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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (February 2016)



Blue Beach Military Cemetery at San Carlos - Falklands Grave of H Jones VC front left

*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 **February 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>

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“This and That” - 28 February 2016

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We loved Valparaiso. Pastel coloured houses are crammed in everywhere. Many challenge gravity on perilous, crumbling slopes. Garish graffiti and murals are ubiquitous. Though many of these are arresting, most are far from beautiful. A good number of the city's century old funiculars are now inactive. Those still in use are fascinating, their clanking, primitive engineering delights, now that sophisticated electronics obscure most things mechanical.

Camaraderie of the road

Small shops and vibrant markets sell exotic foodstuffs. Labyrinthine streets and cobbled alleyways, brightened by colourful shrubs and creepers that burst from small gardens and courtyards, entice. From everywhere there are views of the great bay formed by the city's amphitheatric hills.

Skill in dog turd hopping is obligatory. As used to be the case in our cities, now done away with, thanks to the threat of fines. Not so in Chile. It is estimated that there are 180,000 stray dogs wandering the streets of Santiago and that a further 80,000 are let out by their owners to roam as they please. It is similar in Valparaiso. Largely passive and benign, they seem to find, or are given, enough to eat.

Staying in hostels is more interesting than in anonymous, expensive, international hotels. Cooking and eating together with strangers encourages interesting if fleeting friendships that elicit all sorts of streetwise tips and hints as to what to see and what not. The camaraderie of the road.

The *Hostel Casa Verde Limón* was old, high-ceilinged and clean, with interestingly puzzling internal geography. Oddly, both there and at the hostel in Punta Arenas, there was a directive forbidding the flushing of toilet paper down the lavatory. It goes instead into a bin. Nasty.

Danger in the city

We walked the city thoroughly. The black spaghetti tangles of dangerously loose overhead wires astonished us. They were a feature also of Punta Arenas, Christobal and Cartegena, the only other South American cities I have visited. On one walk I nearly garotted myself on a drooping wire. On another we watched a rubbish collecting lorry gingerly drive up a narrow street as one of its crew propped up low-slung wires with a besom to allow the vehicle to pass underneath. He missed one wire that caught on the lorry. Unperturbed he allowed the vehicle to continue. It stretched the wire and broke it with a shower of sparks. He then calmly kicked the presumably live wire into the gutter to electrocute any passing stray dog, child or pigeon.

On our first full day we went for a long and leisurely walk up above our hostel, climbing ever higher and higher. We rejoiced in old friends: jacaranda, poinsettia, bougainvillea and cascades of blue convolvulus and nasturtiums. Houses are built on impossible slopes and in amazing situations. Planning permission must be exceedingly permissive or totally ignored. Fine dwellings jostle ramshackle ones. Cooling clouds, rolling in from the bay made for ideal walking. My Falkland Island boot-cramped feet relished sandals. With no jersey it was pleasantly cool. We bought a perfect avocado and two rolls to have with a cup of soup for lunch. We ate at the Hostel, chatting to a young American touring South America for six months.

La Chorrillana

In the afternoon we caught the 'Metro' and travelled as far as it went, out into the country to a town called Limache. Buskers and jugglers are as ubiquitous, if not as numerous, as street

dogs. In our carriage we were entertained by a fine singer accompanied by a friend on a primitive flute, a four part acappella choir and a saxophone and tuba jazz duet.

On our return we went straight to “*J Cruz M*”, a restaurant that claims to have invented a dish called *La Chorrillana*. This had been commended to Diana by a young Chilean lad she befriended on a bus. No sophisticated or gourmet dish this. It comprises a heap of French fries, topped with sliced, cooked onion and then strips of Chilean beef, crowned with two fried or scrambled eggs and hot chilli sauce as accompaniment. The place was full of artefacts, paintings, kitsch and the curling photographs of generations of clients. We strolled home licking our chops to sleep well.

(129) “This and That” - 21 February 2016 [To the Falklands 11]

Our first night away from the Falklands was spent in Santiago, Chile, mañana land. We waited over an hour and a half for our luggage there, Diana calmly, me fulminating. I recalled the Irishman who was asked for a Gaelic equivalent to the word mañana. He thought carefully and then replied, *‘there is no word in Gaelic that conveys quite that word’s sense of urgency’*.

Vina del Mar

The next day was Advent Sunday. We caught a bus to Vina del Mar, a coastal town adjacent to Valparaiso. It was the only place with an Anglican Church that advertised its service times on the net. To travel 120 kilometres for a 10.30am service seemed a more congenial challenge than to attend a huge nearby Pentecostal church.

We left Santiago at 8.50am on a smart, double-decker Mercedes bus. Our seat upstairs gave us a good view of interesting countryside. To the east of Santiago are the soaring, snow-covered Andes. To the west, coastward, are what appeared to be relatively low and largely barren hills. As we approached these they grew formidable, a barrier sufficient to require an impressive tunnel to allow access to the coast. The valleys appeared fertile, and when irrigated productive. We noted acres of vines, maize and pumpkins.

St Peter’s Vina del Mar

The bus terminal in Vina del Mar turned out to be very close to the church we were looking for. So we walked into the service not long after the sermon had begun. It was being delivered by a pleasing sounding priest in an alb and stole, the latter, white, which was odd for Advent, indicating, I uncharitably and incorrectly surmised, bumbling evangelicalism. The chalice on the altar was appropriately clothed in purple though and there were 36 of us in the church.

It was a pleasant and peaceful service, even for someone as critical as I am. Although there were no candles on the altar, it was in not disturbingly evangelical and the Celebrant had a true Anglican feel for liturgy. Obviously visitors, with our back packs, the priest greeted us before the giving of the Peace, urging us to stay on for coffee, which we did.

A father of two little ones, in the pew in front of us, turned out to be an American. Over tea he offered to drive us to our destination in Valparaiso, but the priest and his wife had already asked us to lunch, so he and they arranged for a get together after lunch to show us around.

The priest and wife are Simon and Claire Brignall, a likeable couple who had only been in the job for about six weeks. Before this he had been part of a team ministry in Sherborne, of all places. From 1986 to 1996 they were missionaries in Peru and so are good Spanish speakers. Simon runs St Peter’s, the church we attended, with one other in Valparaiso that is destined soon to become a Cathedral and he, possibly therefore, a dean.

Hostel Casa Verde Limón

We had a lovely meal with them in a bright and airy flat, high up in a smart block. He introduced me to Chile's national drink, the Pisco Sour, lemony and refreshing. Good conversation with kindly, godly folk.

They joined us, with the American and family, on a post lunch jaunt, taking us to view their other lovely church, St Paul's, in Valparaiso. The American is Jeff Stevenson and his wife Pam. A PhD, he looks after and tutors American students studying in Chile, as well as teaching at the university. He is training for the Anglican priesthood part time, and comes from the American Presbyterian tradition.

They all accompanied us to our modest digs, the *Hostel Casa Verde Limón*, to sign in and dump our stuff. We walked there from St Paul's, taking an ancient funicular for part of the way. What they thought of our down-market lodgings I don't know. When Diana told a parishioner at St Peter's where we were booked to stay, she seemed horrified. It turned out to be comfortable, interesting and in a fascinating part of town, full of life and colour.

We ended up on the veranda of a restaurant, looking out over the ocean cooled by the Humboldt Current from which cold mists frequently roll in. We had a drink and then said farewell to charitable and interesting fellow Christians.

(128) "This and That" - 14 February 2016 [To the Falklands 10]

Our last day on the Falklands was a full one. Keith drove us to San Carlos Water. This is the sheltered, fiord-like inlet, nicknamed "bomb alley", from which the British troops launched their amphibious assault in 1982. They routed the Argentinian land forces, but came under ominously effective aerial bombardment. In summer sunshine it was beautifully tranquil. A few farm buildings, a derelict jetty, a couple of houses, a small museum and an impressive War Memorial.

H Jones VC

The Memorial contains few graves. The Falklands are so remote that families were offered the repatriation of their fallen loved ones' bodies. Most availed themselves of the offer. Not quite all though, the much feted Victoria Cross recipient, H. Jones is buried there, with a handful of others. In bright sunshine, with daisies and dandelions everywhere, a Falklands thrush in full throat and the waters of the Sound a glittering blue, the place was melancholically idyllic.

We looked over the small museum and then pressed on over khaki coloured pasture land that reminded both Diana and me of the Orange Free State in South Africa. The grass much shorter though, and a good deal less nutritious.

We made our way to Keith and Kathy's bolt hole, a property called "New Farm". It is about 800 acres, with several outbuildings and a white double house, with the characteristic bright red roof of so many Falklands homes. Exposed on a broad plain, it must be satisfyingly cosy when buffeted by the persistent winds and not infrequent blizzards. There are lovely, distant views of the central mountains, including the highest on the Falklands, Mount Usborne at 2,313 feet. After an excellent lunch we looked over the vegetable garden, chicken runs and shed, as well as the property's original building. This was occupied briefly by the Paras during the '82 war. They have left a large graffiti acknowledgement of the fact on one of its walls.

Rivers of boulders

On our way back to Stanley across East Falkland's central ridge, we stopped to inspect more closely the mysterious "stone runs". These numerous great rivers of jagged boulders, a

feature of East Falkland, were caused by aeons of freezing and thawing during the last Ice Age. They are not deeply set into the ground and when broken are iron-oxide orange. Their grey/white surface pallor must be due to weathering. Why are so few of the Island's buildings built of this stone? We were told that it is difficult to work, but I easily broke one of the smaller boulders. This doesn't mean that they are easy to shape and dress, but it does suggest that they are more tractable than is claimed.

On our return we planned to pack and clean the deanery ready for our departure the next day. However we found a note waiting for us from Vincent March. He and his wife had flown in that day from St Helena, via Ascension Island, to join their two sons for a holiday on the Falklands. Vincent had been a horticultural adviser and co-worker with Diana in her landscaping work all those years ago on St Helena. So our last evening was spent reminiscing with lovely St Helenian folk. Infinitely preferable to packing and cleaning, which was postponed and not finished until after midnight.

Goodbye Falklands

In the morning Keith drove us to Mount Pleasant Airport. A military facility this is more dingily functional than ordinary passenger terminals. No photos were allowed and my innocent suitcase was thoroughly searched. We boarded our Chilean aeroplane about an hour after it arrived.

It was a blue almost cloudless day and so we had a good last view of the remarkable collection of over seven hundred islands that is the Falklands. We then drifted in and out of sleep on our way to Santiago via Punta Arenas, arriving at 9.00pm. A mix up with our luggage meant that by the time we had -been through customs and dropped off our two big suitcases at "left luggage" it was past 11pm.

We caught a bus to Santiago's Central Station, booked into our hotel and then went for a short walk. The streets we ambled along were dark and shabby, but it was good to be in a warm and vibrant Latin environment again.

(127) "This and That" - 7 February 2016

[To the Falklands 9]

The BBC series on the Falklands, '*An Island Parish*', has been enjoyed by many of us. Such an amiable, likeable vicar and yet how few folk ever seemed present in his church congregations to support him.

On the Sunday that I took the main service in the Cathedral there were a mere twenty people there. So much for the pull of an exciting visitor like me! Even for so small a population, the number attending Stanley Cathedral on Sundays did seem meagre.

How negligible is intellect itself

The eccentric novelist and friend of C S Lewis, Charles Williams, once remarked: *The middle class in England did not wholly lose the habit of going to church until they acquired motor cars - so negligible in the end is intellect itself.*

Indeed. It is not usually unbelief or intellectual doubt that keep people away from church. Rather it is the footling distractions that come with affluence. There are other things to do, alternative and more interesting choices. The Falkland Islands are prosperous. Life is comfortable. Although there is plenty to whinge about, like the state of the roads and the weather, there is little if any national debt, healthcare is provided at no cost and education is free, including tertiary education in England.

Fishing and the selling of fishing rights, followed by tourism and then sheep farming as a poor third, bring in a healthy revenue. An islander once remarked on the BBC: *We were the luckiest people that was ever mixed up in a war.* Yet adversity is far more likely to turn people to God than contentment and affluence.

Most welcome

The congregation at the Cathedral, small though it is, was most welcoming. The present incumbent is Kathy Biles. With her husband Keith she has been a resident on the island for a good number of years. Keith used to be manager of the only bank on the Falklands, but has retired from that and is now a most effective Speaker for the Legislative Assembly. We watched him in measured, quiet and effective action one morning.

Kathy was priested in 2004 as an honorary assistant priest to whoever happened to be the imported stipendiary incumbent priest. I have served upon and visited enough islands to know how fraught a vocation this can be. Islands attract a fair proportion of cranks, misfits and fugitives from reality, as well as gifted romantics and holy ascetics! She must be delighted now to have been appointed priest in charge herself, for a couple of years. Perfectly at home in the job she lead an excellent Remembrance Day service on our first Sunday and she and her husband Keith were hugely hospitable to Diana and me.

My church duties for our three weeks on the island were not onerous. I preached at an Evensong on our second Sunday and on our last took an early Holy Communion, followed later by the main service of the day. Diana and I both helped out at an Advent Fete and participated in a service for old folk at the hospital. In addition we attended and enjoyed two bible studies led by Kathy.

Knocking the demons out

I also fitted in a visit to the island gaol. It happens to be next door to the Deanery, an unlikely neighbour. I am no stranger to gaols. There were two that I visited regularly in my second Australian parish. This Falklands one contained a mere four rather sad seeming inmates.

One of the prisons I visited in Australia was a high security institution for the criminally insane. I took a monthly Communion service there, always with a couple of warders present. The congregation comprised four of five hulking men, well tattooed and spasmodically participatory. They would make comments on what I said in my short talk, or ask a question or two, not always stupidly either. I have never forgotten the remark of one great brute of a fellow. He came up to receive communion, and having done so smacked his lips appreciatively and commented, *Good tucker that, it knocks the demons out of yer.* A refreshingly reverential and perceptive comment.

Because Keith and Kathy are Falklands residents they have their own house, hence the convenient vacancy of the Deanery for us to enjoy. They also have a house out in the 'camp' to which they like to retreat for peace and quiet. On the day before we left, Keith took us on a splendid tour of East Falkand Island and we stopped at their 'camp' house for a delicious lunch. Keith knows pretty well all there is to know about the island and so was a most informative and entertaining guide. We are most grateful to them both for their warm welcome and kindness.

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