

Clegg News 1998

You can have the Queen's seat because she's not coming tonight', the ticket lady in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw said when I asked if there were any seats for the concert last week. Why she did not come soon became evident. I wonder how long we will have to tolerate, in the interests of 'authenticity', Mozart's bassethorn concerto in which the soloist cannot be heard and passionless performances of Beethoven symphonies.

There were no authenticity hangups in the concert I had conducted the week before. Dar es Salaam Choral Society's December offering of Victorian lollipops culminated in a steroidal performance of Sullivan's 'Lost Chord' which brought tears to the eyes of all the old colonials that struggled out of the woodwork to hear it. I take an increasing enjoyment in trying to design programmes that walk the tightrope between that which is pure enjoyment and that which also uplifts the soul, and in the process, I often find that a piece - even 'Home, Sweet Home' - put in for the former purpose, actually can, in some measure, achieve the latter, even though the DSM choir is not heavily into soul uplifting. Dar, unlike Amsterdam, however, does not lie in the long shadow of the fin de (last) siecle movement that dictated that if you simply enjoyed it there must be something wrong with (a) you or (b) it, or both.



Do you remember reading this year of a country devastated by sudden and unseasonal rainfall. Rainfall that cut the country's railway system in two, that destroyed some 40 road bridges. Maybe you missed the bus disaster in which the driver tried to negotiate a bridge that was flooded so much that the water was flowing over the top of it, disguising the fact that the middle section was missing. Of the 100 plus passengers, mainly children returning to school,

in the overcrowded bus, only 25 got out alive. Honduras perhaps? No, Tanzania. But because it was Tanzania, it was not reported. Tanzania only hits the headlines when a foreign embassy is bombed.

The rain was delivered by El Nino and, paradoxically, what it did in Dar was to cut off its water supply. Three and a half million people were without water after the pipe across the river was washed away. Well, that was not entirely true, there is a lot of water about in ditches and rivers and all over town wherever there was depression with water in it, people bunched together with buckets. A favourite spot near where I live was the bridge at Savey where the little river beneath is easy to reach. It is 100m downstream from a place where the University rubbish is tipped. The cholera outbreak was waiting to happen.

Outside each hall of residence every other evening, the students would queue. Well, actually they didn't, they just stood around and chatted while their buckets did the queuing, long rows of multi-coloured plastic containers, maximum head-carrying size. They would queue patiently for several hours waiting for the bowser, which may, or may not, come.

They restored the water of course, after about two weeks. They always do. They promised again that steps will be taken to ensure that the capital is not wholly dependent on one supply. They promised that last time when drought (and farmers who undid the bolts on the pipe to water their animals) caused the supply to dry up completely. No one believed them then either.



An haemorrhoid (wrote a Dutch friend, who is, by chance, a vet) is caused by a rupture of a tributary of an inferior rectal vein giving rise to a haematoma in the subcutaneous tissue of the

anal canal. Also known as thrombotic pile.

There, as they say, you have it. And indeed, there, I have it. There is a time in the affairs of men, said my doctor, a mildly mad Dutchman called Ype, when you have to consider the state of your sphincter. One such time is when you have to go and spend much of your days standing in an immigration queue. If you need an immigration permit, take good care of your sphincter.

It would not be entirely appropriate to describe in more than outline in a letter such as this what my doctor told me I should do with the tubes of ointment and local anaesthetic cream he prescribed but he then asked me if I had been having a hard time at work this week and I said yes, as a matter of fact I had. An over-tight sphincter is, apparently, a typical symptom of stress in the Netherlands. The way to beat the psychological symptom, he explained carefully, was to adjust your state of mind - just think 'up yours', instead of 'up mine'. There's a lot to said for Dutch medicine.

I got the immigration permit. 13 Visits and 21 passport photographs.

But I have had it easy. Most people in this country don't worry too much about the state of their sphincters when they reach my age because, by that time they are dead. This is not, paradoxically, because longevity is uncommon; there is a sizeable community of active septuagenarians, living amongst, and greatly enjoyed by, their grandchildren and great grandchildren. It is due to a high mortality rate amongst all ages because Dar is a world class centre for diseases; people come from all over the world to study them. Malaria, of course, is the common one and is a major killer. It is not that it is particularly dangerous; everyone gets it several times a year and they treat it like the common cold, except that they go for their chloroquine injection just in case. But every now and then it kills and kills rapidly so it is respected and feared. 'It's OK, the doctor

says it's only typhoid' said Gloria, the wife of my nightwatchman said to me after visiting the clinic with suspected malaria.

Many relatives and friends of friends between the ages of about 35 and 45 died this year. When I ask the question, what did they die of, (a question which seems not to be asked here, death is death) the answer is usually either pneumonia, tuberculosis or 'unknown', they were 'somehow ill' and went into hospital to die a day or two later. What is never ever said is that the cause of death is HIV. Technically, of course, HIV is not the cause of death, any more than the mosquito bite is the cause of the malaria. But it seems that, although everyone knows about HIV and how it is transmitted, it is never openly acknowledged as a factor in the death of a friend or relative. Of course there is a stigma attached to HIV, it is a disease of 'them', not 'us'. It remains unacknowledged, the death certificate says pneumonia and so it is.

What still remains unclear to me is whether all this happens out of a cultural disinclination to face up to HIV as a problem or whether the explanation is more straightforward; HIV, like electricity cuts, interrupted water supplies, the destruction of the railway system by flooding because of deforestation, is simply an act of God (or to the more secularly oriented, simply a consequence of the fact that Tanzania is a developing country) and therefore not amenable to solution. Whatever is the reason, the Sunday gatherings to comfort the bereaved, which are a major feature of everyone's life are just as much accepted as part of the natural order of things as are the queues of buckets at the standpipes during water crises.



The ecology of my kitchen continues to be a significant preoccupation. The main features of the niche are the innumerable cock-

roaches, the rats, the gekkos - particularly the little flat one that lives under the microwave, and pops out to watch me make a cup of tea - the occasional snake, and the frog. I also have a crab that comes up a hole in the corridor and wanders around the house blowing bubbles at me. And, of course, two young Dutch ladies.

The Dutch ladies both took a liking to the frog, a friendly little fat thing that used to hang around the back door and eat all the flies that fell from the light. One of them, always on the lookout for such opportunities, was planning to try kissing it to see if it would turn into a prince. I cautioned against it on the grounds that there was an equal chance that opposite might happen.

The dilemma was circumvented one night, however, when they caught two cockroaches *in flagrante delicto* on the kitchen floor and were so horrified that they immediately reached for the Doom spraycan. There is a moral in this somewhere but I'm not sure whether it concerns what not to do on the kitchen floor or what not to do in front of Dutch maidens.

What you must clearly not do, however, if you are a frog, as we found out the following morning, is eat a Doomed cockroach. We buried him decently.

The monkeys and bush babies remain outside the door, distracted by the eggplants and pawpaws. So far, however, although a civet was sighted one night, no lions. Tanzania has, however, more lions per square metre than any other country in the world and yet most people here have never seen one. So at Easter I took a landroverful of little ones and a roofcrackful of tents and rations off into the wild to look.

The first first of the weekend was to be stopped by the police for speeding and not to be solicited for a bribe. It was all so unusually straightforward. I was doing 84 and I should have been doing 50.

Fine 10,000 shillings. No suggestion that the fine could be reduced if I didn't feel like bothering with the paperwork.

The second first of the weekend was real mud driving. As a general rule, southern Africa is made of sand and stones whereas eastern Africa is made of mud. So none of the riverbed driving in Damaraland had prepared me for this place. You soon learn that there are lots of different kinds of mud and you learn that some are benign and can be negotiated at speed while others you negotiate as though you are a train, by taking your hands off the wheel and letting the roadwheels stay in the ruts. If you try and use the steering you end up in the ditch with all the fancy Datsuns with fat tyres, tinted windows and CD plates, that we pulled out here and there. One kind of mud, however, called black cotton soil, is a favourite of landrovers; they always stop and wallow in it. And Mukumi Game Reserve is full of black cotton soil. It is interesting stuff, it is thixotropic, which means that if it is not disturbed it is a firm solid but once it moves, it becomes a glutinous liquid that can swallow a landrover wheel in one revolution. This is a neat idea - it means that with care you can drive over it without any problems at all. But if you disturb it in any way, or stop; then, in half a turn of the wheels you are in up to the axles.

Mikumi has a lot of animals. There are many varieties of what an American friend refers to as DLAs (Deer-Like Animals). There is the stupid one that is an antelope at the back but that thinks it's a bull at the front, which in the south is called a wildebeest but here is called a gnu - or nyumbu in kiswahili. And there is the big one that is a bull at both ends, the buffalo. This time we saw one end of a dead buffalo that had been brought down by lions the day before. A big hungry male lion, feeding later on the carcass, annoyed by a hungry hyena that was bothering it, had become a little irate and had bitten its head off; a strategy which addressed the

hunger problems of both animals in one go. So there were quite a lot of animal bits around when we got to the scene. But no lions.

Venturing down a rather blackish looking track that had no recent tyre marks on it, we came across the tracks of the lions that had clearly left the carcass that morning. We tried following up but the mud started making sucking noises. By this time it was very clear that the watoto in the back were extremely bored by gnu, only moderately amused by giraffe, and it was beginning to rain. I was going to be in real trouble if we could not find simba. Simba they wanted and simba they must have. We returned to the camp where I gave them cheese and biscuits and had a beer and went to sleep.

Evening came and the watoto were going critical. 'If you want simba you must have a guide which costs 10 dollars (and a bit) and I am a guide' said the man at the gate. OK I agreed and off we drove. It soon became clear that he knew no more than I did about where the simba were but that what he wanted were clues. What he knew, and I didn't, were all of the few places that they habitually go for a post-buffalo sleep. What he wanted to know was which bedroom they were in and inadvertently I told him. 'I noticed fresh lion spore this morning just down there heading north' I said, with the nonchalance of one who notices lion spoor daily. 'Turn round' he said immediately. 'Now?' 'Yes now. Drive round there', he pointed to what looked like a bog. So I did and, amazingly, it was firm. He seemed to know what he was doing. We drove back. 'Right here, down the track'. I saw no track but turned right anyway and he seemed satisfied. We carried on down the non-existent track for a while and suddenly it started being there, deep, black, ugly and wet. I squelched on. 'Left here' he said, 'out onto the side, it is too wet further on.' I turned left but the landrover kept going straight on - power steering does not work in mud. 'Polepole' he said. (Slowly slowly). The landrover incredibly

climbed out of the ditch into the 2 metre high grass. I could see nothing but grass. He kept giving directions like 'slow', 'left', 'right'. The suddenly; 'Simba', he said, 'under the tree'. He saw lion? I couldn't even see a tree. I remembered what it was like to be a little child in the middle of a cornfield when the corn was twice my height. All I could see was corn.

'A little right', he advised. A little right it was, and suddenly there they were. Six big simba under a big tree. I started asking him stupid questions like how he knew they were there. He smiled and said resignedly 'eighteen years'. I suppose that was the same reason why he knew we were driving on firm land while all around at either side, though brief openings in the grass, I saw patches of obviously deep mire.

The tree was at the other side of the deep track we had left some while before. 'If you drive straight down he said, you can drive straight up the other side and get very close to them.' By 'down', he meant down a vertical drop of about two feet into black mud. 'Up' the other side was equal and opposite but not gravity-assisted. I thought briefly about the desirability of getting stuck 30 minutes before darkness six feet from six lions with a car load of hors d'ouvres. But the curious thing about being there is that these thoughts become ephemeral; the adrenaline, or stupidity, takes over.

Fortunately, the guide too, seemed to think better of it so we had to make do with simba at 10 feet instead of 2 feet. Now, until you looked into the eyes of a lion, full of buffalo, lying under a tree, slowly lifting its head to eye a car full of gormless humans peeking at it through binoculars, you have never seen what true boredom really looks like. When we had eaten our fill of lion, the guide said 'See that dead tree?' He pointed at a tree some 20 m ahead. 'That was where you turned back this morning' And it was too.

Eighteen years it takes.



On the night of Halloween, down our way, the moon had, I noticed, a little pimple on its bottom. I phoned up Julian, a friend who knows a thing or two about lunar pimples and asked him if it was something to do with Halloween. Wrong occult apparently. It seems it was Jupiter being not quite occulted by the moon and people in Dar were in a perfect position to see this rare event not quite happening. So I went out for a while and told everyone around about how interesting it was and they nodded and smiled accommodatingly at me like they always do.

Then I went up to the top of the hill by the University to look at Saturn, the bringer of old age in the east and Mercury, the wingéd messenger in the west, visible only between 6.45 and 7.15pm. I had never seen the wingéd messenger before and I confess that it was disappointingly dull. Then, of course, I was arrested. I am always arrested when I go and look at stars at the top of the hill. It happened with Hale-Bopp last year. Well, I am not quite arrested, but they know that they have to make it sound pretty much like the real thing or they won't get offered a bribe.

I find that it is not easy, having only three words of Kiswahili that I can recall in an emergency, and all of which mean 'Good Day', to explain to a Tanzanian plod that I am savouring a glimpse the wingéd messenger up in the western skies through my binoculars. So I tried to point out the lunar pimple instead. He was unimpressed and carried on with the arrest routine. I was in the driveway of the bank and I must be arrested as it is not allowed to be in the driveway of a bank between the hours of darkness. I pointed out that the bank was closed and that nobody used the driveway even between the hours of daylight, but he was unmoved.

Finally, and not unconnected to the fact that I have been stopped, interrogated, harassed and fined by what passes for a police force in this country more times in the last year than in all my previous 54 years of crime, I decided on the high risk strategy of raising my voice, wagging my finger and telling him in very fast English that I had had enough of being arrested for looking at the wingéd messenger and that he was not going to get a shilling out of me and would he kindly go away and harass someone else. Astonishingly, it worked. Dangerous though; as I found out on a later occasion, the trump card is to impound the landrover. The going rate for unimpounding landrovers, as the tourist brochures do not tell you, is 10,000 shillings (about 15 dollars).



There are several things of interest about Pugu. The first is that the hills are covered in the remaining bits of coastal rain forest that has been burnt and replaced with bananas and coconuts everywhere else. The second thing is that Pugu Secondary School, a former Catholic School which has a spectacular position in the top of a hill overlooking Dar, is the school where Mwalimu Nyerere started his career half a century ago, and the third is that a dutch couple called Kick and Ans have built a house there that they open as a restaurant at weekends.

The dutch own a couple of hills and they have made paths through the undergrowth for people like me to practice for the ascent of the big K on. On one occasion, seeing no monsoon, I sauntered up one. When I got to the top the monsoon I hadn't seen, started. It is surprisingly gentle rain but it wets you through to your underpants in seconds. So I sauntered back down again where they met me with my meal and a spare set of Kick's clothes. Now, Kick has a typically dutch shape and I have a typically British one and one consequence of this is that I could not

stand up without hanging on to my 6 inch too long trousers. Not the kind of position one would want to be in, for example, when a stunning Belgian lady walks in, eager for conversation, and you are seeking to impress. She extends her right hand. You realise your right hand is supporting your trousers. 'How are you?' she said. 'I'm, er, wearing Kick's trousers' I struggle with.

Moral - if there is any prospect of meeting stunning Belgian ladies, remember to wear your own trousers.

This was not the only experience of Pugu in the rain. I once read an examination paper in meteorology in which candidates were asked to calculate how many British picnickers would be needed to bring rain to the Sahara. Similar thoughts occurred to me one night in August on my way to Pugu - how many Standard Bank employees were needed to go to Pugu to look at stars in order to guarantee 100% cloud cover.

The answer is surprisingly few. We were less than 25. I attended the Standard Bank party because it was there and it seemed a nice idea. I also brought along astronomer Julian to point out where all the stars would have been had they been visible.

It was actually a Perseid Party and it had been organised by Jean-Luc, a Belgian who had read about the Perseids, a meteorite shower, in a book. What the book had not made too clear was that the Perseids are only clearly visible in the northern hemisphere in the constellation of Perseus. You could just see it from here on the northern horizon at about 3am. Neither that nor the clouds stopped people seeing meteorites however. Many people saw lots of them, and the more they drank the more they saw. Julian did not feel able to point out how you distinguish between fireflies and meteorites, he was too busy waiting for the moon, which, it being Tanzania, was late rising.

Julian and I also went to Pugu to watch the great

Leonid meteorite shower in November. It was well worth going; between us we managed not only to induce 100% cloud cover but also to trigger the beginning of the early rains, much delayed here. We are planning a trip to Cornwall next August to see if we have a similar effect on the eclipse.



Charlotte has long black hair and makes passports. My passport was, I privately suspect, the first one she ever made. This kind of activity creates a strong bond; well that's what I like to think but what it probably means is that she remembered my face and name, these being important elements to a passport (as is the date of birth I reflected). Anyway, for whatever reason, she scooped me up one evening at a cocktail party for Brits and fellow-travellers, and put me in a circle next to the wife of a retired landrover assembler.

A digression here; I am a warden. This means that I have been appointed to organise, should it ever be necessary, the evacuation of British Nationals from my patch (district 10) to the harbour area. This is not a particularly onerous task as I am the only British inhabitant of district 10 but in order to ensure that I evacuate myself in a smooth and orderly manner I have been given a two-way radio to keep me in contact with mission control at the BHC. I have not, however, been shown how to use it.

Back to the landrover assembler's wife. In the midst of a detailed conversation about the pop-rivetting of the Series 3, I became aware that two others had joined the group, together with Charlotte who was trying to introduce us both. The party was a reception given in honour of HRH the Princess Royal and I vaguely recognised one of the new ones as the PR herself. We were the first group she came to and I was standing at about 11

and she was an anticlockwise operator, so I was the first to shake the white chamomis glove. She was told I was a warden and asked what is that and I explained in detail that I would be in charge of the evacuation of district 10 in the event of civil disturbance (I thought that was a more impressive description of my role than saying I had to look out for DBNs - Distressed British Nationals - and give them the phone number of the High Commission which I at all times carried). I got the royal God preserve me from these nutters look and she passed on to the Landrover Assembler's wife who, in answer to the usual question, said she'd been here 40 years. That was enough, two nutters out of two. She moved quickly on and the retired Landrover Assembler's wife introduced me to her Landrover Assembler (ret'd) who turned out to be a German who also assembled Volkswagens.

Now, at this point, what I really wanted to do was to contrive to accidentally re-bump into the blonde French Chargées d' Affaires that I had met earlier in the 'I don't know anyone here do you?' phase of the evening. Instead I had 30 minutes of the Series 3, the pinnacle of English engineering excellence that ended with the long slide to the Tdi via the 110. He had, apparently, won an award for his pop-rivetting when he discovered that if you did them the wrong way round the roof didn't leak. I never did find out what happened to the Chargées d' Affaires.

Her Royal Highness was in Dar to launch the Landrover Freelanders (the latest BMW) which happened at a place called the Sea Cliff Hotel. In which direction I wondered? She then went on to see some refugees and chimpanzees in their natural habitats.



Home news. Eileen is still at Liverpool with man Dominic and hamster Boris. She has spent the year studying a small tray full of

pebbles, which she calls lithics, from a wadi in Jordan, and then she went to Venice to tell a lot of important archeologists all about them. Dan is now at Martock doing all the things that 21-year-olds habitually do with a mobile phone and a pre-used car. Tom has increased dramatically in height while remaining at constant volume, in the manner of 16-year-olds, and has done rather well in his GCSEs. Rose has moved, at the age of 18, from her school near Bristol, to sheltered accommodation in Tavistock where she is much happier. And Tom and Rose have acquired, at one go, a new mother, Sarah, three new half sisters, and a rather smelly dog, a change which has meant that Rob now divides his time roughly equally between the DIY shop and the Victorian pile he has acquired to contain the new family.

My little household in Dar increased by one during the year. Born to Angela and Harvison, on the day that Brazil lost, she is a fine bright-eyed baby. I was away at the time and returning to find the increased family, I asked her name. A mystified look greeted me; they had not named her as that was my job, as baba, the most senior male of the community. Angela waited, eager, I supposed, to know what her new daughter was called. I have never been asked before to name a baby, well, not without about eight months to think about it. 'She is called Rose', I announced with what, I hoped, was appropriate solemnity. Angela's eyes brightened. 'Lose' she repeated with some relief and, I thought, satisfaction. Lose, also relieved, peed on my sofa.

My contract with the University of Dar es Salaam ends this year. Last July, the British Council asked me to go to Namibia to help them prepare the technical proposal for a bid for an EU funded science and technology education project. I took a weeks leave to do the job and the Council subsequently won the tender, bidding against, *inter alia*, my current employers,

the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. So it seems fairly certain that sometime during the year I will be on the move again.

Stella sings alto in my choir and, as she lives quite close to me I have come to know her and her family well. She is educated and is a secretary with the railway company, bringing in, by Tanzanian standards, a reasonable income to feed her extended family of around 6. But 30 pounds a month does not go far in Dar, where the official cost of living is 130% of the cost in Amsterdam, so I am helping out with school fees for her children as education is no longer free. This is a problem faced by many people now and it is particularly heart-rending for children who, through the death of the provider, suffer doubly when the family can no longer afford the fees. I know two such children and if any readers would like to sponsor them (less than 100 pounds a year I was told), please contact me.



I had thought of writing a little bit about the vagaries of the muslim calendar and the problems created by national public holidays determined at the last moment by whether or not two adult male muslims have, or have not, sighted the new moon, but somehow such comments seem now out of place. One of the pleasures of the last two years has been working with muslim colleagues, academic, secretarial and technical; gentle, courteous, thoughtful people without exception.

When the Christians sacked the Alhambra the first thing they did was to burn the whole library of many thousand books, in an attempt to wipe out the Islamic culture that forms the foundation stones of our language, our mathematics, our science and our engineering. Sadly, our understanding of the world of Islam does not seem to have improved much in the intervening

centuries; bombing Baghdad is the equivalent of bombing Rome.

I am not sure how I am going to face my muslim colleagues when I return.

A happy new year.

159 Bower Hinton,
Martock,
Somerset, TA12 6LG
+44.1935 823439
andrew@asclegg.demon.co.uk