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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (September 2014)**



**Guinea Fowl**  
(See article 53 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 **July 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>*

#### **(56) “This and That” - 28 September, 2014**

Harvest Festivals are disconcerting, discombobulating and disorientating to the likes of me. For a start, a visit to the supermarket suggests that the harvest is an all year round event. Shakespeare’s wisdom, pinned prominently on the fridge, freezer and pantry doors, might help persuade otherwise:

*“At Christmas I no more desire a rose  
Than wish a snow in May’s new-fangled mirth,”*

but it doesn’t does work for me. Out of all the harvests experienced in my long life, sixty

were celebrated in the southern hemisphere. In Africa during July (midwinter), on the island of St Helena during October (spring), in Australia during February (summer). In the global village that is our world, when are we not harvesting something or other, somewhere or other?

### **Harvest on St Helena**

I have recently begun to type out my longhand St Helena diaries. Here is the entry for 20 October 1982: **Wednesday:** *“Sunday went alright, a very peaceful one for me, preaching at 11.00am and 7.00pm, celebrating at 8.00am. Both sermons ok, I fancy. It was the Harvest Festival and the church looked lovely, though I was disappointed at the amount of produce. However, once all the parade children had brought their offerings there was a fair amount of stuff. At the sale next day I picked up rhubarb (made last night into tarts and the rest stewed), a few broad beans, a pineapple, two smallish pumpkins, two gem squash, nine oranges, a huge turnip, nine bananas - all for £3.60, not bad.....”*

I can't remember how much I was paid on St Helena, but it was a modest amount. In my diary, talking of a male nurse at the little Mental Hospital, I remark that “his salary is bigger than mine - about £230 a month...”. To keep ourselves well and interestingly fed we kept chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys for their meat as well as eggs and we maintained a large vegetable garden. Obtaining fresh vegetables other than from one's own garden and meat from one's own animals was sometimes difficult and usually very expensive.

### **Harvest in Zimbabwe**

In an earlier diary, from my time as Rector of Kadoma in Zimbabwe, there are two Harvest Festival entries: 30 July 1978 **Sunday:** *“A very successful Harvest Festival, over 90 communicants which was amazing indeed, and the breakfast afterwards was great fun with \$89 worth of vegetables sold. Two splendid hampers of vegetables came from the Merediths, positive works of art decorated with magnificent bunches of violets...”* 3 August 1981 **Monday:** *“The Harvest Festival Service went off very well indeed, with a packed church and lots of produce. We made \$106 out of the produce and the collection was \$109. Better than last year, I think in part because I sent the reminder letter round to arrive on the Monday before, late enough to prevent many folk from forgetting. I thought my sermon good, though Margaret's mother thought it too deep and sophisticated. Mrs Priddy loved it and wanted a copy to read.....”*

### **Harvest at Hill House School**

Now an entry from my current diary: **24 September 2014:** *Yesterday afternoon we went to Hill House School for their Harvest Festival. As with their Carol Service last year I found it very, very moving. There are about 24 students, all of them so seriously and severely autistic as to require a minder each. Simply to get the students to the ceremony is a triumph. A few didn't make it. The happy and noisy chaos of the ceremony I loved and to receive the baskets of goodies from students who took some persuading to bring them to me was a privilege.*

Such folk are to be treasured for just who they are. Charles Causley wrote an interesting poem called “*Healing a Lunatic Boy*”. The point he makes in the poem is that to heal the lad is in a sense to ruin him. Of its six stanzas, here are the first and last:

*Trees turned and talked to me,  
Tigers sang,  
Houses put on leaves,  
Water rang.  
Flew in, flew out  
On my tongue's thread  
A speech of birds  
From my hurt head....*

*Now the pebble is sour,  
The birds beat high,  
The fern is silent,  
The river dry.  
A seething summer  
Burned to bone  
Feeds at my mouth  
But finds a stone.*

Charles Causley "Collected Poems" - Published: PAPERMAC

## **(55) "This and That" - 21 September, 2014**

The lovely, uncomplicated and unfussy Confirmation Service at St Mary's last Sunday set me thinking about my own Confirmation in a very beautiful, simple church in Africa.

### **Lizards, cicadas and bush shrikes**

The church had a scruffy, elephant-grass-thatched roof that sloped steeply down to form deep and ragged-edged eaves supported on spindly poles all round the building. Inside small lumps of termite dirt occasionally fell from the un-ceilinged roof. Through un-glassed windows large, blue-headed lizards scuttled up tree trunks. Much smaller, less colourful, splay-toed geckos scampered and wriggled on the walls inside. In the early summer heat cicadas whined their single penetrating note, bees hummed frenziedly in the msasa tree blossom and the long, faintly melancholic whistle of the black-capped bush strike hovered harmoniously somewhere in between them.

My brother and I were the only white candidates among many, many blacks. The singing was superb. African schoolboys harmonising effortlessly. The air reeked richly of over ripe humanity. The Bishop was Cecil Alderson, an austere and learned bachelor with astonishingly white legs when unrobed and in shorts.

I don't remember feeling particularly pious or holy, though looking back the whole scene is bathed in a gentle, sainted haze of nostalgia. Those times, looked back to after years of horror in Africa, appear almost innocent. Much of British Africa contentedly blessed by a relatively benign form of colonialism, and I so much less a swine than I am now.

The Bishop's translated sermon I can't remember at all. Sermon's are not memorable when you are young. Like dry red wine they are an acquired, adult taste, endured by youngsters, not enjoyed.

### **Oh yes indeed**

I was well and truly confirmed though. Confirmed into the Church, into Christendom, into the tradition, into the faith. Never able since to leave it. Disgusted with it often, despairing of it periodically, doubting both its authenticity and even its God sometimes, but firmly, firmly confirmed and deeply and profoundly loving it.

How still, now, I love the Church, its Faith, it's Jesus of Nazareth and its

Creator God. How still, now, I love its robust, exuberant, violent, eirenic, complex, simple, paradoxical, awful, wondrous bible. How still, now, I love its music, traditions, architecture, arcane customs. I love it, love it, love it beyond telling. Firmly confirmed in it, I will never be pulled, driven or enticed out of sweet Mother Church. Those who sneer at it, mock it, vilify it, attempt to pull it down, enrage me. Confirmed? Oh yes, yes indeed.

### **A great builder of faith**

Throughout my life as a priest adult confirmation classes have been hugely stimulating. Those with Alison Middlemas and Jeremy Utton over the past three months have been no exception. We have questioned much, laughed a lot, learned a lot, discussed a great deal and agreed on most things. Talking the Faith I love so much openly, frankly and critically with sympathetic and thoughtful fellow believers is a great builder of faith. I am grateful to them both.

Starting on Monday, 17 November at 7.00pm in the Vicarage, there will be a four week Advent Discussion Group open to one and all. Using the chapter on the Eucharist from Rowan William's little masterpiece "The Christian Faith" we will indeed, as sympathetic and thoughtful fellow believers, talk together the faith we love so much, openly, frankly and critically. Deo gratias.

### **(54) "This and That" - 14 September, 2014**

I have subscribed to *The Spectator* for about twenty six years and I love it. Its stance, although conservative is irreverently, humorously, iconoclastically and unpredictably so.

#### **Friday lunch**

The magazine arrives every Friday and so over lunch its best columns are read out aloud. Diana and I particularly enjoy the "*Low Life*" columnist, Jeremy Clark. He tells of his daily life in a dryly droll, artlessly artful, matter of fact way that is frequently hilarious, but with an underlying sensitivity and pathos that reveals him to be deeply humane and even lovable. The political articles are only mildly interesting to me, it is the journal's cultural content that I value most. Not least because, although taking account of popular culture, there has been no sell out to it. Music, opera, art exhibitions, films, radio and television all receive serious and intelligent attention. The book reviews are superb as too are the cartoons.

Over the past few weeks Richard Dawkins has received two good kickings. I enjoyed them. Not that I have anything against atheists. There are times when I come very close to being one myself. Usually when in the company of fanatical Christians.

#### **The first good kicking**

The first kicking came in an article by Andrew Brown entitled "*The Cult of Dawkins*". Brown writes ".....it's difficult to remember the hosannas that greeted 'The God Delusion' and the vote by 'Prospect's' readers that named Dawkins as Britain's greatest public intellectual. Much of the atheist/humanist/secularist movement is now embarrassed by him, and repelled by the zeal of his cult of personality.....the Richard Dawkins website offers followers the chance to join the 'Reason Circle', which, like Dante's Hell, is arranged in concentric circles. For \$85 a

*month, you get discounts on his merchandise, and the chance to meet 'Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science personalities'. Obviously that's not enough to meet the man himself. For that you pay \$210 a month — or \$5,000 a year — for the chance to attend an event where he will speak.*

*..... the \$85 a month just touches the hem of rationality. After the neophyte passes through the successively more expensive 'Darwin Circle' and then the 'Evolution Circle', he attains the innermost circle, where for \$100,000 a year or more he gets to have a private breakfast or lunch with Richard Dawkins, and a reserved table at an invitation-only circle event with 'Richard' as well as 'all the benefits listed above', so he still gets a discount on his Richard Dawkins T-shirt saying 'Religion — together we can find a cure.'*

*The website suggests that donations of up to \$500,000 a year will be accepted for the privilege of eating with him once a year: at this level of contribution you become a member of something called 'The Magic of Reality Circle'. I don't think any irony is intended. At this point it is obvious to everyone except the participants that what we have here is a religion without the good bits.'*

### **The second good kicking**

The second kicking came in the form of an article by Simon Barnes in response to Dawkins' informing a woman, by way of Twitter, that if she was knowingly pregnant with a Down's syndrome foetus she should "*abort it and try again. It would be immoral to bring it into the world if you have a choice.*"

Barnes and his wife have a thirteen year old Downs Syndrome boy called Eddie. Without polemic or sentimentality he exposes Dawkins' vile comment for the unpleasant, illogical nonsense that it is '*.... It is dismaying... that a scientist and writer of brilliance.... has given the world licence to conclude that my son's existence is less valid than everybody else's. And no, don't blame the headline writers: a big name writer with moral authority has a responsibility not to go off half-cocked. You shouldn't risk being misunderstood on big subjects....*'

### **Lovely**

The article's loveliest vignette: '*Eddie brings joy to his family. He is cherished for his vulnerability and for his humour and affection, gifts that burst the banks of kin and spread into the wider world. Eddie means a great deal to many friends and acquaintances. The terminally ill find solace and meaning in his uninhibited nature. He and his aunt sang Elvis on her deathbed: "Love me Tender" was rocking across the hospice. Not everybody can do that.*'

## **(53) "This and That" - 7 September, 2014**

The Vicarage was in scaffolds for the last few days of August, to enable the repair of damage wrought by masonry bees.

### **Solitary bees**

Because these little creatures don't form colonies they are known as "solitary bees", of which there are over 200 species in Britain. There are "leaf cutter bees", "miner bees" and "cuckoo bees". Cuckoo bees lay their eggs in the nests of bumblebees. The

female first kills the bumblebee queen and then leaves her offspring to be reared by the bumblebee workers. Solitary bees can be parasitized by an insect called the “bee fly”, a stout and furry fly that looks like a bumblebee with long thin legs. It lays its eggs close to the entrance of solitary bees’ nests and the larvae feed on bee larvae and their stored food.

The soft mortar of the Vicarage was riddled with bee excavated tunnels. These, in places, were enough to loosen the bricks. The tunnels are roughly ten centimetres long and are coated by the bees with a smooth, varnish-like material. They are then filled with a mixture of nectar and pollen known as “bee bread” upon which an egg is laid. This process is repeated until the tunnel is full. The only place in the world where masonry bees of some sort or other are not found is Australia, hence my ignorance of and fascination with them.

### **Pye Corner**

Straight after church last Sunday we took a cross country route to a tiny hamlet in Kent called Pye Corner. Travelling leisurely on lesser roads than motorways allowed the destination to seem less important than the journey itself. It was a sunny afternoon and the drive through West and East Sussex and on into Kent was lovely. A hint of late-summer weariness to the heavily leafed trees gave the first intimations of an impending leaf-fall. The best of the summer is over. Beautiful autumn is on its way.

The reason for our trip was to collect two bags we had left with the friend who collected us at the docks in Antwerp and took us to Calais last year. He had brought them over to England on a later visit and left them with his daughter who lives in Pye Corner. We had forgotten much of what was in the bags, though not my hand written St Helena diaries, which I am anxious to type up, nor three simple little African artefacts I call my “study guardians”. These comprise two brightly painted wooden guinea fowl and a small, carved Mother and Child. They grace my computer as I type. There was also Richard Stokes’ translation of all of J S Bach’s Cantatas. This will enable me once more to listen to Bach’s sacred cantatas devotionally by following the words closely as I listen.

I love guinea fowl. My old grandmother kept a flock in Derbyshire when we stayed there for nine months after our Tristan da Cunha sojourn in 1956. In Rhodesia there were three different species of them in the wild, one of which we frequently encountered on walks. The secondary school I went to was called, somewhat bizarrely, “Guinea Fowl Boys High School”.

### **Charles Causley**

Geoff Hawkes and I are getting together every few weeks to discuss the poems of particularly favoured poets. The first was Edward Thomas, a couple of weeks ago, great fun. We have selected Charles Causley as our next poet. Having left my hardback *Collected Poems 1951-1997* in Australia I had a look on the internet to see if I could find a second hand copy at a reasonable price. To my amazement the same copy that I have in Australia, if new, now costs £2,499.50! However, if used, as my copy most certainly is, it costs a mere £30.00. Even that seems a lot for a well-used book. I settled on ordering a second-hand and less exhaustive edition at a more reasonable rate.

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