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BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (June 2018)



THE A'GHAIRBHE RIVER IN FULL SPATE
see 246 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 **June 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>

(249) “This and That” - 24 June 2018

No more *Spotted Dick* on the menu in the Houses of Parliament restaurant. *Spotted Richard* instead. Bird-lovers beware. Blue tits and shags will soon have to be rebranded.

A marital scarred veteran

Is this prudery or sensitivity? Obscene terms and once taboo subjects are now so commonplace in public discourse it can't be prudery. If it's sensitivity then it's strangely selective. Both the name and title of Jesus of Nazareth are widely tolerated and accepted as an expletive with no regard for the sensitivities of Christians.

Talking of birds, a bald robin on the feeder just outside my study window regularly eyes me off with fellow-feeling. It's bald patch is grey, but with a white feather fluff fringe. Where the baldness creeps close to its eyes there's an impression of white eyebrows. It's a marital-scarred veteran and survivor. At ease with itself, cocky, confident and feisty.

Einstein at Aberdeen

On our recent trip to Scotland we left the Highlands with regret to stay for a couple of nights in Aberdeen. An easy trip allowed time enough for a diversion alongside Loch Ness to remind ourselves of its beauty. We then visited Gordonstoun, of all places. Diana's idea not mine, but interesting. We imagined it to be austere spartan, but there was little evidence of that. It is situated in the driest and warmest part of Scotland amid pleasing, pastoral countryside and is now co-educational. Though well treed and spacious many of its buildings are decidedly ugly. Not so the students wandering about, polite and civilized.

In Aberdeen we stayed with a friend of Diana's from university days. A physicist, mathematician, one time friend of Stephen Hawking and for many years a professor of mathematics at Aberdeen University. He remains there a professor emeritus. Interesting to talk to, his book *Symmetries and Curvature Structure in Einstein's General Theory of Relativity* impressed, though not enough to tempt me to read it. The language of mathematics is more incomprehensible to me than *Unangam Tunuu*.

I asked if he considered to be an eminent scientist necessitated atheism. Not at all, he said. Though belief from such a perspective does require an imaginative thinking through of matters theological creatively and carefully.

The oldest of our universities

As well as being royally wined, fed and single-malted, we were shown all over Aberdeen University, the fifth oldest in the United Kingdom. That four of the six oldest universities in Britain are in Scotland says something about the contribution of Scottish scholarship to the Union.

The ancient centre and heart of Aberdeen University is very lovely. At its core is a small, ancient quadrangle of the Oxbridge sort and a lovely chapel, albeit with a Knoxian rather than Cranmerian or Laudian ambience. Architecturally the rest of the university is a hodge podge of unlovely functionality and modernism. It reminded me of my own alma mater, the euphonious, spacious but unlovely University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

From Aberdeenshire to Angus

Our next and last destination was Invergowrie, a village just outside Dundee. We potted along by way of the Cairngorms, stopping to wander around Ballater, passing Balmoral and pausing briefly at Braemar. This is one of the coldest villages in Britain. In 1985 it recorded the lowest ever temperature in the Kingdom: -27.2°C . It was far from warm when we were there. Our Aberdeen friends informed us that it has also recorded the hottest Scotland summer temperature, though I can find no confirmation of this.

We also wandered around red sandstone Kirriemuir, possibly the loveliest of towns we passed through. It is the birth and burial place of JM Barrie which explains a statue of Peter Pan in the town square. There are many narrow wynds or lanes between buildings and the town boasts

the narrowest footpath in Europe, 15.75 inches wide.

Nearby is the family estate of the mountaineer Sir Hugh Munro. He compiled a table of all the 282 mountains in Scotland over 3000 feet. They're now known as Munros.

(248) “This and That” - 17 June 2018

Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump in a *pas des deux* of peace and *tête-à-tête* of concord. It raises eyebrows more than hearts or hopes.

The Paganini of ideas

Both men insult their enemies. Though Kim's use of “dotard” trumps Trump's “Little Rocket-man”. Dotard: a person in his dotage, nearing senility. For a non-English speaker it's an obscure, apposite and unusual insult.

When it comes to insults, writes Theodore Dalrymple, ours is not usually an age of subtlety:

“Insults and even ordinary criticisms seem to me crude by comparison with those of my youth. We seem to prefer the elephantine to the feline. My favourite insult is that offered by the political philosopher to his more famous rival, Sir Isaiah Berlin. Oakeshott called Berlin the ‘Paganini of ideas’, which is wonderful because it can be received also as a compliment, for Paganini was the greatest violin virtuoso of his time, universally acknowledged as such. He was also regarded as flashy and superficial, a judgment borne out by his own musical compositions. How one would take such an insulting compliment, or complimentary insult, would rather depend on one's self-estimate and the state of one's vanity. Berlin knew perfectly that Oakeshott's remark was more insult than compliment, and may even have suspected that it contained within it a grain of truth. His own phenomenal fluency was not a guarantor but perhaps a symptom of his superficiality—relative, that is, to a genuinely profound or original philosopher, not to the average barfly.”

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Coincidentally the word *Paganini* was an insult in my own family for some years. When the children were small, to encourage them away from crude and unimaginative obscenities, we invented *Paganini* as the ultimate insult. It was used with such venom by my son Peter, at primary school on St Helena, he was punished for it. Its real meaning has surely to be *Page Nine* in Italian.

Loch Maree's monster

On Sunday in the Scottish Highlands we went to church at Poolewe. A car journey in bright sunshine alongside Loch Maree. Beautiful beyond telling. Of Scotland's freshwater lochs this is the fourth largest and arguably the most beautiful. It contains five, large, wooded islands and innumerable small ones. The largest island contains its own loch with its own island. Golden eagles soar above.

The waters of Loch Maree are claimed to be curative. A brief immersion an effective remedy for lunacy. It remains relatively unspoilt by development. In 1887 Queen Victoria stayed at the Lake Maree Hotel in Talladale. As a result a nearby waterfall, fed by streams from mighty Ben Eighe, is called *Victoria Falls*. Less spectacular by far than the river Zambezi's *Victoria Falls*, they are, in their own way, just as beautiful. Loch Maree is the largest loch north of Loch Ness and has its very own monster, *Muc-sheilch*.

Visiting St Maelrubha

The church we attended was dedicated to *St Maelrubha*, a seventh century Irish born saint. He founded an important monastery at *Applecross*, of which now there is little trace. There is a

painting of the saint on the wall of the small, stone, pleasing Episcopal church. A wild and hairy fellow, as imagined by its artist.

There were ten of us in the congregation. The vicar preached a short but effective sermon on forgiveness. Enjoyment is memorable. I can still see her, behind the altar, swaying blissfully as she sang her heart out in the hymns.

Afterwards in the church hall, over a cup of tea and a meringue I met a retired priest and medical physicist. He had been ordained by Paul Richardson, once my bishop in the Diocese of Wangaratta. A short, curly-headed, obsessive mountain walker and extremely well-read bishop. An uncompromising traditionalist he is now a Roman Catholic.

Later we were taken by our friend on a spectacularly beautiful drive to a restaurant in a tiny hamlet on the shores of Loch Torridon. Local sea food, eaten outside in cool sunshine, was Holy Communion all over again.

(247) “This and That” - 10 June 2018

The first circumnavigation of the world was by Ferdinand Magellan in the 16th century. It took three years. Only 1 boat out of 5, and 18 men out of 270 returned. Magellan was not among them. He was killed in the Philippines.

Circumnavigating the world at last

It took me 60 years. I completed my first and only world circumnavigation in 2013. From the age of six until then, innumerable voyages to paradisaical haunts had taken me no further than half way round the globe. 177° east of Greenwich in New Zealand. 18° degrees west of Greenwich, off the coast of Senegal, in the North Atlantic ocean.

To complete a circuit of the world so long after my first long voyage to Tristan da Cunha in 1956, was deeply soul-satisfying. The world in perspective at last. Diminished a little in the accomplishment, but beautiful nonetheless.

Circumnavigating Scotland

We circumnavigated Scotland by car last month. This too was hugely satisfying. Though, as with the world, to get that lovely country into perspective was to diminish it as well as to be overawed by its beauty.

Anything grasped, fathomed and comprehended is a little belittled. Simply by being mastered.

What is unknown, unexplored and unmastered helps keep ourselves in perspective. In the unlikely event of “a grand theory of everything” ever being achieved (the holy grail of the physicists), it will diminish the universe, and render humankind insufferable.

Thwarted

We set out from our cottage in the Highlands on a cool, sunny morning. Our plan was to arrive at Durness by 11.00am in time to catch a ferry, and then the bus to Cape Wrath. This is the north west tip of mainland Britain and dear to all lovers of the BBC shipping forecast.

It was a beautiful drive. We sped up the west coast, by way of Ullapool, over dun coloured moorlands darkened by vast acreages of winter-dead heather, gloomily black when the sun gave way to drifting clouds. In every small town and village a profusion of daffodils in full bloom brightened the journey. As too did clumps and ridges of golden gorse. Mountain peaks were still lined and streaked with snow. Desolate valleys as well as occasional green valleys distilled the sky into bright blue lochs and firths.

We made it to Durness with time to spare, but were thwarted by the Ministry of Defence. The land south of Cape Wrath is of restricted access to the public because of its frequent use for military manoeuvres. Our chosen day was one such. This is the second time that I have been foiled by the British military.

The first was in 1982 in Cape Town. The ship my family and I were booked on for St Helena was requisitioned by the Ministry of Defence for use in the Falklands war.

A change of plan

Over a mug of asparagus soup we decided that if we were to miss the north western tip of mainland Britain we would instead visit the northernmost point, Dunnet Head. So eastward along the north coast of Scotland we made our way. A surprisingly short coastal journey, even with long diversions inland to cross great inlets and along winding, narrow roads with frequent, well marked, passing bays.

We bought the wherewithal for lunch at Bettyhill on Torrisdale Bay and ate it by a rocky beach near Crosskirk, watching fulmars glide towards and away from nests on nearby low cliffs. Along the route moorland had given way to arable and pastoral countryside.

Dunnet Head, at 58.64° north is not only the most northerly point of mainland Britain it's also the furthest north I have ever travelled. Almost the same latitude as Stockholm and a mere degree and a bit south of Oslo.

On a lovely afternoon sea birds soared, the light house dazzled crisply white and the cliffs of the Orkneys, bright in the sunlight, tantalised. We left to visit John O'Groats. Over commercialised, coach-ridden and nasty. It's only merit being to attract the mob from lovelier destinations.

(246) "This and That" - 3 June 2018

Small islands throw disparate sorts together. A young doctor on the Island of St Helena in the 1980s found himself in close social contact with his vicar for several years. There were too few others with whom to confabulate, dally and dine to be discriminating. He was surprised to discover the vicar relatively normal and less than moronic.

Visiting the Moon

After a night in Glasgow Diana and I headed north to visit another St Helena acquaintance turned friend. Pat Moon, training community nurses, was also on the island in the eighties. Like us she is now getting on in years, a twinkling eyed, feisty, vegetarian, convinced atheist and eccentric. Her home an old cottage in the Northwest Highlands.

It is set in a much loved, carefully nurtured, pleasingly wild garden and has no wifi or mobile phone coverage. So to be with Pat Moon was to be as if on the moon. Though scenically Wester Ross surpasses anything that the stark, clinkered, inhospitable real moon could offer.

Snow topped mountains huddled us. A salmon river in full spate, lined with silver birches, gurgled and roared less than 100 yards away, beyond a paddock patrolled by a strident, vicious, harem-protective cockerel. Geese and ducks honked, waddled and paddled a minor rivulet even closer to home. Wild birds fed frenziedly from swinging feeders.

Intelligence signalling

Our hostess was no wavering atheist. A blatant lie told by the headmistress of her convent school had set her on a course from which she never deviated. But we could tease her and be teased in return. It was good fun.

An atheist, Simone Weil reminds us, may be simply one whose faith and love are concentrated on the impersonal aspects of God. We are usually far less apart than we think.

Though those atheists contemptuous of faith are usually just 'intelligence signalling'. The Christianity of the simple is taken as normative, sneered at, easily dismissed and then atheism adopted to advertise an insecure 'cleverness'.

Jam doughnuts and blistered lips

My last parish church, in Australia, was in the centre of a large country town. It served as a temporary refuge, resting place and food bank for those in difficulty, under threat or homeless. One of these was a plump, part-aboriginal, gentle, hesitant, easily intimidated but usually smiling,

woman. We'll call her, after Jesus' mother, Mary. We loved her. She visited the parish office nearly everyday. Always with a wheeled shopping basket full of bargains she'd acquired.

A local baker supplied her regularly with day-old jam doughnuts. Knowing me to be partial to these, she gave me her surplus. Revivified in a microwave they were as good as fresh, the jam so hot it blistered my lips to rival Marilyn Monroe's. Diana, solicitous of my health and guardian of my girth, threw them away if she got to them first.

Mary complained about nothing, but we began to suspect that she was so often around town and church because she couldn't bear being at home. This turned out to be so. She was frightened of her drug dealing, jailbird son. She locked herself in her bedroom at night, and got out of the house as soon as she could. His vicious dog intimidated her too. I met the son only once. It was enough. I had given Mary a lift to her home, which was on the other side of the Goulburn River. As I was chatting to her there a muscle-bound thug drew up in a battered car. He appeared not at all pleased to see his mother talking to a priest.

What a put down

After a few perfunctory pleasantries he began to interrogate, abuse and threaten me with violence. If ever he saw my car near the place again something nasty would happen to me he said. Soft answers failed to turn away his wrath.

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