

Home

BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (September 2017)



IS THIS THE FIRST ZIMMER FRAME?

*(detail from Hieronymus' Bosch's 'The Temptations of St Anthony' 1501)
(See article 208 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 2017** 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>

(211) “This and That” - 24 September 2017

I’ve been an Englishman in exile for most of my life. Happily so. Voluntarily so. Glad to be able to define myself as such against those among whom I’ve lived. Never one of the crowd. Different. A stranger and a sojourner.

Sorting immigrant sheep from goats

It is one of several reasons for favouring Psalm 39. The phrase: *I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were*, resonates. So too does Orlando Gibbon’s beautiful seventeenth century setting of its deliciously gloomy verses. My son Peter as a boy, when criticised by his parents, would exasperate or amuse us by quoting verse three: *I held my tongue and spake nothing, I kept silence, yea, even from good words; but it was pain and grief to me...*

Two Fridays ago Diana and I visited Australia House on the Strand. We had been there several times before, but only to the typically brutal and functional immigration and passport waiting rooms and booths. They are specifically designed to dispirit as well as to distinguish hopeful immigrant sheep from expectant immigrant goats.

Guests at Australia House

On this visit we were welcome and honoured guests, not supplicant immigrants. Ushered into the beautiful, grade 2 listed building proper, we were dazzled by flowing marble staircases, fine wooden panelling, gilded ceilings and artful spaciousness. The building was begun in 1913 and many of the materials used in its construction were imported from Australia. Although the exterior is of pommy Portland stone, the foundations are of Australian trachyte. The gleaming interior marbling, in three distinct colours, comes from sites in Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales. The dark, carved panelling of the Downer Room, our destination, comes from the Moreton Bay Chestnut. Australia’s equivalent of the oak.

Impressed by the building’s beauty, I suggested to a friendly diplomat that its aesthetic qualities should be better publicised and boasted of in Australia. He responded cynically, maintaining that far from being impressed, Australians would be more likely to query such luxurious surroundings for mere diplomats. He also informed me that Australia House is usually the single largest polling station in Australian federal elections. More votes are cast there than at any polling station in Australia itself.

We were there for Diana to receive her Australian Citizenship once she had pledged and affirmed her loyalty to that fair land. The ceremony was held in the fine Downer Room and the High Commissioner, Alexander Downer, was present to welcome about 22 new citizens in all. The room is named after his father, Sir Alick Downer, who was High Commissioner from 1964 to 1972.

The welcome was all you would expect from Australians. Warm, unaffected, casual and yet wholehearted. There was a sense of camaraderie and quiet pride in Australia. As a Christian I was delighted to note that the majority of new citizens used the first version of the pledge, the one that allows God into the matter: *From this time forward, under God, I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey.* Each new citizen made this pledge individually. As Diana did so I found myself welling up with love of Australia. How could this be?

May Australia win the Ashes

The answer is obvious. After four years living in England, I have ceased to be an Englishman in exile. For the first time since I was six I am now English among the English. Yet it is exile that has defined my life. To be who I am I need to be a stranger and a sojourner. Happily so. Voluntarily so. Able to define myself as such against those among whom I live. Not one of the crowd. Different.

Little wonder that I should well up with Aussie pride in Australia House. I am now an Australian in exile. Able and happy to define myself as such over and against the 53 millions poms around me. May Australia win the ashes.

(210) “This and That” - 17 September 2017

We left Portugal and the feisty pair of sisters, our hosts, with regret and a little better disposed towards vegetarianism and Jeremy Corbyn. They being enthusiasts for both.

Never meet your enemies

If we made more of an effort to meet up and socialise with those whose opinions and enthusiasms differ from our own, the world would be a more peaceful place. Rod Liddle made this point in the Spectator recently:

Never meet your enemies — you might like them, and that ruins stuff. I had dinner with the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, about a year ago. During his time in office, Rowan came out with what I considered to be some of the most cringing, effete, left-liberal, self-abnegating rot I have ever heard. But then, at this dinner, I met the most kindly, charming, humble and witty human being. If a man could be said to actually radiate goodness, that was Rowan. I left the dinner utterly dismayed. Never meet your enemies.

Guadiana and Guadalquivir

Along minor roads and through scruffy, small-holding country we made our way to the border. We intended crossing the *Guadiana* river into Spain by ferry, but the ferry was out of action, so the bridge it had to be. We then took the highway to Seville through countryside beautifully productive and ordered. Acres and acres under glass. Great fields of wheat and sunflowers. Orchards of olives, peaches and nectarines. For over a hundred miles the centre of the highway was lined with oleanders in glorious bloom, mostly pink but with deep reds and whites as well.

We left the highway to enter Seville, but for want of dallying time and a ready parking space we didn't stop. We pressed along minor roads towards Cordoba along the *Guadalquivir* river. It was a lovely drive through great fields of healthy wheat and sunflowers. The prefix *Guad* for the names of so many Iberian rivers is derived from the Arabic word for river: *wadi*. The *Guadiana* was known to the Romans as *Flumen Anas*, the *River of Ducks*. During the Moorish occupation this became *Wadi Ana*, in Spanish and Portuguese: *Oudiana*, until finally, influenced by Castilian, it evolved into *Guadiana*.

We stopped for a lunch shaded by orange trees, in the town *Almodóvar del Rio* overlooking a most impressively sited hill top castle. Its pristine condition belied its antiquity. Originally an ancient Moorish, castle, it was hugely restored in the twentieth century and is now thoroughly commercialised. It featured in the Game of Thrones. We walked around its mighty walls enjoying splendid views.

An exact antipodal city

We arrived at Cordoba in the early afternoon. It is one of the very few cities in the world with an exact antipodal city: Hamilton in New Zealand. It's a good deal warmer than Hamilton though. Set in a depression in the valley of the river *Guadalquivir*, it has the highest average daily summer temperature in Europe.

We parked judiciously not too far from the great Mosque and walked down a wide modern street through the orange tree shaded parkland of its broad median strip. We then turned into the narrow, meandering and fascinating streets of the ancient city until we came upon the *Mezquita*, the second largest mosque in the world.

Faintly disturbing

Impressive, huge, and lovely it is also faintly disturbing to a proud Christian like myself. The aesthetic contrast it provides between Islam and Christianity is unflattering to the latter. On the defeat of Islam in Spain a Cathedral was built right in the middle of the mosque. Charles V, king of Castille and Aragon gave permission for this. On viewing the result he said: *they have taken something unique in all the world and destroyed it to build something you can find in any city*. He is right. Catholicism's gothic architecture and innumerable representational paintings of agonised saints, contrast poorly with the intricate, non representational patterns, calligraphy, mosaics and austere beauty of Islamic art.

(209) "This and That" - 10 September 2017

On a leisurely, sunny boat trip around the lagoons and marshlands of the *Ria Formosa*, we hoped to see flamingos and spoonbills. We saw neither. Only on a walk later did we spot a solitary spoonbill.

The Iberian magpie

It was left to the Iberian magpie to delight us. Unlike the English magpie it's not black and white. Its back is light brown, its underparts fawn and its wings and long tail feathers an azure blue. All that's black is the top of its head, all that's white its throat. *Rubado*: "Long tail" is its Portuguese name. Its Latin: *cyanopica cooki*. Cyan for the blue and *cooki* after a nineteenth century English naturalist, Captain S E Cook. The bird is so close in appearance to a 9000 mile distant relative, the East Asian azure winged magpie, it was once considered to be the same species. Wrongly.

Which is an excuse to refer to A N Wilson's new biography of Charles Darwin. Darwin was an expert at spotting tiny deviations in the shapes of birds bills to distinguish one species from another. A N Wilson's expertise is also, albeit metaphorically, ornithological. He ruffles the feathers of readers and critics not birds. His biographies of Jesus and St Paul did not win him many friends among Christians. This one on Darwin is winning him few in the scientific community. I love him as a biographer though. Acute, imaginative, full of interesting asides and acerbic opinions, he is thought provoking, original, often funny and a joy to read.

Hilaire Belloc and Charles Darwin

I can still recall two little nuggets from his biography of the, historian, versifier and Catholic bon-vivant, Hilaire Belloc, read many years ago.

The first: Elodie, Belloc's wife, placed a crucifix above the low lintels of the doorways in their house. It delighted her to see visiting atheists bow before her Lord as they entered or left a room.

The second is a Belloc quatrain that wittily reinforces official Victorian moral sentiments. It would win him few friends on the BBC these days:

*The world is full of double beds
And most delightful maidenheads,
Which being so, there's no excuse
For sodomy or self-abuse.*

That Darwin was an outstanding naturalist, geologist and biologist goes without saying. Only creationist freaks and flat-earth wierdoes would gainsay that. Thanks to him we see and understand the world differently and should be duly grateful, but nor should we be unduly reverential either.

Wilson is knowledgeable about the Victorians. He has written a hard to put down and not unsympathetic biography of Queen Victoria, as well as a book on the Victorians in general. He is

qualified to tackle Darwin. He does so, according to the reviews, with some distaste. I look forward to reading the book once it is available on kindle.

Much of the critical outrage at the book's debunking of Darwin comes from those only too happy to debunk Christianity. Darwin's support for eugenics and racism is made light of and excused in the Guardian as follows: *What he actually was.... was an Englishman with the usual prejudices of his time.....* Indeed, but how rarely do we hear such critics similarly excuse Rhodes to those who wish to pull his statue from its plinth? Or the Crusaders to those who dismiss Christianity on account of their bloodthirstiness. Rhodes and the Crusaders were also creatures of their time.

Fitting a cork

Portugal produces more cork than any country in the world and while there we visited a cork factory. It produces only the thin disks that top and bottom champagne corks. Millions and millions of them. The part of the cork in between the disks is made of compounded cork granules.

Like western Christianity, wine corks were considered doomed some years ago. Screw tops were bound to replace them. It has not quite happened. Traditionalists continue to prefer cork, even though, with the best science in the world, a wine-tainting fungus in natural cork cannot be totally eradicated. Even today 1% of corked bottles are indeed "corked". A recent resurgence in the fortunes of cork might presage one in the fortunes of western Christianity.

(208) "This and That" - 3 September 2017

We saw a brothel disguised as a saints' grotto when we went to Lisbon for the day by train. Also a bird on skates with a crossed-bill, ears like a spaniel and wearing a helmet; a devil playing the harp while riding a chicken, a singer with the face of a pig, a nude young woman about to dive from a high building, a man with a thistle for a head and many more such grotesqueries. Of all Lisbon's sights these, from a painting in *The National Museum of Ancient Art* stay with me

Mini-skirted monopods

We arrived in mid-morning and bright sunshine. Convolvulus, with electric-blue flowers, draped walls and climbed pillars. The three hour train trip had taken us through a variety of countryside, some of it *montada*. This is land lightly forested with cork oaks, grazed by cattle and productive of wild game, mushrooms honey and firewood. All the mature cork oak trees had had their lower bark removed. Grey above the hemline of the cut, black below. Mini-skirted black monopods. The recently harvested trees mini-skirted red monopods.

Once in Lisbon we queued for and then elbowed our way onto a packed 28 tram, warned wary of pick pockets. The tram rattled and squealed down steep streets to the capacious *Comercio Square* on the wide and beautiful *Tagus* estuary. We then caught a bus along the river front to the *Berardo Museum*. There Diana attempted to broaden my horizons. We toured a permanent collection illustrative of the artistic movements, vanguards and schools from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. *Dadaism, constructivism, neo-plasticism, surrealism, Abstraction-Création, kinetic art, abstract expressionism* and many, many more. All interesting, a few lovely even, but predictably, it was *neo-realism* that most pleased me.

A delicious tart and a loathsome rot

Afterwards we queued to buy some *pastel de nata*. These are a Portuguese speciality: custard tarts with a particularly delicious pastry. They were created in the 18th century by monks from the nearby *Jerominos Monastery*. The monks originated in France where such tarts were common because at that time the church used great quantities of egg white to starch nuns habits and church linen. The superfluous yolks were used to make such tarts.

Later we came across and entered *The National Museum of Ancient Art*. Here, to my delight, we discovered one of the greatest paintings by my favourite artist *Hieronymus Bosch*. In

a room devoid of tourists, other than ourselves, we pored over and examined minutely the large triptych *The Temptation of St Anthony* (1501). Richly symbolic, minutely detailed, hugely imaginative, and technically brilliant it is full of grotesque, mysterious and fascinating figures.

It tells the story of the temptations and torments of St Anthony's life. In the third century he was the first monk to practice his asceticism in the desert. Subsequent accounts of his spiritual and supernatural temptations in the wilderness inspired much medieval and later art.

St Anthony is said to offer particular protection from fire and *ergotism*. This is sometimes called *St Anthony's fire* from the burning sensation to which it gives rise. It is a particularly unpleasant disease caused from eating grain, especially rye, contaminated by a particular fungus. The earliest reference comes from 857: *a great plague of swollen blisters consumed the people by a loathsome rot, so that their limbs were loosened and fell off before death*.

The fungus and therefore the disease still occurs. There was an outbreak in 1951 in France resulting in five deaths. The convulsive symptoms and hallucinations associated with the disease are suggested as the source for the accusations of bewitchment that resulted in the Salem Witch trials. Rotating crops and deep tilling help control the fungus in grain. Deep tilling these days, is going out of fashion.

The first Zimmer Frame?

Zimmer frames or walkers began to appear in the 1950's. The first US patent was awarded in 1953 to an Englishman from Stretford. However, on the right hand panel of *Bosch's* triptych there is the earliest of all versions. It even has wheels and is being used, after a fashion, by a large nosed and footed ancient. Prescient *Hieronymus Bosch!*

[Home](#)