

# Home

## **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (February 2021)**



### ***St John's Boldre - The New Forest***

*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 **February 2021** 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>

## (389) “This and That” - 28 February 2021

Who would have thought it? Walking the lanes of Pilley and Boldre this grey and sodden winter, has brought to mind a glorious, jacaranda-treed square, with a fountain in its centre, right in the middle of Zimbabwe’s Harare. There, in the shade, on hot, tropical days, gather weary shoppers, enchanted tourists, lunch-munching office workers, and a sprinkling of vagrants and vagabonds.

In my student days it was called *Cecil Square*, after that enterprising, but now unmentionable colonialist, Cecil *you-know-who*. Today, more aspirationally than inspirationally, it is named *African Unity Square*. Harare Cathedral’s great west door opens onto the street alongside it. I was a curate there for three years. Happy days.

### Slashed, torn and ripped

One sunny morning, in the mid nineteen sixties, a callow, long-haired student of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Andrew Neaum, strolled through the square during Rag Week. There he was accosted by a group of Gwebi Agricultural College students, one of whom wielded menacingly a pair of sheep shears. They were beefy, khaki shorted, well muscled, rigger-bugger lads, disdainful of long-haired, university swots, particularly so during Rag Week.

The blunt shears were applied to my lovely, blond locks with the crude, slashing efficacy of the Boldre and Pilley hedge-trimmer. Which is why, as I walk the so crudely slashed, torn and ripped hedges of Church Lane, my mind goes back to *Cecil Square* and the ruined beauty of my violated pate all those years ago.

With such bizarre and unlikely connections our fertile minds, memories and imaginations add spice to life.

### Stocktaking

I’ve admired the Anglican poet George Herbert for many years, but only on the strength of a dozen poems. During Lent I’m reading many more, carefully and closely. They’re wonderful. In the early hours of one morning last week, on my backlit Kindle, I read, reread and read again “*Affliction (I)*”. “It is thought,” writes Mark Oakley, “that Herbert wrote this autobiographical poem sometime in his mid-thirties, before his ordination. It is an extraordinarily honest bit of spiritual stocktaking, often accusatory towards God, and just about held together by Herbert’s belief that affliction, ultimately is beneficial because it ‘softens, and works the stubborn heart of man.’” The poem ends:

*Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot,  
Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.*

### Not Monday but Thursday

For safety reasons we have had to store away all the prayer books, hymn books and bibles in St John’s. The complete service, including hymns and readings, is now printed on the pew sheet. This has meant rather more work for the parson and wife, who arrange, compile, proof-read, print and staple the thing together. But how much more stranger-friendly it is not to have to reveal your liturgical ignorance to nearby worshippers by juggling books, or peering over people’s shoulders for page numbers.

I’m now required to have the order of service and sermon completed by Wednesday, so that the pre-recorded version of Sunday’s worship can be put together with due care and consideration. Monday’s no longer a day of peace and relaxation. It’s Thursday that’s so honoured.

### With angels and archangels

While Diana and I were recording the sermon and our part of the service a few weeks ago, a stranger walked in, sat down, and endured the sermon. He walked out at the end without a hurrah, thank you, or gesture of goodwill. I await a letter informing me that the experience turned his life round and that he no longer beats up his wife, fiddles the books, or drinks to excess.

It is good that we’ve been able to maintain regular services at both St John’s and St Nicholas’ when so many churches have not. Our worship, while different, is still lovely, peaceful, rewarding and reassuring. All the better too, thanks to Timothy’s lovely recordings, for an awareness that those unable physically to be present, like angels and archangels, are well and truly with us in spirit.

## (388) “This and That” - 21 February 2021

To go with the flow is not always for the best, or wise. You can end up in backwaters, eddies, whirlpools or quagmires. It carried me into the teaching profession, the most scandalously undervalued of all professions, but not the one for me.

### Learning to ride a bicycle

To help my father pay my way through university I signed up for a “teaching grant”. My fees were paid by the Rhodesian government, on the understanding that I would undertake the year long Postgraduate Certificate of Education course and thereafter teach in government schools for at least two years. I went with the flow. Having obtained a degree, I duly did the PCE and ended up a teacher.

The head of the University’s Department of Education was Professor Jac Rousseau. He’s remembered by most of his students for just one pearl of wisdom: “You learn to ride a bicycle by riding it.” We all agreed. It’s silly to deny the obvious.

### A sizzling girlfriend

More important to my future than the Professor was a fellow student who had joined the course after completing her degree at a South African university. A sizzler of a girl friend, she was not at all the sort to go with the flow. She it was who initiated a turn around that ended, several years and girlfriends later, in my ordination to the priesthood.

My difficulties as a teacher had nothing to do with a lack of rapport with youngsters. If anything there was too much of that. Rather it lay in what I taught. My subject was English. I’d spent three years studying nothing but, and yet I felt a mountebank teaching it. At university I had done work sufficient to pass my finals, but little more. In no way at all had I anything like entire mastery of my subject.

Few people do though. Can anything worthwhile be grasped in its entirety? Of course not. Had I realised this and also come across a Louis MacNeice’s poem that beautifully says as much, I might have persevered. I’m glad I did not. I remain eternally grateful to that sizzling girlfriend.

### Entirely

If we could get the hang of it entirely  
It would take too long;  
All we know is the splash of words in passing  
And falling twigs of song,  
And when we try to eavesdrop on the great  
Presences it is rarely  
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate  
Even a phrase entirely.

If we could find our happiness entirely  
In somebody else's arms  
We should not fear the spears of the spring nor the city's  
Yammering fire alarms  
But, as it is, the spears each year go through  
Our flesh and almost hourly  
Bell or siren banishes the blue  
Eyes of Love entirely.

And if the world were black or white entirely  
And all the charts were plain  
Instead of a mad weir of tigerish waters,  
A prism of delight and pain,  
We might be surer where we wished to go

Or again we might be merely  
Bored but in brute reality there is no  
Road that is right entirely.

### **Kalk Bay**

Last week we watched a recording, from Cape Town, of my sister's ashes being laid to rest in the churchyard of Holy Trinity, Kalk Bay. It was a sun-bright, blue sky, breezy day. Her husband Bob and son John, reassuringly in character, spoke of her lightly, lovingly and naturally, striking just the right note. The priest, kindly, calm, loving and wise, was the daughter of Sue's first and longest best-friend, right back from happy days on Tristan da Cunha as a little girl.

I love Kalk Bay. The Church is lovely, the little town and harbour exquisite. The ceremony ended with "Goin' Home" sung by a Welsh male voice choir. Heart-rending. When the YouTube recording ended, quite by chance, Bach's Easter Oratorio burst gloriously upon us.

## **(387) "This and That" - 14 February 2021**

Every month, for half a century, I have read through all 150 Psalms in daily chunks. Whenever possible in Miles Coverdale's balanced and musical translation in the Book of Common Prayer.

Familiarity has not bred contempt. It's freed my mind to soar, wander, linger and ruminate as the words, like a Henry Purcell ground bass, thrum along underneath.

### **Lurking in secret places**

On the third of February we read Psalm 17 in which there occurs the interesting word "whelp." It brought my father to mind. He sometimes referred affectionately to my brother and myself as young whelps. Though in this psalm it is the ungodly "enclosed in their own fat" who are said to be "like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a lion's whelp, lurking in secret places."

Coverdale's musical prose gladdens the heart and lifts the spirit, and the occasional archaic or obsolete words and phrases tickle the fancy: "...the singers go before, the minstrels follow after, in the midst are the damsels playing with the timbrels." Merely as sound, let alone meaning, damsels and timbrels delight.

The word damsel originates in the French demoiselle, meaning "young lady". It's now obsolete, except as the "damsel in distress" trope. Which, ironically, turns feminists themselves into distressed damsels for perpetrating regressive, patronizing myths about women.

### **Dulcimers and timbrels**

Timbrels were the foremost percussion instruments of the ancient Israelites, not dissimilar to modern tambourines. They were particularly favoured by women and used for dances and to accompany songs of victory like the one sung by Moses' virago of a sister, Miriam.

I toy with the idea of writing a piece of verse beginning: "The timbre of the timbrel of the temptress...." It would be more W S Gilbert than S T Coleridge I fear, who in Kubla Khan introduces us to the haunting, mysterious "damsel with a dulcimer...."

### **A goodly heritage**

In Psalm 16 there occurs the line: "the lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground, yea, I have a goodly heritage." This set me reflecting upon my own good fortune. How fair the ground into which my own lot has fallen.

To have been born in 1945, at the very end of a foul world war, into a secure but excitingly adventurous Church of England priest's family, is to have been immeasurably blessed. What a good life's trot I have enjoyed. Imagine being born in 1900. Two World Wars, to be lived through or killed in. A great depression and the Spanish Flu.

Should Covid 19 nobble me, I'd be regretful, but hopefully will die filled with the grace of gratitude.

## Guinea Fowl Boys High School

No one who I went to school with, as far as I can tell, ever came to much. One of us almost made it into the Springboks. That's about it. Not a single celebrity. Perhaps it was because Rhodesia was drifting inevitably towards its metamorphosis into Zimbabwe, and so there was little opportunity to make a name for oneself. Or it could have been because we were all sensible enough to opt for a life well-lived, rather than one devoted to the single-minded, all consuming graft that leads to fame, notoriety and reward. This option W B Yeats encapsulates in a little poem, called "The Choice" the first four lines of which go:

*The intellect of man is forced to choose  
Perfection of the life, or of the work,  
And if it take the second must refuse  
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.....*

### **The anonymity of normalcy**

I remember my schoolmates with pleasure and thoroughly approve and admire them for choosing the anonymity of normalcy. Very few were nasty. Even the small quota of furtive bullies, liars and snivelling cheats were denied, by Rhodesia's twilight, the opportunity to turn their nastiness into the notoriety of today's world-stage strutting bullies, liars and cheats: Putin, Erdogan, Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping et al, et al, et al.

## **(386) "This and That" - 7 February 2021**

Good similes elicit a delighted flash, rush and frisson of affirmative recognition. Bad ones but a sigh.

### **Light-footed common sense**

Clive James had a way with them: The Sydney Opera House he compared to "a portable typewriter stuffed with oyster shells". The pumped body of Arnold Schwarzenegger to "a brown condom stuffed with walnuts". Damon Hill's Formula 1 racing car to "a modern sculpture propelled by burning money". A sense of humour to "common sense, dancing". I love Clive James.

### **Nokter the Stammerer**

I was recently given a copy of his last published book: *The Fire of Joy: Roughly 80 Poems to Get by Heart and Say Aloud*. It ends with a postscript entitled: *Growing up in Poetical Australia*. Though just a few pages it contains many delights, one of them a "two line masterpiece" of a poem from a friend of his youth called Harry Hootan:

*In the midst of life  
We are in Perth.*

This set me searching for the origin of that verse's origin, namely, *In the midst of life we are in death*. It turns out to be the first line of a Battle Song composed by *Notker the Stammerer* (840-912), a leading literary scholar of the early middle ages: "*delicate of body but not of mind, stuttering of tongue but not of intellect, pushing boldly forward in things Divine, a vessel of the Holy Spirit without equal in his time.*"

### **Impassioned intercourse**

James also introduces a verse by another university friend. It's about two hapless lovers who, because of a timid reluctance on the part of the man to declare himself, never consummate their love. The verse ends:

*Friends buried him where she will lie  
When dead. They'll rise as roses then.  
  
As roses, then, they'll bloom on trees,  
Enjoying, kindly Fate decrees,  
Impassioned intercourse, through bees.*

### **A post Brexit, pre Brexit holiday**

There'll be no trip to Australia this year. Nor possibly next year. Instead our daily walk becomes an annual holiday in miniature. It's economical, and with a little imagination turns out to be as varied geographically as the real thing.

Thrushes are already in full throat. Just as when travelling through Europe we pass from one country into another, so too on our walk we pass from one thrush's territory into another's. The language changes too, for no thrush's song is identical to that of the previous territory's songster. It's a pre-Brexit holiday though. No passports required.

### **Mañana mañana**

We were vaccinated last Sunday in Christchurch. Last time I needed inoculation against a deadly disease was in Panama. Newly retired Australians, we were crossing the Pacific on our leisurely way to Boldre by freighter. Two days out of Auckland, the ship's Captain discovered I'd not been vaccinated against Yellow Fever. We were heading for Panama and Columbia where this vaccination is required.

So my inoculation was arranged for when we arrived at Colon in Panama. Once docked at Manzanillo we were bundled into a minibus and driven to the Shipping Agency's headquarters in Christobal, Colon's original port. Mañana, mañana! The doctor booked for the task was unavailable for an hour then another and then for good.

A frantic ring round to find another was fruitless. At one time it looked as though we might have to travel back by car across the isthmus to Panama City. We'd have loved that, but sadly a doctor was found and so back to the minibus. Then further mobile phone exchanges revealed yellow fever vaccines dangerous to those over 60, and therefore not required! A large certificate saying as much was produced. So into Colon to find a doctor prepared to sign it.

We loved Colon with its semi-derelict, crumbling apartments and brightly painted though faded and peeling shops and buildings. Its colourfully garbed, buoyant crowds seemed full of perzzaz and zing. Narrow streets with graffitied walls fascinated us with chaotic, spaghetti-like tangles of black cables. A Dr Juan Nunez signed my vaccination exemption. Phew! Nor did I catch Yellow Fever.

**[Home](#)**