

# Sydenham Life



February 2024

In and around the parish of St Bartholomew

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## Hopeful New Year'

*Edited from a sermon written for the first Sunday after Christmas*

This year, I mostly wished people a 'Hopeful New Year'; it seemed more purposeful and, perhaps, realistic than the usual 'Happy New Year'.

There is something slightly uncertain about hope; We want something to happen, and hope that it will, but that hope is built on a number of factors and how certain the hope is depends on the strength of those factors.

In our Christmas and New Year services we heard the stories of Mary & Joseph, Shepherds, Magi (sometimes called 'Three Kings') and Simeon and Anna – two faithful old people who served and preached in the Temple when Jesus was brought there to be dedicated. All these people had great hopes for a Messiah. But when they encountered Jesus their expectations were turned upside down as they realised that hope was to be found in quite different places and circumstances than they had expected.

I wonder what hopes you have for this year? And I

wonder what inspires your hopes, and how you imagine those hopes might be fulfilled?

Many will be hoping for more certainty about where the rent or mortgage payments will be coming from; hoping that they need to make fewer visits to the food bank this year; hoping for less suspicion because of the colour of their skin or their accent; hoping for more work opportunities, or less stress and maybe a little more leisure time; hoping to be more accepted for who they are, hoping for less hatefulness because of their identity or who they love; hoping for better health or at least more chance to

see a doctor and get some answers. Then there will be hopes for a more peaceful world, or more action to prevent climate catastrophe, or simply more positive news to be reported.

Some will find hope in a vague idea of 'new year – new beginnings'; it's understandable but does feel a bit like wishful thinking. Others may pin hopes on the possibility of elections this coming year; but we surely all know that necessary compromises, inevitable competing interests and the impossibility of being 'all things to all people' mean that no human power can meet the hopes of everyone.

The shepherds discovered true hope, the outworking of God's desires for all humanity, was to be found in the most unexpected of places; in the helpless dependency of a baby, the barely coping struggles of a young mother and father, in a place of poverty and their own experience as social outsiders. Mary discovered true hope was to be found in the sharing of the light with all who were open to it; singing angels and excited shepherds, noble Magi and busy innkeepers, overwhelmed young parents and wise old folk who had kept the faith.

What do you hope for this year? In church we find hope in the child whose birth we have celebrated, whose words and actions we will give attention to through the year, and whose death and resurrection is at the heart of our life. For us this is the light that shines in the darkness, and that light is a source of hope when we, like Mary, realise that it is not just ours, but everybody's. That God's gifts are for all people. And that when we share them, they spread and grow and transform us and all whom we share the light with.

May we all have a hopeful 2024.

*Rev'd Jim*

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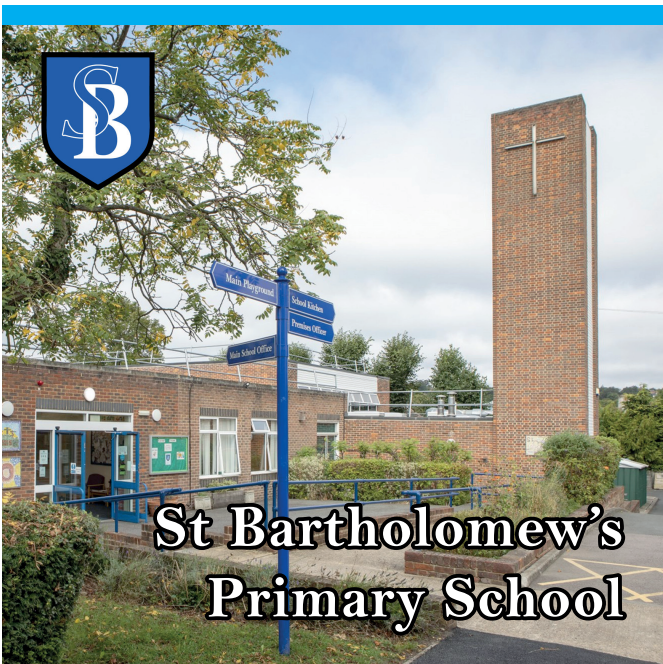
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# From the Editor

History is often written in a way that excludes achievements from individuals it does not think conform to the norm. The growth of innovation is viewed through an extremely narrow perspective. When I was at primary school in common with all my classmates, we learnt of Alexander Graham Bell and tied two plastic or paper cups together with a taut piece of string to mimic the invention of the telephone. Similarly one would have heard of Alexander Fleming and mould that led to the discovery of penicillin.

However, I wonder how many people think of refrigerated food transport. One only has to look up and see refrigerated lorries bearing the name 'Thermo King' to gain insight into its development. My interest was piqued when I saw refrigerated vehicles bearing the name quite frequently in Sydenham but on a recent holiday to Barbados practically every refrigerated vehicle bore the trademark. The origins are quite humble really, but its development and invention revolutionised the way we live in more important ways than other modern developments which are widely acknowledged.

If you were to conduct a search for name Thermo King you will find it says that it is an American company that manufactures temperature control systems for transportation systems. The next question you may ask is who started the company and the answer that would appear is Frederick McKinley Jones who was born, according to Wikipedia, in Covington Kentucky on 17 May 1893 to an Irish father and an African American mother. There is not room here to go into his whole biography but it makes interesting reading. He was also significant in the development of the synchronisation of sound and film in the movies.

He received many honours, some of them posthumously, but Wikipedia reference quotes Tom Berg a former editor of Heavy-Duty Truck magazine in talking about Mckinley Jones contribution to refrigerated food transport as a technological breakthrough that 'redefined the global marketplace with cultural reverberations felt from the world's largest cities to its most isolated villages.'

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

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# Are wars inevitable?

This is a question that you might expect to find in the editorial of any current newspaper or magazine. But it rarely appears. It is a question to which this south Londoner has been seeking answers. It is not a new question, and the answer has challenged some of our greatest writers, thinkers and statesmen over many years. In school history lessons, we learn about what seems an endless catalogue of wars with their dates from the Battle of Hastings to the War of the Roses, and our religion defining English Civil War, and on and on, to the two great World Wars of the last century. We are taught the dates and the facts and sometimes the circumstances, before and after these history defining events.

The Old Testament of the Bible is peppered with some fiercely fought battles between the tribes of Israel and their surrounding neighbours often referred to as the Philistines. Indeed, our very education instils in us the inevitability of war, although wars always seemed to be historical events firmly planted in the far-off distant past, in most cases, before we were born. We are led to believe and firmly told they will never happen again!

This was the sentiment that pervaded the 1930's as the world recovered from the trauma of the First World War. It was far from certain that the recently formed League of Nations would prevent the outbreak of the next world war. Just before Christmas my attention was caught by a programme broadcast on Radio 4, titled 'Why War? The Einstein-Freud Letters'. To seek an answer to this intractable question, two of the greatest minds of the time in 1932 exchanged correspondence and it was intended that this exchange should be made public. One a physicist and one of the greatest thinkers of our time,

the other a psychoanalyst revealing new discoveries on the working of our minds. They were both of Jewish descent and self-declared pacifists. Einstein supported an international judicial and legislative body that all nations would participate in (League of Nations) while Freud perhaps more realistically counterargued that due to the nature of man and his propensity for aggression and conflict, any such agreement was doomed to failure. For an international system to function each state would have to agree to give up some element of sovereignty or state power. Freud recognised that few nations would be prepared to relinquish this authority and that history has shown that conflicts of interest are usually settled by violence. Ironically, both men were caught up in the events that led to the Second World War. Einstein had to leave Potsdam in 1933 and Freud left Vienna in 1938. Their correspondence which started in 1932 was never published. Freud's writings were deemed to be anti-establishment by the Nazis. The correspondence ends with their puzzled bemusement as to why the waging of war has not been unanimously repudiated. The dilemma of universal death and destruction versus hope, the right to life, happiness and wisdom was never resolved.

I have written previously about the Bloomsbury group who were predominantly pacifist and ran into difficulties with the established authorities. Maynard Keynes established his reputation by writing 'The Economic consequences of the Peace', examining the hefty reparations resulting from the treaty of Versailles. In 1938 Virginia Woolf wrote a short essay called 'Three Guineas' where she tackled the question of how to stop wars head on. Her basic premise was that all the main institutions



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The ruins of bombed homes the morning after a raid in Liverpool, England, during World War II



(Government, Judiciary, Armed Forces, Church) were heavily and in some cases exclusively male dominated and until such time as this changed there was unlikely to be any appetite to discourage wars. War was regarded as the preserve of men and men alone. She was unquestionably correct in her assertion that all the main professions and positions of state were occupied by men, but she would not have known the outcome of a larger representation of women in the higher levels of the workforce or where women now play an active role in the armed services. Women as heads of state have not avoided war entirely. Margaret Thatcher was key to responding and declaring the Falklands War. The same (iron) lady was prepared to take on the military challenge of the IRA. Golda Meir was in power in 1973 at the time of the Yom Kippur War. Queen Elizabeth I was head of state during the Spanish Armada. Woolf was very much opposed to the private education of the wealthy classes which perpetuated the male dominated institutions and offers one of her three guineas to the support of a college for the poor and the daughters of educated men, where they could 'freely study the art of understanding other people's lives and minds'.

One of the key circumstances in this country is that Defence (from War) is an integral part of our culture and institutions. Members of the royal family are honorary chiefs of various regiments. The King awards honours and medals to those who demonstrate bravery on the battlefield. As pointed out by Virginia Woolf in her essay, the armed services consume a significant portion of the country's annual budget. The defence industry including the manufacture of weapons is one of the most important economic businesses we have. Careers in the armed forces are sought after and highly respected at all social levels. Training to defend (and kill) takes many years (My wife spent eight years as an officer in the Queen Alexandra nursing corps). Those killed in war are commemorated annually on Remembrance Sunday. The Church of England provides ministers for the armed forces. This status is unlikely to change in our lifetime. Costa Rica abandoned its army in 1949 but few if any other country has followed suit.

But what is it like to experience war? We can read firsthand accounts of those who have been involved. The poets of the First World War are often found in the school syllabus. I was recently loaned a book by a parishioner who had lived through the War and had spent many a night in an Andersen shelter in her garden in Brockley. It concerns the diaries of Vere Hodgson subtitled how 'Unimportant people in London and Birmingham lived through the War years of 1940 to 1945'. This is an everyday wartime account of a lady living near Ladbroke Grove experiencing the nightly bombing that took place over 10 consecutive months from September 1940 to June 1941. She gives a daily account of the immense damage incurred from the West End right through to the City and beyond. The overflying planes with their unseen occupants are referred to as the blighters, the brutes, the raiders. The whistling of the bombs, the shudder of the explosions and the crack of gunfire all contributed to months of interrupted sleep and visceral fear. Survival depends ultimately on the arbitrary decision of where the bombs are dropped and explode. The destruction is widespread, and the loss of life, irreparable.

From books to films, we can readily witness the filmmaker's attempt to convey the horrors of war and the damaging effect on the protagonists. There is a long list of excellent films where the eye level camerawork makes you feel as though you are on the beach or the battlefield, such as 'Apocalypse Now' (1979), 'Platoon' (1986), 'Dunkirk' (2017) or '1917' (2019). Although I have not tried them, there is probably an even longer list of war themed video games. But films and video games are screen or cinematic illusions. These days, video cameras and mobile phones capture events as they happen, the real thing. But we remain as observers or outsiders looking in from our position of safety on a disturbing fractured reality that is the world of war.

How to stop wars once they have started is even more problematic. There are plenty of practitioners of conflict resolution in all areas of human life and activity. You can get an MA on the subject at Bradford, Lancaster or Kings College London universities. One of the main resolution strategies is for one party to understand the position of the other without necessarily agreeing to the opposing argument. But without an intermediary or a meeting forum or any smidgen of willingness to look at the issue from the other side, peace or resolution remains a distant prospect.

Today we are facing armed conflicts in Eastern Europe, the Near and Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia all of which have some impact on our lives. It is impossible to escape from the emotional and visual impact of 24-hour news coverage with reporters, cameramen and commentators leaving us little respite or room to hide. There is likewise a war of words as the main protagonists compete for the moral and political high ground. The boundaries of what is acceptable between attack and defence become blurred. (Self)defence is deemed legitimate, confrontation and aggression, illegitimate. Special military operations and campaigns are considered justifiable, but invasions are not. (Air) strikes are permissible, but (air) raids are not. There is a primitive battle over the assertion of competing rights and claims. National or sovereign rights are promoted over the individual's right to life. The right to live in undisturbed peace is overridden by the right to reclaim or establish land. Recent settlers are confronted by those who have already settled. New Immigrants are opposed by those who have already arrived. The facts established by present day customs and circumstance are overruled by the historical facts of yesteryear.

Too often the outcome is that victims, injuries and death are regarded as an unfortunate consequence of an inevitable set of circumstance (being in the wrong place at the wrong time). Lives are reduced to statistics. Atrocities become memorials and events with a date. Suffering is transcribed into a diary. What we do know for sure is that war produces no clear winners, instead battle-scarred survivors who prevail over cities reduced to rubble, wastelands of mud and scorched earth and newly expanded graveyards. The future can be rebuilt but fatalities cannot be brought back to life. History repeats itself. Isn't this what we learn at school?

*Nigel Ralph*

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- Virginian Woolf, 'Three Guineas', The Hogarth Press 1984.  
'Few Eggs and no Oranges: the diaries of Vere Hodgson 1940-1945'. Persephone Books, 1999.  
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# The bicycle rack

Because a house always comes with a plethora of ‘To Do’ projects one is never at a loss for what to do next. So came the time to build a bicycle rack. A friend of Chelsea my daughter was to join her husband in Dubai. Because this move entailed disposing of many household items of which included her and her husband’s bicycles, Chelsea acquired a bicycle for herself and one for Bill my husband. This necessitated the need for a bicycle rack so as to be able to store the newly acquired bikes in the shed.

Bill having built bike racks for us more than once back in Arizona, commenced on the project once again. He had seen wood that would be good for the project at a Wickes store two train stops down the road in Anerley.

Our plan was to take our rolling cart (trolley) – what

Bill calls our “jolly trolley” – to the store, buy three 6 feet long boards, place the boards in the cart, and roll it onto the train for a two-stop journey back home. Here is where the line, “the best laid plans of mice and men...” comes to mind. It turned out the boards were not six feet but eight. No way would we be able to transport them on the train! Time for Plan B. We would purchase the planks, put them in the cart, and walk home wheeling the cart. Now it seems every alternative has a complication, and this one was no different. The wood was wet which made it even heavier than normal. So with the cart in front of him, one end of the planks in the cart, the other end resting on his shoulder, and my supporting the boards in the middle, Bill and I started on our 1.5 mile trek home.

We soon noticed our trusty cart which started out a wee bit wobbly was becoming increasingly so with each step. Upon examination we discovered the rubber on one of the cart’s wheels was separating from the wheel itself. With no other options readily available, we resumed our sojourn with our ever-so-wobbly cart hoping and praying we would make it home before the wheel gave out completely. And having no idea what we would do if that happened. As we continued and the cart grew more and more wobbly we became quite a sight walking along the sidewalk (USA terminology for UK pavement) – people along our route looked on in disbelief, consternation or folly at what they were seeing. To one man who looked on quizzically as we passed him I simply declared, “It will be on YouTube tonight.”

Because the cart’s wheel continued to further disintegrate along the way, transporting the boards became an increasingly heavy endeavor which necessitated several rest stops. But alas, after more than an hour we arrived home carrying the remnants of the cart and the boards – exhausted. The construction of the bicycle rack project would have to wait for another day.

*Gerri Falconer-Ferneau*



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# The Law of Treaties

The recent Parliamentary debate on the Bill which, if adopted, should make it easier to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda has brought back into the spotlight the issue of the relationship between UK law made by Parliament and International law as expressed in Treaties. Quite apart from the specifics of this case, there is a general reason why the relationship between Government and Parliament and the UK's obligations under international Treaties to which the UK belongs can be fraught. This is that the right to negotiate and ratify International Treaties is vested in the Crown not in Parliament.

Of course, King Charles himself doesn't take time off from his other duties to negotiate and ratify treaties. The Crown's power is executed through his Ministers, meaning that it is the executive, i.e. the Government of the day, which does this. Over time, Parliament has developed powers of oversight over the ratification of treaties. As long ago as 1924 a convention was established under which Treaties were laid before Parliament before they were ratified. This convention was given legal force in 2010. And the Government cannot change domestic law or make major changes to the UK constitution without Parliamentary authority. Even so, some members of Parliament see Treaties as infringing the sovereignty of Parliament and are particularly hostile to the UK being directed to comply with judgments of international courts – or “foreign judges”. The main focus of their attention is the European Convention on Human Rights and its Court, but of course, this isn't the only Court established by international organizations to which the UK belongs, notably the United Nations.

The issue, therefore, isn't a matter that relates only to particular Treaties. It is inherent in the concept of International law itself. This is made clear by the Vienna Convention of the Law of Treaties, which is both a Treaty in its own right (and one which the UK has ratified) and also compendium of conventional international law. This means that, although, like any other Treaty, it applies directly only from the date in which it came into force (1980), it indirectly applies to all Treaties. You can see this from the way in which it refers to its most fundamental rule in its preamble “Noting that the principle of free consent of good faith and “pacta sunt servanda” are universally recognized”. In the body of the Convention this principle is stated in Article 26, which says “Every Treaty in force is binding upon the parties and must be performed in good faith.” Article 27 underlines this by stating “A party may not invoke a provision of its internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty”. In other words, international law trumps domestic law.

Article 27 is subject to a limited exception that is given in Article 46. This says “A state may not invoke the fact that its consent to be bound by a treaty has been expressed in violation of a provision of its internal law regarding competence to conclude treaties as invalidating its consent unless that violation was manifest and concerned a rule of its internal law of fundamental significance.” It is unlikely that this exception could be used to justify failure to respect the provisions of the European Convention on Human



European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg

Rights because the rules under which the UK ratifies Treaties were well established when the UK ratified it.

The Vienna Convention also deals with the possibility of states withdrawing from Treaties of which they are members. In brief what it says about this is that the withdrawal of a party to a treaty can take place only as a result of the application of the provisions of that treaty or of the Vienna Convention itself. The Treaty that has been the focus of concern to some members of Parliament is the European Convention of Human Rights. This does have a provision for members to withdraw. It provides for withdrawal to take place six months after the delivery of a notification to the Secretary General and, like the Vienna Convention, it makes clear that until the withdrawal process has been completed the member concerned must continue to respect the rules of the Convention.

So, even if the Government was willing to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights (which at the moment it is not), this wouldn't immediately free it from its obligations under it. This probably explains why it is contemplating amending what the civil service code says about obeying interim injunctions from the European Court on Human Rights. These injunctions haven't taken a position on whether sending asylum seekers to Rwanda is a breach of human rights but have simply said that asylum seekers who have taken a case to the UK court shouldn't be deported until that Court has delivered its verdict. As the UK has repeatedly asserted its adherence to the rule of law, such injunctions do not look very controversial but, of course, they are frustrating for the Government. Hence its intention to amend the civil service code which currently requires civil servants to suspend a deportation which is the subject of such an injunction and instead require them to immediately refer the question to a Minister and then carry out his instructions. Not surprisingly civil service unions have reacted with horror to this.

*David Roberts*



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