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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (June 2014)



First Vicarage Poppy

*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 **June 2014** 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>*

(44) “This and That” - 29 June, 2014

There was a plump, white, pasty-looking and extremely Anglo Catholic dean of Mashonaland diocese when I was a child. Whenever my mother cooked sausages for us she would say, as she put them into the pan, all pale, pink, soft and pasty looking, “Look, here's Dean So and So before he heads off to the seaside on holiday.” When they were

fat, brown, firm, crispy and ready to be eaten, she would say, “Look, here is Dean So and So back from his holiday by the sea. “As children we thought this an excellent joke. I am still childish enough to think it rather funny.

Boerwors

On Saturday nights for dinner at theological college in Grahamstown, South Africa we were served huge, fearsome South African Dutch sausages called “Boerwors”. They were long, black, spicy brutes, and unlike other sausages contained no sawdust, just a generous proportion of large gristle granules to dilute the coarse particles of real meat.

They made us burp. One Saturday night I took one from the dining room and pinned it onto the door of a student who was coming in late that night. I hoped that it would give him a fright hanging there sinister, inert and black to greet him in the dark. Once recognised, I was sure that it would gladden his heart at what he had missed.

He was not impressed. He plucked it from the door and threw it out of the window on to the roof of the verandah below. It remained there for months, sending out a slow trickle of grease on hot days, black in sunshine and off-white in rain. We closely observed it every day, told the weather by it and were deeply regretful when eventually a crow spied it, ate it and burped and gurgled over it for hours in a nearby tree.

I do love sausages, but am choosy about them. A friendly butcher once told me what he put in his tasty products. It horrified me and for some months I stopped eating them. Not for long though. They are irresistible.

Sausages are an ingenious way that butchers have evolved to make unpleasant meat tasty and useful. All sorts of scraps and pieces of meat are stuffed into sausage skins. Minced, spiced, bulked up with cereals and pushed in tight they can be delicious. There is no meat wasted in a good butcher's shop. A sausage skin covers a multitude of sins.

Tasty though tasteless

The Church has attracted to herself many metaphors and similes down through the ages. Here is a new and tasty one, though not tasteful. The Church is like a sausage. I love it. I have never been able to stay away from it for long. I love its buildings, its music, its services, its traditions, its parsons, its bishops, its organists, its choirs, its people, its God. The Church, like the sausage, has played a big part in my life.

Just as sausages are a creative way that butchers have evolved to make unpleasant bits of meat tasty and useful, so is the Church a creative way that God has evolved to make unpleasant people tasty and useful. Just as you find all sorts of scraps and pieces of meat stuffed into sausage skins, so you find all sorts and types of people in the Church - good, bad, holy, unholy, beautiful, ugly, old, young, high church, low church, hypocrites, the sincerely devout, every sort and type, all acceptable and good to be with because God loves them and because they are all trying to love or follow or believe in God.

There need be no waste in God's world. Everyone, every scrap and morsel of a person can be used and made something of in God's Holy Church, not least a sausage freak like me.

(43)

“This and That” - 22 June, 2014

I picked a tick off my upper arm a week ago. They are not creatures I associate with England, though they were a menace in the Rhodesia of my youth and potentially very dangerous. A regular and far from pleasant daily chore as a boy was de-ticking our pet dog every evening. It involved pulling off the grey-blue, bloated brutes and squashing them with a pop. The purloined blood seemed astonishingly dark on the cement slab upon which I did the squashing. My mother's old fashioned English curries were laced with raisins which, once swollen in the curry sauce, reminded me of blood-bloated ticks. Perhaps that is why I remember her curries with little joy. Having been warned of the dangers of Lyme disease carried by New Forest ticks it was a relief to be given some sane, non-alarmist advice from Jill Mathew. A great Forest walker she has had many encounters with ticks and knows how to tell the rare infected bites from the itching but harmless uninfected ones.

Australia way

We head off for three weeks in Australia on the June 25. As always there is far too much to do beforehand to allow the joy of anticipation fully to flood my being. We will be based in Benalla in country Victoria with my daughter Elizabeth, her husband Nathan and three splendid little granddaughters. Our parish here will run as smoothly as it does when I am present, I am sure. Sunday services will offer a pleasing surprise in its Officiant or Celebrant.

Spooky

Sitting at my study desk this past week or two has been strangely spooky. I hear behind me knocking noises and scratching sounds that indicate a presence. I turn round to see if anyone is there and no one ever is. Even when Diana is away these noises are to be heard. Late at night they can be unnerving. Suspecting mice or rats we have emptied all nearby cupboards. They reveal nothing, no evidence whatsoever of rodents. More thorough detective work has revealed that a small portion of the plastered and brick wall, right down at floor level, has a hollow sound when tapped. “Aha,” we surmised, “a covered up fireplace.”” A look outside revealed there to be indeed a redundant chimney. So part of the problem is solved. However the sounds continue, and if from fallen jackdaw nestlings, surely by now the little birds would have died. Do jackdaws nest at the bottom of unused chimneys? If so how do they get up and down, and more importantly, how do fledglings get up and out. Perhaps the noise comes from rats after all. Hmm.

An Arundel Tomb

We visited Chichester Cathedral some weeks ago. It was a first visit for me, though Diana lived in the town for several years while her first husband, Michael, was studying for the priesthood at its theological college, long since closed. The Cathedral is very lovely and well worth a lingering visit, not least because donations are invited rather than extorted, unlike in too many of the more renowned cathedrals. Best of all though was to come across the “Arundel Tomb” immortalised by Phillip Larkin in one of his most memorable poems. I hadn't realised that this tomb, with its man and wife occupants in stone effigy on top tenderly holding hands, was in Chichester. I had assumed the tomb to be in Arundel itself. We were able to recite the poem because it is framed and printed on a nearby pillar. Clive James, one of Australia's brightest sons, was an admirer of Larkin. I came across this little fragment by him from I know not where, a pleasing small tribute to Larkin:

*The truth is that you revelled in your craft.
Profound glee charged your sentences with wit.
You beat them into stanza form and laughed:
They didn't sound like poetry one bit,
Except for being absolutely it.*

(42) "This and That" - 15 June, 2014

Today, in the morning, at St Nicholas' Chapel, St Mary's and St John's we honour the holy and blessed Trinity, it being Trinity Sunday. This evening, at our Group Evensong in St John's, we honour John the Baptist the Patron Saint. He has been transferred, for convenience's sake, from the actual day on June 24.

Heresy

I was a mere curate at Salisbury Cathedral (Rhodesia) when I first preached on the Trinity. As I made my self-satisfied way back from the pulpit to my stall, led by the verger with his wand, I passed the Dean's stall. He was a great big, bully-boy of a priest, full of insecurities and hugely annoying to the choir for ruining every hymn and canticle by singing a raucous bass into his microphone. He whispered (into the microphone of course) as I passed "heresy, heresy"!

Even in those days I was self-assured enough to be convinced he was wrong, but had I indeed flirted with it heresy it would not have worried me overmuch. Orthodoxy is fine, it is good and necessary as a guide and reference point, but I sit lightly on it. Like the poet John Heath Stubbs in his fine epitaph on himself, I have always nursed a few pet heresies, if only for recreational purposes:

*.....Orthodox in beliefs as following the English Church
Barring some heresies he would have for recreation
Yet too often left these sound principles (as I am told) in the lurch
Being troubled with idleness, lechery, pride and dissipation.*

Being understood

I like to be understood and I like to understand. Writers who are unclear, imprecise, long-winded, meandering, repetitious, confused and confusing I abandon as soon as I can.

It seems to me that ideas are no more than mere notions until precisely clothed in exactly the right words. There is no such thing as a good idea badly expressed. Until perfectly and precisely worded it remains less than an idea, just a vague, inchoate idea struggling to be. All my life I have striven to say exactly what I mean. It has sometimes got me into trouble!

Sermons are notorious for imprecision of thought and wooliness of thinking. I have wriggled and fidgeted through many, many such in my time. What is worse, I have stood at church doors after services next to wooly preachers and heard folk gush with praise over their paltry efforts. How can people like such waffle, I wonder? Were they even listening? Do people prefer incomprehensibility to understandability? Do they mistake imprecision of thought for profundity? I suspect that too often they do.

I am not alone. I recently read an article by Theodore Dalrymple about a charlatan professor of his acquaintance. In one splendid paragraph he tells us that this person:
..... had gone through life in a pleasant and not unlucrative manner, lucubrating incomprehensibly and yet always with a vague penumbra of meaning. I do not mean to deprecate this: it is a definite skill that I personally have not mastered. Try as I might sometimes to be incomprehensible, and therefore profound, meaning keeps peeping through what I say like the sun through clouds. I suppose it is a matter of willpower and practice. I have never really wanted enough to be incomprehensible; and I am far too literal-minded for my language not to alight before long upon concrete realities.

(41) "This and That" - 8 June, 2014

The first of the wild poppy seeds scattered in our garden for the centenary year of the First World War are now flowering. They are rivalled by three or four large, hybrid poppies of the sort more commonly found in gardens, also bright scarlet.

Wild poppies and dog roses

I much prefer the wild poppies. The hybrids, though beautiful in their own right, are in comparison blowsy, vulgar and overblown. I liken wild poppies to simple, lichened, unpolished ancient granite tomb stones in a graveyard. Hybrids are more like grandiose, polished granite or marble, heavily decorated, self-important tombs.

Among ox-eye daisies on road verges, or in fields of grain, poppies are among my very favourite flowers. Also dog roses, how I love them too. As with poppies I prefer such wild roses, in their simplicity and modesty, to all the sophisticated garden hybrids and derivatives. To my delight I discover that the dog rose is the county flower of Hampshire.

The name "dog rose" does not do justice to the flower's beauty. It possibly derives from the use of the flower to treat the bites of rabid dogs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have always assumed dog roses to be the same as the more beautifully named "eglantine", as used in Keats' divine "*Ode to A Nightingale*", but apparently they are not quite the same. If so, then I love the eglantine, or the sweet briar, as much as I do the dog rose.

A special Evensong

Last Sunday, like the Sunday before, was made special by a lovely Evensong. This time it was not at St John's Boldre, but at St Catharine's College Cambridge.

The early eighteenth century College Chapel is relatively small, classically and austere simple and has a resonant acoustic. Its twenty eight member choir flooded that lovely space with glorious sound. The Introit and Canticles were by Thomas Tallis, the anthem by William Mundy and to round off in splendour a glorious offering of praise there was Bach's Fugue in A minor BWV 543. Unutterably lovely.

The sermon was no better than the weekly offering at St John's Boldre. Indeed it was a slightly adapted version of one preached at Evensong in Boldre on February the fourteenth. The standards at St John's Boldre are so very, very high I felt it necessary to dumb my effort down slightly for Cambridge!

At the High Table dinner afterwards I sat next to the Chapel's musical director, a modest, kindly and hugely talented Dr Edward Wickham. Of his innumerable duties, activities and achievements I learned not from him, but from a little bit of internet research. He lectures on and supervises fifteenth and sixteenth century music and the history of musical notation and is Course Director of the M.Mus in Choral Studies in the Faculty of Music. In 2008 he established the St Catharine's Girls' Choir to complement the existing mixed student choir. It remains the only college-based choir for girls in the country. More recently he set up The Cambridge Singing School which caters for boys and girls and offers tuition in vocal technique and music history as well as in classical choral repertoire. He performs all over the world with *The Clerks*, a renowned vocal ensemble which he formed in 1992. A fascinating table companion.

On my other side was Dr Rose Melikan from the Faculty of Law. Her special interest and expertise are in British political and constitutional history (especially the eighteenth and early nineteenth century), English legal history and Roman law. Even more interestingly she writes mystery novels. These my son David tells me are excellent, so I intend to acquire one to read.

(40) “This and That” - 1 June, 2014

Classical music seduced me when I was sixteen. We were living at the time on a mission station in the African bush and had only recently been connected to the electricity grid. We had no gramophone, let alone a television. Our shortwave radio was used for the news and little else.

Then a missionary friend of my parents, a splendid woman called Muriel Hook, before going on long-leave to England, lent us her little gramophone and modest collection of long playing records. May she rest in peace. The records included Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, *Handel's Water Music* and Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*. I fell in love with them all.

Obsession

It was the beginning of a love affair that became almost obsessive. We bought our own cheap gramophone and my father and I slowly gathered a large collection of long-playing records. We ruined them on inferior players over many years.

Whenever we went on holiday we would hunt out record shops in new towns in search of bargains. I remember sitting opposite my father listening for the first time to Purcell's "*Come, Come Ye Son's of Art*" Ode. When the famous counter tenor duet "*Sound the Trumpet*" began, we glanced at each other in delighted disbelief, sharing a frisson of boundless joy.

Before I left Australia I gave all our old records to the Parish Church fete. A sad and difficult thing to do, but I had long since swapped my listening to CD's. Rather more affluent than in those far gone mission station days I had gathered a new and parallel collection. It is now on my computer and playing as I write this.

Extravagance

In about the year 2001 I made a shocking purchase for a relatively impecunious parish priest with four children to see through university. I bought "Bach 2000", thanks to Amazon.com. When the huge parcel arrived, appalled at my extravagance

(well over a thousand dollars for every single piece of Johann Sebastian Bach's recorded music, more than 160 disks) I couldn't even bring myself to open the parcel. I put it behind a chair and left it unopened for 24 hours.

But it was one of the great, little decisions of my life. Thereafter I listened to a Bach cantata almost every day in the chapel before matins. They still bring me closer to God than almost anything. I love them, love them, love them, as well as the God they so marvellously witness to. I punch the air in exaltation as, following the words, I listen to dancelike joyous arias. I risked the money, threw caution to the wind and was well and truly rewarded.

Longing for death

I tap out these random thoughts on Tuesday morning having just listened to one of those Cantatas. It is all to do with longing for beautiful death and so perhaps not the sort that would appeal to everyone. Bach and his librettists seem to be so accepting of and positive about death. Astonishingly so really.

This particular cantata (BWV 161) begins with a heavenly tenor aria, accompanied by flutes and continuo, that starts with the words:

*Come, O death, thou sweetest hour,
When my soul honey takes
From the mouth of lions;
Make sweet now my departure,
Tarry not, final light,
That I may embrace my Saviour.*

An interesting reference to Samson finding honey in the carcase of a lion he had killed earlier. Later on, in one of the recitatives, there is a thrilling musical representation of an insistently ticking clock to the words:

*So now break forth, thou happy day of death,
So strike then thou, the final hour's stroke!*

All of this spices up my devotional life enormously. It is necessary to experiment with one's quiet time and prayer life and even be prepared to spend money in developing it. All of Bach's cantatas were an extravagance that after my initial shocked moment of doubt I have never regretted for a moment.

[*Home*](#)