth, pulled out its false teeth, gave them a good rub on his scruffy trousers and popped them back. He then took a kitchen scourer to scrape clean his filthy feet, dressed him and placed him in a coffin. Falklands settlements, in days gone by, kept a coffin or two for just such inevitable eventualities.

Before the man could be buried locally the Roman Catholics claimed him as one of their own. Catholics (and Anglo Catholics) are far better at accepting and dealing with sin and the sinful than are Protestants. This old alcoholic had found some solace in the sympathetic ear of a visiting Catholic priest who had been willing to share a glass or two of whisky with him as well as absolution. He had converted. So instead of being buried on the Settlement he had to be sent to Stanley for proper church obsequies.

In those days the plane was a small flying boat to which the coffin was taken in a dinghy. When it arrived it couldn't be fitted through the plane's door. No matter how or what way it was tipped, angled or shoved, it was four inches too big. Back to shore went the corpse. Taken from its coffin it was wrapped in an old boat's ancient sail and duly sent on its way.

Many week's later Peter noticed the sail lying about at the airport. It was obviously awaiting its return to Port Stephen to be used once more on a boat. Presumably, like the Turin shroud, bearing a body's imprint.

A perilous but spectacular drive

After an excellent lunch and a beer Peter took Diana and me on a bush drive. Ignoring tracks altogether some of the time, and following barely visible ones at others, we drove over the bush, up hills, round rocks, tipping at times almost to turning-over point. Peter had obviously done much of this sort of driving and revelled in it. The countryside and views were spectacular. The khaki coloured pasture and heath gave way occasionally to patches of green grass, some of these, Peter told us, had once been penguin rookeries. The greenness was in part the lingering effect of the birds' guano deposits.

The hills and scenery reminded us of the Scottish Highlands. I suggested that heather should be introduced to make the likeness more complete. Peter was not impressed. They are having to call in an expert to advise on getting rid of areas of introduced heather on their property. It is considered sterile stuff and is of no use to sheep farming.

The destination of our perilous drive was a narrow strip of land between two hills, the bay on one side, open sea on the other. On this short isthmus was a great colony of penguins and out in the open sea was a frenzied shoal of them too. They appeared to be coming in to land but didn't.

The majority of the birds were Gentoos, but there was also a colony of burrowing Magellanics, of which we saw only one. Among the Gentoos was a small group of King penguins, the handsomest of them all. Had we taken time to walk round the bluff we would have seen Rockhoppers and Macaronics as well. Many of the Gentoos were sitting on one or two pale,

blue-green eggs. As a boy on Tristan da Cunha I had eaten boiled Rockhopper penguin eggs. When cooked they had a very bright, orange yoke and a translucent, pale blue 'white'.

The first time in my life

We arrived back at the homestead for a cup of tea and Diana's lemon drizzle birthday cake, decorated with seven candles. We ate the lot, and then enjoyed good conversation, followed eventually by an excellent cannelloni with Chilean merlot and our bottle of champagne. I retired to bed replete and for the first time in my life aged seventy.

(125) "This and That" - 24 January 2016

[To the Falklands 7]

We assume life to have been nasty, brutish and short in Old Testament times. Yet Psalm 90 tells us: *The days of our age are threescore years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years: yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow.....* Are we too negative about life in primitive times then? Survive infancy, motherhood or war, and even in those far off days you were expected to reach seventy, or even a clapped-out eighty.

Heading west to celebrate

I achieved my three score years and ten while on the Falklands. A good place to do so. Little opportunity for fuss or the contrived jocularly of a party. Instead of that we boarded a small, red, noisy, seven-seater plane, with haversacks containing two lemon drizzle cakes, a bottle of champagne and a few warm and wind-resistant items of clothing.

The aircraft took us 150 miles from Port Stanley in East Falkland to Port Stephen in West Falkland in an hour and a half. Our combined return fare was a mere £134. This the rate for island oldies, granted to us on the strength of our residency in the Deanery and my help at the Cathedral.

We flew low enough to delight in the multitudinous inlets, islets, straits, sounds, beaches and cliffs below. As the plane laboured into a strong headwind I indulged my superficial pessimism by reflecting how appropriate it was to endure a seventieth birthday in the Falklands, close to the end of the world, close to the Antarctica of life that is death.

Stanley is pretty well as far east of East Falkland Island as you can get. Port Stephen almost as far west of West Falkland island as you can get. More usual tourist destinations, like Sea Lion Island and Pebble Island were fully booked or too costly, so an invitation to Port Stephen was most welcome. Anne, our hostess there, had called on us in Stanley on learning we had a common friend in Dick Baker. He was Governor on St Helena when Diana and I were residents there in the mid 1980s and before that was Government Secretary on the Falklands when Argentina invaded.

Happy landing

It was good to be given a new perspective of the islands from a small, low flying plane. The sea was bright blue and we were able to get a comprehensive view of the mysterious 'rock runs', the military base, Goose Green and Darwin. We then we crossed the Sound, East Falkland meeting the sea gently and gradually, West Falkland more resistantly with substantial cliffs and intriguing inlets. The plane was noisy, but there were only a few jumps and wind-buffets.

We landed on a strip of daisied grass to be met by doughty, hospitable and delightful Peter and Anne Robertson. Older than us, they live an isolated though contented life. Anne is Anglo-Argentine in origin, well groomed, very capable and a most thoughtful conversationalist. She tried to insist on carrying my backpack to stow on the pickup. Peter is a tall, angular Falklander of wide experience, a great talker, splendidly opinionated but not dogmatically. Their

son now runs the property, and is also a part time pilot. He and his wife, with Peter and Anne, are the only permanent residents.

Long ago there was a fairly large community at Port Stephen. They all worked the huge, many hundreds of square miles property which Peter's father and then Peter himself managed. After the Second World War this property, with most other large properties, was acquired by the government from absentee landlords, partitioned and then sold off. The Robertsons took the portion around the settlement. They now run about 10,000 sheep, one sheep to five acres. It is not the best pasture on the islands Peter told us, it lacks some trace minerals, but nor is it the worst.

Their house is a large, double storey edifice, with wide landings and spacious rooms that include one for billiards. A little Heath-Robinsonesque, it is very comfortable. There are no palatial residences on Falklands farm properties. The absentee landowners of days gone by did not build such dwellings for managers. Electricity is supplied by a windmill assisted by a generator for the few days when the wind fails. On our first night the wind did get up and substantial rain fell. It was lovely to sleep with a window slightly open listening to wild weather and a cow bellowing for the calf it was separated from until after milking the next day.

(124) "This and That" - 17 January 2016

[To the Falklands 6]

I once saw a film that showed how to take the horror out of warfare. Should two countries declare war, each feeds into a computer every conceivable detail, fact and statistic to do with its weaponry, manpower, resources and anything else likely to affect the war's outcome. The machine then predicts the outcome of each and every skirmish and battle. If forty fatalities are indicated for a particular skirmish, then forty serving soldiers are painlessly and cleanly euthanised. Likewise for a hundred thousand, or a million, be they civilians or soldiers. An eminently sensible and humane way to do battle. Absurd too of course, but then so is all warfare.

Fitzroy and shepherd's pie

The Falklands are haunted by the 1982 war. We could not help but become interested ourselves, visiting many battle sites. Loaned our neighbour's car for a week, our first trip was to Fitzroy, the scene of one of the most disastrous episodes in the conflict, the successful Argentinian air attacks on the ships *Sir Galahad* and *Sir Tristram*. There are a number of melancholic, poignant memorials to those lost around the nearby coast, as well as one in the village itself.

The Fitzroy settlement continues to function as a working farm and is named after Robert FitzRoy, the captain of HMS Beagle, which in 1833 visited the islands with Charles Darwin on board. There is a large shearing shed and a long jetty with rails which was used in 1982 to land military gear. It is now closed to the public. Bright yellow gorse hedges were particularly vivid and pleasing in the sunshine.

On our return we participated in a Bible Study in the Deanery until two guests we'd asked to dinner arrived, Charlie, an English, Sandhurst trained soldier, brought up in Sweden and his Swedish colleague. Both lecture at a military academy in Sweden. Charlie is doing a doctorate on the Falklands war which is an ideal war for study, being so geographically contained, brief, decisive and successful, though with all the cock-ups, political complications, intrigue, derring do and farce that are so much a part of all wars.

It was an enjoyable evening. A Shepherds' Pie, made from Falklands' mutton, crisply brown on top, rudely rich beneath the potato. Second helpings all round. To follow, rhubarb from

the garden in a crumble, with ground almonds to replace wheat flour as one of our guests was a coeliac.

Darwin, Goose Green and Gentoo penguins

Our second car trip was to Darwin and Goose Green. They are placed on a narrow isthmus where the many and varied inlets into the island from the east and west almost meet. Here the first significant battle in the 1982 war was fought. Darwin is a mere collection of three or four houses these days. Goose Green appears a little more substantial, but is nonetheless a tiny settlement, its brightly coloured corrugated iron rooves charming in the sunlight. We stopped above Darwin, in a strong and cold wind, to eat egg sandwiches, and then walked up to view the Paratroopers' Memorial before dropping down to Goose Green. There we sat in the car reading Robert Fox's account of the battle. As we left a detachment of troops came out of one of the buildings with packs and rifles. They lent an eerie authenticity to what we had just read.

We then pressed on to a colony of at least 600 Gentoo penguins sited in the middle of a sheep paddock. There were another 150 or so on the beach, three or four hundred yards from the colony. We delighted in their speed and grace as they approached land to shoot like a bullet out of the water and land upright on the beach with faintly surprised aplomb. Once land lubbers their graciousness turned to stagger, waddle and plod. For their tender courtship rituals they stand close together, beaks in the air and chortle guttural sweet nothings to each other. Those with incubating mates pick up bits and pieces of nesting material to place next to them with careful tenderness.

On our way home we stopped at the Argentine cemetery. Many of the graves are anonymous and there is controversy over them. The Argentinians want DNA testing to identify the bodies, but refuse to talk to the Falklands Government about this. When they ask the British they are referred to the Falklands. The political conundrum: how can repatriation to their homeland be demanded, if *las Islas Malvinas* are in fact Argentina?

(123) "This and That" - 10 January 2016

[To the Falklands 5]

Like the writers of the Gospels I rely on a variety of sources in writing these Falkland articles.

The Gospel according to Andrew

The primary source is my journal. Written at speed it is wordy, unguarded, tendentious, libellous and by far the closest to the truth. Then there are a series of letters written to my family and close friends. These are drawn from the journal, but fitted into some sort of narrative framework. They are exaggerated for effect, censored of what is commonplace, dull or unnecessarily insulting, and generally polished up. There is also our 'oral tradition'. All sorts of seemingly forgotten occurrences, as well as new perspectives and significances that crop up in conversation between Diana and myself are noted down, if worthwhile. Finally there is Google for fact checking and the pursuit of different points of view and new perspectives.

Close analysis of these articles might well provide a doctoral student with the unravelling of enough utterly pointless textual complexity to fill a successful thesis.

Disaster on the high seas

For a short while we had two young Chinese women staying with us in Stanley. They were from a stricken cruise ship, *Le Boreal*. This relatively small, luxury ship was evacuated on a cold, windy night a few miles north of East Falkland after an engine room fire. The majority of

passengers and crew spent eight interminable hours in two covered lifeboats, seasick and frightened. A small proportion had things even worse in an open life raft. The military, together with civilian agencies, eventually rescued everyone. The stricken ship, its engine room deliberately flooded, was brought to berth at the Royal Naval base, near Mount Pleasant.

Many of the of the survivors were brought to Stanley. We greeted a good number of them when they visited the Cathedral, which we minded for much of the day for this purpose. They had been directed to leave everything behind and some, in the rush, had left even their glasses. Few had their wallets and most had limited English, especially the Chinese. However, we were able to communicate a little with most, and had a good chat to an English couple who shared something of the horror of the experience.

The crew, they told us, were less than cool, collected and efficient in the emergency. Because procedures were not properly followed one lifeboat ended up with far more passengers than the other. Their particular lifeboat was controlled by a young person who had little idea how to steer or control it. Before the current swept it clear, it kept banging against the ship's hull and it rammed the Royal Naval vessel that eventually rescued them all with a splintering crash.

The husband was a church organist and to his delight was given permission to play his first Cathedral organ. The strains of *Guide me O Thou Great Redeemer* and *Eternal Father Strong to Save* were therapeutic to him and comforting to all gathered in the Cathedral. Both these hymns had been sung in the lifeboat. *A foxhole makes believers of us all.*

Accommodation in the deanery

Later we agreed to provide accommodation to a Chinese passenger. He turned out not to be from the stricken vessel, but from its sister ship *L'Austral*. This had docked in Stanley to assist those rescued from *Le Boreal*. As far as we could gather he had been evicted from the ship because he was insulin dependent and had not brought enough of the drug to see him through the ship's journey to South Georgia and the Antarctic. Hence his resisted and reluctant eviction from the ship. Because he was unwell, less than happy, unable to speak a word of English and appeared to have been irresponsible enough to embark on a journey with insufficient medicine, we decided we would offer him accommodation only if he was accompanied by someone who could translate for him. No one appeared to be willing to do this. So he was sent to someone more compliant than us.

This is why we ended up with the two young Chinese women, tour guides from the stricken ship. Their English was reasonably good, though sadly we hardly saw them. They were hard at work looking after the passengers that they would have been minding had the ship not been abandoned. They left us at 5.00am on Sunday to fly out, with all the stricken passengers, on a chartered plane.

(122) "This and That" - 3 January 2016

[To the Falklands 4]

Our next door neighbour in Stanley, was a generous, kind woman called Wendy Reynolds. She asked us to dinner on our first night and the next day took us on a tour of the town and for a walk to a nearby penguin rookery. She also offered us the use of her car for a week, while she went to West Falkland to cook, at shearing time, for one of the families whose child she had taught some years previously.

She is a retired "Travelling Teacher". Children in remote parts of the islands, considered too young to board in Stanley, are visited at home regularly by such travelling teachers who spend several weeks on the farm or settlement where a child lives. When elsewhere teaching other

children, there is 'telephone teaching' from teachers based in Stanley. Wendy loved this job and established close and lasting friendships with some of the families of her pupils.

George IV's great gut

On holiday I read more, and particularly enjoyed A N Wilson's biography of Queen Victoria. He leavens his biographies with wit, literary allusions, parallels, and illuminating and pithy vignettes. George IV, visiting Scotland, was persuaded to wear Scottish gear. His great gut hung so low that it could be seen beneath the hem of his kilt. The elderly Lord Melbourne, whose relationship with the young queen was poignantly close and warm, happened to be a lover of the whip, a flagellant. I read my Kindle to put myself to sleep when I wake in the night. This book kept me awake.

We did some gardening while on the Falklands. When we leave the islands Wendy will share the Deanery's small vegetable garden and poly-tunnel with the person who is to rent the place. A relatively inexperienced gardener, she welcomed our advice. She took us to the only garden nursery on the island to buy kale, cauliflower and cabbage seedlings to augment seed potatoes already in hand. We dug over the garden and planted the bulk of the potatoes outside, with a few in the tunnel. Likewise with the kale, cauliflower and cabbage. We also sowed radish and lettuce seed.

When resident on the Island of St Helena in the nineteen eighties, both Diana and I got to know the Governor, Dick Baker. Prior to this appointment he had been Government Secretary on the Falklands and had the unenviable task of carrying out the white flag prior for the truce that preceded the surrender of Stanley to the enemy. Before we left England he sent us a list of people we might like to contact while on the island. One of these was Stewart Wallace whose family appear to own *Fortuna*, the largest producer and exporter of frozen seafood from the Falkland Islands. Any squid eaten in Europe, he told us, is likely to have come from this part of the world. Fortuna have about half a dozen trawlers and a couple of long line fishing vessels. The islands also sell costly licences to foreign fishing fleets.

Patagonian tooth fish

I asked him how best to cook Patagonian tooth fish, having bought some the day before. He rang his wife for suggestions, but for want of ingredients I followed my own recipe, lightly coating the fish in egg and ground almonds. The flesh is as dense as crayfish and delicately flavoured. In years gone by the fish was discarded as worthless. Now it is highly prized and priced in Europe. The fishing industry is lucrative for the Falklands, the selling of fishing licences particularly so. With the wool industry nowhere near as buoyant as it used to be, fishing enables the Islands to claim self-sufficiency and maintain that they are in no way a beggar state off Britain. This is a trifle disingenuous. The maintenance of the military base costs Britain between seventy and eighty million pounds a year. It is that military presence, as always a possible back up to the policing of the Falklands fishing waters, that underwrites the fishing industry, and the potential oil industry.

Two bald men fighting over a comb

The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, when asked about the Falklands conflict characterised it as "*a fight between two bald men over a comb*". There is something in this. Of little use to Britain or Argentina the Falklands were hardly worth fighting over. To the Falklands itself, however, the conflict brought in its aftermath military protection. With that came physical security, political stability and prosperity. A little known and almost stagnant backwater became famous, symbolic, and well off.

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