

6th March 2022

Fingers

**“Dawn! O fairest, clearest,
Touch me with thy golden fingers.”**

Jean Ingleow, Winstanley (1880), 'The Apology'

Spoiler alert! There's a bit of rudeness in this piece. On Islay, I've come to appreciate being given the finger. Now, I've been given the finger – or as it's often known, “the one finger salute” – before, *and* the two fingered greeting too. So I know the circumstances of such a displays of animation, and I know how it feels as well. In that sense, no one likes to be “given the finger”. I know I don't – or *didn't* till I came to Islay.

There are single-track roads on Islay, and, as with all single-track roads, there are courtesies drivers are expected to observe. Pulling into a passing-place to let a car through, and moving aside to let a faster car overtake, are the expected norms. And so is the wave of recognition or the thumbs-up of gratitude. But what I *didn't* expect on Islay was being given the finger, not just on single-track roads, but *everywhere* on the island. Bus-drivers, passing motorists, cyclists, even white-van-man, will give you the finger. No! Not the *rude* version. And not the “golden fingers” of the dawn, as Jean Ingleow would have it. But as you sweep past each other, a single index-finger raised off the steering-wheel is very common. If you *really* know someone, it's a cheery wave of recognition. But for everyone else, it's “the finger”. And I've come to appreciate that.

It's friendly. It's recognising that another human being exists, going about their business, just as you are. And, not put too fine a point on it, being given the finger makes me feel I'm welcome on this island.

When I was with my granny in Paisley, she spoke to everyone in the bus-queue and to folk round about her on the bus. I thought she was well known and popular. But no! It's what you did. It was a recognition of other people's existence, and, if it isn't too existential, it was a symbol that we are part of one humanity. Being given the finger as I pass people on the roads on Islay makes me feel like that. I belong. I matter. I've been offered the recognition that I exist. And, as a result, I've started giving people the finger too. Now, *there's* something I never expected to admit to!

A prayer for today

To see and be seen. To know and be known. Together, to be one humanity. Great!