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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (May 2018)



BETWEEN TORRIDON AND DIABAIG - NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

*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 **May 2018** 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>

(245) “This and That” - 27 May 2018

Footling around Scotland gave us an occasional glimpse into an altogether different world. The world of affluence. The Scotland of grouse hunting, salmon fishing, whisky and golf.

Vainglorious peacocks

On one of our sorties we stopped to look over the Glenfiddich distillery in Dufftown, owned and set up by William Grant and Sons, specialists in blended whiskies. Glenfiddich, on the other hand, produces the world’s best selling single malt whisky, accounting for 35% of the worldwide market. The distillery is a beautiful, immaculately gardened and maintained, prosperous establishment.

Much as I enjoy a measure or two of single malt, neither Diana nor I felt quite at home at Glenfiddich. Though lovely, the place and especially its salesroom, breathed a carefully contrived “ambience”. We were a pair of shabby house sparrows who had strayed into a palace of calculated tastefulness and discreet but self-congratulatory affluence.

A bottle of fifty year old whisky, not Glenfiddich, but *The Balvennie*, from a sister, single malt distillery, also owned by Grants, was aesthetically and enticingly displayed at a cost of £26,750.00 a bottle. Who but a vainglorious, peacock-vulgarian or fool, would pay such a price, thought two shabby, Boldre vicarage house sparrows.

Moonshine at Talgarno

One of the most enjoyable, interesting and much, much cheaper whiskies I ever tasted was in my last parish but one. It was at a church barbecue at St Thomas’ Talgarno. This small daughter church has since been closed. In my day it survived, albeit precariously. It was a simple, clapboard building with two extra doors in the east end, on either side of the altar, that allowed cool air off lake Hume to blow through the building on hot summer days.

At the barbecue were a variety of strangers and guests. With one I entered into animated conversation about the problem of evil. After a while he asked if I’d like a whisky. At noon on a hot and sunny Australian day, I declined. My resistance broke when I learned it to be moonshine.

He owned a panel-beating business on the New South Wales side of the Murray river, in Albury. There he made the whisky in an unobtrusive, ramshackle collection of pipes, cylinders and canisters that that would fool any nosy excise officer. The result was smooth-tasting and pleasing. He called it Bourbon but it was not. Corn whisky to earn the title Bourbon needs to be aged in barrels. His most certainly was not.

Perhaps because we had been discussing the problem of evil, my new found friend interpreted my interest in moonshine as a desire to go into production myself. He suggested I bought a locally available, small still used in the legitimate distillation of eucalyptus oils, but easily diverted to more nefarious uses. Had I gone along with the idea St Thomas’ Church, Talgarno, might well still be open. Funded by moonshine at three Australian dollars a bottle. Serious competition for fifty year old Balvennie.

Donald Trump’s Scotland

We left Gatehouse of Fleet to stay a night with relatives of Diana just north of Glasgow. We pottered through the forest and hill country of Galloway along a route taken by Diana on a tandem many years ago. She was with Michael, her first husband, on honeymoon. To tackle Scotland on a tandem indicates an intriguing blend of courage and folly.

On our car trip the season, in the third week of April, were several weeks later than Hampshire. Innumerable daffodils were in full, fresh bloom. Few trees were yet leafed. We bypassed Ayr, and in doing so were reminded of a particularly vainglorious vulgarian called Donald Trump. We passed the newly refurbished “Trump Turnberry”. A distinguished, century

or more old golf course and resort, purchased by Donald Trump in 2014. The world of affluence again. It's impressive hotel with splendid views offers rooms for as much as £1359 a night.

A perfect setting for vainglorious peacocks, vulgarians and fools to sip *The Balvennie*.

(244) "This and That" - 20 May 2018

"Hell", said Jean Paul Sartre, "is other people." If so our recent ten day holiday in Scotland was hell. We went to visit and stay with people, as well as to relax and view lochs, firths and mountains.

Rugby, cricket and philistinism

Our rendezvous in Gatehouse of Fleet was with Bunty Love and some of her family. She used to sing in the choir of my father's church in Salisbury, Rhodesia. A fine contralto. I too sang in that choir. It was there that I learned to sing bass. After my fashion.

One of the very few disadvantages of being brought up on an African mission station was to be denied access to the Anglican musical tradition. Nor was there any musical education at my boarding school, Guinea Fowl Boys High. A bush school outside Gwelo. It specialised in rugby, cricket and philistinism. In spite of which it was a good school in many ways. It served me well.

My father left his African mission station to run a Salisbury suburban parish once I left school. In part to help finance my university education. I could stay at home and incidentally join his choir and edit the parish magazine.

So ignorant was I of choral music, it had never occurred to me that basses sang a different tune from sopranos. I sat my A levels at the end of the year and so returned home just before Advent. In the choir I sat next to a magnificent bass called Mike Joughin. A lovely man whose love of beer and cigars had no deleterious effect upon his voice.

The discovery of the running bass line to the tune of the Advent Hymn "Lo he comes with clouds descending" shivered my timbers. I sang, or rather bellowed, the repeated line "with what rapture...." unutterably enraptured.

Bagpipes and Holy Trinity Brompton

At a dinner party at Bunty's she proved to be still sharp of mind and wit. Her memory was good enough to remind me that my siblings called me "Randy Andy" for producing (after marriage of course) four children, to their mere two each. It was a lovely and sometimes hilarious meal. Her daughter and husband, we discovered, have a holiday house in Keyhaven. We are unlikely to entice them to St John's though. They are Roman Catholics. Also present was David Hannay, retired Professor of General Practice at Sheffield University, Chief of Clan Hannay, a player of the bagpipes, recreational sailor and excellent and amusing raconteur. His wife Janet is the daughter of a parson who for many years was Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton.

Diana's connections

The local connections were not only mine. As a child Diana and her family regularly holidayed just outside Gatehouse of Fleet. They stayed in the beautifully isolated cottage of a friend of her father, just a few yards from the stony beach of the Solway Firth. We discovered that the cottage was owned, and still is, by the Hannay family.

We paid it a visit down a steep embankment and walked the beach upon which Diana, when at university, had done a project all to do with the rising and falling of Solway Firth water levels through the centuries.

John Knox

Whenever we pass through a village with a church spire or tower advertising God's local presence, we are tempted to stop and look it over. Churchyards are lovely places to pause for a sandwich lunch or a coffee break. Many of the churches are beautiful beyond telling.

Their attraction is not quite so great in Scotland. All the lovely little kirks there, when entered, seem faintly alien. The established church, north of the border, is Presbyterian not Anglican. It should make little difference, but does. Primarily because the focal point in Presbyterian churches is not the altar but the pulpit. In thoroughly Protestant churches the preaching of the Word not the celebration of the Eucharist predominates.

The fire brand Calvinist John Knox was most responsible for Scotland's more thorough Reformation than England's. Hence a Scottish kirk's faintly knoxious atmosphere to a sacramentalist Church of England lover of short homilies rather than wordy sermons.

(243) "This and That" - 13 May 2018

For ten days in Scotland we traversed mountains, hills, valleys, glens and moors. Alongside firths, seacoasts, lochs, canals, and rivers galore. Glory after glory, after glory.

Later in the year we plan the opposite. From Perth in Western Australia to Tamworth in New South Wales. A trip that will be blow-all, after blow-all, after blow-all. Equally soul-satisfying, we trust.

Fascinating and repellent

In Scotland two books kept me company. The first, a best seller, both fascinated and repelled. The second a necessary antidote for the first.

Yuri Harari's book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* is a racy romp through human history from the Stone Age to the 21st Century. Easy to read, it is full of interesting information, crisp judgements, confident opinions, and wild speculations. Some wise, others dubious. Told within a framework of evolutionary biology and natural science it's also depressingly reductionist. Reducing humankind to mere biology. I prefer Hamlet on humankind:

What a piece of work is man, How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, In form and moving how express and admirable, In action how like an Angel, In apprehension how like a god, The beauty of the world, The paragon of animals.....

Though Shakespeare, as is his wont, does give the whole picture. Hamlet continues:

yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor Woman neither.

It was a relief to turn to Rowan Williams's short book: *Being Human: Bodies Minds and Persons*. A less easy read, it offers a more profound exploration into the complexity of what it is to be human.

Gatehouse of Fleet

We left Boldre at 6.00am and arrived at the Scottish border by 1.00pm. We then made our way to the lovely named *Gatehouse of Fleet*. There we met up with an old friend of my father's, Bunty, a contralto from his choir in Rhodesia, now in her 90s. In the year 2000 my family and I stayed with her and her husband Paddy in Kirkdale House.

My journal from the time reads: *Their rented apartment is as elegant in its furnishing as it is in architecture. Rhodesian economic refugees, they were unable to buy a house in Britain or rent one further south for want of capital. I had a long chat with Paddy. He is a sincere, practising Roman Catholic and told me something of which I was unaware about their Service of Reconciliation. After the homily, readings and general confession all are invited to go up and confess individually to the priest just one sin that troubles them, while music plays. So the rite retains a vestige of private confession.*

Bodily resurrection

He also asked me about bodily resurrection, which troubles him. Not least, presumably, because like many elderly people the thought of death's likely imminence sometimes haunts him,

and bodily resurrection, as often preached and taught, does appear nonsensical. I gave him my own understanding of it all, which makes sense to me if no one else, and also talked about the necessity of some liberality in approaching the bible. This illustrated well by an old fellow I buried a year or so ago called Harry Bock. In his early nineties he too was worried about death's inevitable imminence and so was moved to read the bible right through. He battled on to about the third chapter of Leviticus and then walked into the kitchen, tossed his bible on to the table and said, "I don't know! Jesus was a good chap, but the fellow who wrote the book was a bloody idiot!" One sympathises. While words reveal truth and reality, they also obscure them.....

The bible, at first sight, read without a modicum of scholarship, and with the mind only, not the heart, poses more questions than it answers and can shatter and shock.

On last week's visit we put up for the night in the Ship Inn, and then went to a splendid and loquacious dinner at Bunty's, with visiting members of her family and the local laird. Next day we joined her at a midweek Eucharist in her church. It had once belonged to a fierce Presbyterian sect. Both Catholics and Anglicans tendered for it when it came up for sale. The Anglican tender was lower, but they were favoured for being the *lesser of two darknesses*.

THIS AND THAT 242

We've just returned from an idle few days in Scotland. This verse was written in the year 2000 after a three month parish swap there.

Invergowrie and Dundee

A six foot one Australian,
A bearded, bald Episcopalian,
I've spent the last twelve weeks at least
As All Souls' Invergowrie's priest.

Australia and Scotland share
Far more than most would be aware.
No wonder then, I've settled in
As if among my kith and kin.

Invergowrie and Dundee
Indeed have grown to mean to me
As much as anywhere I've been,
Lived in, visited or seen.

I voice my gratitude in verse,
Well conscious that I can't do worse
Than Dundee's own great versifier,
Bill McGonegal the dire.

His "silvery Tay" is what defines
Dundee's delights, for it confines
The city to its northern side,
Its estuary being by far too wide

To let Dundee's exuberant life
Overspread the fields of Fife,
Which, green and lovely to the gaze,
In winter's cold and summer's haze

Remain there to remind us all
That cities needn't always sprawl
Forever outwards, covering beauty
With concrete, tarmac, graft and duty.

It doesn't matter where you are
(Held up by roadworks in your car,
Or trying to cross a busy street
In wild wind and bitter sleet)

A glimpse of fields and silver Tay
Will change the outlook of your day,
Will turn a curse to benediction,
To joy a sense of dereliction.

And just as special as Dundee
Has Invergowrie been to me,
For though to Dundee closely linked
It's yet contrived to be distinct,

Is very much an entity,
Retains its own identity.
Not quite by city planners nobbled,
It's not been swallowed up and gobbled.

Its little school and bowling club,
Two churches, village shops and pub
All give the place a village feel,
Contribute to its great appeal

The Crop Researchers' Institute
Plants fields of grain and berry fruit
That help preserve a country feel
And make the sense of village real.

And what a lovely church, All Souls!
For miles its spire attracts, cajoles
Believing Christians in, to see
How beautiful their faith can be.

The fairest church in all Dundee
Or so it seems to biassed me,
For I, inside, beneath its steeple
Have met my Lord in lovely people.

I've also visited the highlands,
Lochs and lowlands, firths and islands,
Glasgow, Edinburgh, Lochgair,
Kilmarnock, Braemar, Perth and Ayr;

Forfar, Plockton, Achnasheen,
Iona, Mull and Aberdeen;
Inverness and Loch Aline;
Scone, Dumfries and Gretna Green.

Stonehaven, Brechin, Crieff, Auchmithie,
Forres, Findhorn, Nairn Drumlithie,
Jedburgh, Fishnish, Corran, Keith,
Pitlochry, Glamis and Monifieth

Comrie, Aviemore, Dalwhinnie,
Carnoustie, Abernyte, Baldinnie.....
But best, by far, have been to me
Invergowrie and Dundee.

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