

Sydenham Life

July/August 2025

In and around the parish of St Bartholomew

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The Camino Inglés

After Easter, my partner and I went for a long walk. I hope you'll enjoy a few of the reflections we had on the way.

The Route:

We departed from Southwark Cathedral, following the Thames as far as Walton and then the Wey navigation via Guildford as far as Godalming. Then we skirted the Devil's Punchbowl, crossed the South Downs, and hobbled through Havant and Portsmouth to our ferry. We sailed to Santander and took a coach and a narrow gauge train to Ferrol, whence we followed the Camino Inglés through industrial estates, towns, countryside, and eucalyptus forest to Santiago de Compostela.

Leaving from home meant that it took almost two full days walking for us to be somewhere we'd never gone before; it was exciting to watch the world around us gradually transition from familiar to strange at 5km/h. Everything is connected. It seems silly to even mention, but in my lifestyle of getting on public transport and popping up in another locale I can often consider the world in discrete parcels. It takes a long walk and three port cities to remind me of that.

The People:

The first person to say 'buen camino' (the traditional Spanish pilgrims' greeting) to us was a jogger overtaking us on the Thames path through Richmond. She saw the shells on our packs and called out to wish us well! In Spain, doing the same route as many others, we saw the same people over and over again:

We met a Mexican couple, whom we kept overtaking and being overtaken by. When we identified ourselves as Inglés they asked if our ancestors had walked this way. As far as I know, only my parents have done it, but our spiritual ancestor Margery Kempe was the first known English pilgrim on the

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route! We met a Portuguese woman, who has done the Camino Portugues previously, and whose husband was driving to pick her up from Santiago. We met a Swede/American (he picked which nationality he told people about depending on where they were from) who stubbed his toe and gave us a chance to use our first aid kit! We met three Yorkshiremen; my partner says they were harder to understand than the European pilgrims, but I found it a great comfort to speak to some fellow-northerners. We met a Czech family, whose teens taught us to play a card game and marvelled at our accents.

Our fellow-pilgrims showed us kindness and love and allowed us to do so back to them. We came from different places, spoke different languages, moved at different speeds, and did it for different reasons; and in these differences we found something of a loose community.

The Question:

The question which Charlie and I kept returning to in our conversations along the way was 'what is pilgrimage?' Is it a long walk? Because we made part of the journey by boat, and by bus and train to get us to the port where the boat didn't go. Were those days part of the pilgrimage? They were vital for rest and recovery; they were calm and beautiful; we read and chatted and thought about the sea and global

borders. We continued praying four times a day, and working our way through the psalter. We even met other pilgrims. They certainly felt like an integral part of the pilgrimage.

So what is a pilgrimage? We reflected on whether it's the destination, or the mentality with which you travel, or the difficulty of the journey, or the unnecessary nature of the walk. Probably it's all of these. And probably, if you think that a journey is a pilgrimage, then it is one.

Mother Bethany





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From the Editor

Many of you may not have heard of the names Paul Revere Williams or Danny Thomas: both were Americans. Mr Williams was born in 1894 in Los Angeles, California. He and his brother were orphaned when he was four years old when their parents died from tuberculosis. His brother Chester became a fruit seller and died of pneumonia in his twenties. Paul was fostered by a different family who recognised his ability at an early age and encouraged him at school. He trained as an architect at the University of Southern California and became known as an "architect to the stars". He built many civil buildings and affordable housing as well. However, what makes his story remarkable is that he was a black man and he wrote a book called 'I am a Negro' which explains that he could not live in the areas in which he built homes or be served in the Beverly Hills Hotel which he was responsible for remodelling.

The second person I mentioned is the comedian Danny Thomas who was born Amos Muzyal Yaqoob Rairouz in Michigan on 6 January 1912; his parents were Maronite Catholic immigrants from Lebanon. Danny Thomas was an actor and comedian. He never forgot his pledge when he became successful to build a shrine to St Jude, Saint of hopeless causes. He is reported to have said "Help me find my way in life, and I will build you a shrine." He became a successful entertainer but never forgot his prayer.

Paul Revere Williams and Danny Thomas became close friends when one worked on the renovation of the other's house. They often discussed the concept of building a fully racially integrated hospital in the South that would concentrate on serious childhood illnesses. Mr Williams drew up the plans for the hospital and Danny Thomas and his wife and a number of businessmen set about raising the funds to build St Jude Children's Research Hospital. It was built in Memphis, Tennessee in 1962. It accepts sick children from all over America and the World and operates on the basis that no child should die in the dawn of their life and that no child up to the age of 21 should be turned away. The Hospital's research has improved the health outcomes of seriously ill children worldwide. In 1957 Danny Thomas founded the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC) and its sole mission is to raise funds and awareness necessary to operate and maintain the hospital. It raises one billion dollars annually to support the hospital.

I have written about St Jude Children's Research Hospital because I am moved by its motivation and its continued mission. I know that this is only one hospital and that there may be others. We have the NHS and we should not take it for granted as there are many places in the world where such facilities do not exist and politicians who do not share the values of Paul Revere Williams or Danny Thomas.

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

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Vanilla made by hand

The weather has turned out nice again.

What is one of the favourite ways of enjoying a sunny day? Eating an ice cream? Even dogs and cats are getting in on this one with pup cups! What flavour was your first ice cream experience? A vanilla ice cream? Yes, for most people.

But vanilla isn't just used in ice cream, it is used to flavour desserts and cakes. It is either the expensive long brown pods or the cheaper bottled versions referred to as vanilla essence or extract.

When we take the time to consider how are food, spices are grown, it is amazing what has to be done to cultivate, grow and harvest our food. It should make us appreciate the efforts made by the few for so many.

Vanilla is no exception. It is a type of orchid that produces a seed pod that holds thousands of tiny black seeds. The process involved is labour intensive. It requires hand pollination and gathering of the pods to be sun-dried. It is a long process as the orchids need nurturing to produce the much sought after spice. It is highly prized and highly priced. For the foodies – the presence of tiny black specks in a vanilla-flavoured dish is confirmation that real vanilla has been used.

I stated that we do not always think about our food products and the process required to grow, harvest and deliver them to the markets and shops. Well, what if I told you that for vanilla that flavour we enjoy, we should thank an enslaved twelve-year-old boy, who found a way to successfully pollinate the vanilla orchids?

It happened in the mid 19th century on an island east of Madagascar called Réunion. The island had been colonised by the French since the 17th century. In the 1820s the French brought vanilla beans from Mauritius with the intention of cultivating vanilla orchids. Unfortunately,

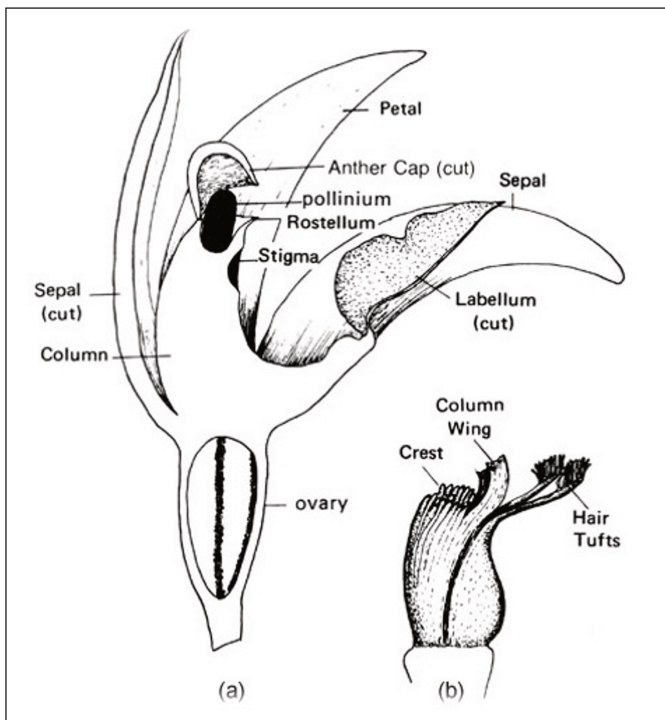
the vines were sterile as there were no native insects that would pollinate them. Ferréol Bellier-Beaumont, a plantation owner tried to cultivate these beans, but the vines did not bear the pods. Interestingly, Bellier-Beaumont took it upon himself to teach the young lad named Edmond botany and showed him how to hand-pollinate plants by using as the example of a watermelon plant, Edmond was shown how to hand-pollinate by marrying the male and female parts together. Edmond took it upon himself to practice on a vanilla orchid vine.

It was in 1841 when Bellier-Beaumont was viewing the last of his orchid vines that had been growing for 20 years but bore no fruit, when Edmond showed him two pods on the vine. In delight he asked how this was possible? Edmond proudly said he had hand-pollinated the vine using the technique he had been shown. He found the stigma, the part that needed to be dusted. He discovered that the two parts were separated by a little lid, and he lifted the flap and held it open with a little tool. It is the rostellum, the lid that many orchid plants (vanilla included) have, designed by nature to keep the plant from fertilizing itself. In disbelief Bellier-Beaumont asked him to repeat the process. With the success of the second attempt, Bellier-Beaumont wrote his fellow plantation owners to say his twelve-year-old enslaved boy had solved the mystery. Edmond was then sent to plantations on the island to teach other slaves how to fertilize the vanilla vine.

As a result, in 1848 Réunion was able to export vanilla to France and by 1898, they were outstripping their competitor Mexico to become the world's largest producer of vanilla beans (source T Ecott).

But what about Edmond, what recognition or benefit did he receive? Well, his master wrote to the Governor of the island suggesting that Edmond should receive a cash stipend as a reward. He received no answer. But what he did for Edmond, meant more. He gave him his freedom. Edmond gave himself a surname Albuis. It was a nod to the white flower of the vanilla orchid.

He left the plantation, but things didn't work out well for him. He fell into a bad crowd and ended up in prison for five years. His former master wrote to the Governor appealing for compassion and to recognise his



The various parts of an orchid flower



Vanilla pods



Edmond Albius

achievements that made him and others wealthy and the reputation of the Island as a successful producer of vanilla beans. This time the Governor listened, and Edmond was released.

Edmond had a trustworthy advocate in Bellier-Beaumont. A French Botanist Jean Michel Claude Richard claimed to have hand-pollinated vanilla in Paris and then gone to Réunion in 1838 to show a small group of horticulturists how to do it. He asserted that Edmond must sneaked into the room, peeked, and then stolen the technique. Bellier-Beaumont came to Edmond's defence - an uneducated, former enslaved male, who would believe him? He sent a formal letter to Réunion's official historian stating that Edmond was the true inventor. This letter is now an official record and survives.

Whilst the acknowledgement of his skill was documented for posterity. His life was not easy. He never prospered from his discovery. He died in poverty in 1880 at age 51. A small notice appeared in the, the local paper, a few weeks after he died. It read *"The very man who at great profit to his colony, discovered how to pollinate vanilla flowers has died in the hospital at Sainte-Suzanne. It was a destitute and miserable end."* His long-standing request for an allowance, never brought a response."

He is remembered on Réunion in the town of St Suzanne where he was born, with a statue, a street named after him, and a school. So please remember the little enslaved boy who through his careful observation and application gave us the opportunity to enjoy vanilla flavoured ice-creams, and desserts.

Angela Morgan

The Hidden Crisis: mounting debts leave people across London isolated and fearful

On average people in London who come to the charity CAP for debt help owe over £14,000. Gareth Hall, Debt Coach and manager of Penge debt centre says we are determined to help more local people improve their financial situations.

Ahead of Loneliness Awareness Week (9-15 June), debt advice charity, Christians Against Poverty's (CAP) is releasing a new report, revealing the devastating impact debt and poverty is having on people.

A crisis of isolation and fear is gripping people struggling with debt and poverty across the UK, according to the new report, *No Time to Lose*. It looks at the experiences of CAP's clients, and reveals a stark picture where debt is forcing people into hiding, with a staggering 85% feeling isolated, and more than half (52%) admitting they were afraid to leave their homes.

CAP's new report also highlights that many London households face a debt crisis. New CAP clients in London on average owed over £14,000. They had organisations chasing them for payments on 13 different debts, with 48%

of their arrears for priority debts, often for essential bills like Council Tax, rent arrears, gas and electricity.

This comes alongside CAP's latest polling with Opinium**, which reveals that over 11.2 million UK adults are suffering with loneliness (21%), with 11.1 million (20%) living alone. Importantly, over 4.6 million (8%) report not having a support network.

CAP partners with Holy Trinity with St John's church, Penge and other churches to offer free debt advice to people in Penge, Beckenham, Norwood, Sydenham and West Dulwich. Gareth Hall, manager of the Penge debt centre, says that isolation and fear are preventing people from seeking help, leading to their debts spiralling out of control.

Gareth said: "The financial pressures people face often go unseen, and as many are afraid to ask for help, they can isolate themselves from family and friends. CAP's latest report highlights that low income and struggles with mental health are the two biggest reasons our clients are finding themselves in a debt crisis. Many people live on

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ridiculously low incomes, and when faced with increasing costs and other financial challenges they can become trapped in a vicious cycle of uncontrollable debt, leaving them to feel ashamed and alone – only worsening their fear and anxieties.”

Findings from **No Time to Lose** highlight the extent of the constant state of anxiety that many of the people coming to CAP for help report feeling:

- 78% fear answering the phone
- 82% are worried about opening the post
- 62% are frightened about a knock at the door
- 58% suffered from poor mental health

CAP client and mum of three, Jolene, faced the raw isolation of a financial collapse when her working hours were slashed at the same time as she became liable for additional debts: “I’d worked hard to get where I was, and I’d put myself through qualifications so I’d be in a good financial position.

“But my ex-partner left, which meant not only was I now responsible for paying back all the bills, but I was stuck paying off his debts as well. I didn’t sleep properly

because my head was permanently calculating, worrying about where the next meal’s going to come from. It was a really depressing time.”

Jolene finally reached out to Christians Against Poverty: “That community has literally saved me, it’s given me and my family hope for the future. What churches working with CAP do is provide a life-changing experience, but it’s not just the initial support and getting people out of debt: it’s that life-long support and guidance that they give you.”

Gareth continued: “Many people struggling with debt are forced into isolation because of fear and worry about their situation. Thankfully, we’re able to meet clients face-to-face and provide in-depth, bespoke support. We’re determined to help more people in South London who are struggling financially, and so we urge those who need support to get in touch – please don’t suffer alone.”

How to seek help

You can find more information on all of CAP’s free services in your area on CAP’s website at **capuk.org**, which includes access to an **article on loneliness** and some helpful tips and hints on how to manage your money.

Gareth Hall

The Devil is in the details

After purchasing our flat we remodeled much of it – the bedroom, bathroom, living room and hallway (actually we reconfigured our hallway into a kitchen alcove and a storage closet). Stopping short of any major undertaking in our kitchen, we kept the same cupboards and countertops. We did, however, change part of the kitchen configuration, installed a dryer, replaced the flooring, sink and faucet. After a few months we decided we needed one last change in our kitchen. The oven worked well, and after a professional cleaning almost looked like new but the Hob definitely needed to be replaced. Another shopping adventure.

We set off to John Lewis with the plan of procuring an electric ceramic stovetop. Once there all we found were induction stovetops – something with which we were totally unfamiliar. This necessitated a rethink and further exploration. Off to Curry’s we found virtually the same – almost all their electric stovetops were induction.

The saying ‘you can teach an old dog new tricks but you can’t break old habits’ came to mind. We decided we could learn a new way to cook. Back to John Lewis to purchase an induction Hob. The salesman was ever so knowledgeable and thorough. We left John Lewis new owners of an induction stovetop scheduled for arrival to our flat the following week. At last our flat was going to be completed!

We contacted our builder to arrange installation, however, due to travel conflicts on the part of his electrician and us (we were returning to America for me to have a total knee replacement) the installation was going to have to wait for two to three months. Surgery went well and after nine weeks of physio we returned and immediately scheduled our Hob installation.

We returned on a Tuesday and had the installation set up

for Saturday. We had learnt that with an induction cooker we would need to purchase several new pots and pans with ferrous metal on the bottom. Using the salesman’s tip, I tested our pots and pans with a magnet to determine which ones would work on an induction cooktop. Discovering that I had only one pot that fit the criteria, and in an endeavor to be efficient, I donated all my other cookware to a charity shop on Friday.

Saturday arrived and so did the electrician. A meticulous man; he read the installation manual thoroughly before embarking on the actual installation. After much anticipation the installation was completed. As the electrician departed he mentioned one warning that no one with a cardiac pacemaker could come within a specified distance of the stovetop. What!?!?! Did we hear that correctly? Where did this admonition come from?

Bill immediately sought the manual and started reading it. It advised to contact one’s doctor to ensure pacemaker installation conformed to a certain standard in order to be able to use the stovetop. As his pacemaker was inserted in America I got on the internet and went to the pacemaker company’s website. The information contained on it was worse. Instead of the original warning he had to remain 10cm from it, the pacemaker company said 60cm. Since his pacemaker was originally inserted in America I decided to also check the USA website – it, too, said 60cm distance. My daughter checked with the British Heart Foundation which also warned of the need to keep a 60cm distance. Ugh!

Now what were we going to do? Both Bill and I like to cook; he didn’t want to have to give it up, and I didn’t want to take it on fulltime.

After several days of contemplating our options and encouragement from several friends we decided to go

back to John Lewis and see what they could do. I was prepared to plead our case but as soon as we walked into the department one of the salesmen, reading the look on my face, asked how he could be of assistance with our problem. Part way through my story he stopped me and told us he was aware of our dilemma. To wit he offered that for a reduced price the HOB could be exchanged for a new regular ceramic cooktop. Whew!

Next we scheduled the electrician to come again, only

this time to uninstall the induction Hob for return; and to reschedule another date for him to install the ceramic Hob (kaching, kaching, kaching).

Now the only other thing left to do was to buy new pots and pans to replace the ones I had unnecessarily donated.

So my Public Service message for the month is: If you or anyone you know has a pacemaker, DO NOT buy an induction Hob.

Geri Falconer-Ferneau

Making a will

Why do I need to make a Will? As Solicitors, it's a question we hear often. However, making a Will is the probably the best and most important way you can ensure your family, loved ones and dependents are provided for after your death.

While about 90% of people in the UK have a definite idea who they want to pass their assets onto after they have died, only about 50% have actually made a Will.

There are of course many reasons why people don't make a Will. Some people just keep putting it off. We generally do not like to think about our own demise(!)

There is a common misconception that your money and assets will automatically pass to your loved ones. However, without a Will, your estate may not pass to the people, or in the way, that you intend.

A carefully drafted Will gives you control over what happens to your assets. It enables you to choose your beneficiaries and set out exactly what each beneficiary will receive.

People sometimes think they don't need a Will because they're not wealthy enough or their circumstances are so straightforward everything will pass to their desired beneficiaries anyway. Even if your estate is relatively modest, there are lots of other issues which can be dealt with in your Will, such as naming executors, making funeral directions, making gifts of personal items, gifts to charities and appointing guardians for minor children. You can also create trusts in your Will and choose who will act as the trustees.

You can make provision in your Will for vulnerable beneficiaries such as those with disabilities or who may not be able to manage larger sums of money by themselves. You can also specify the age an adult beneficiary receives their inheritance. It is not always appropriate for a beneficiary to receive their entitlement immediately.

A carefully drafted Will can ensure that your estate passes as tax efficiently as possible by using inheritance tax exemptions and reliefs and by taking advantage of all available tax reliefs.

If you do not have a valid Will in place when you die the law steps in and dictates to who and in what proportion

your estate will pass. These rules are rigid and take no account of the person's particular personal circumstances.

Modern families are not always straight-forward. Making sure that fair and reasonable financial provision is

made for the children of both current and previous relationships, and for your surviving spouse or partner is very important. A Will can give you piece-of-mind by ensuring you make adequate financial provision for all your loved ones, avoiding unnecessary friction between family after your

death, or even expensive claims being brought against your estate.

For a Will to be valid it must comply with certain formal legal requirements and the person making the Will must have the requisite Mental Capacity. Unfortunately, we see far too many 'DIY' wills that are either invalid or just don't do what the person intended. It is surprisingly easy to get things wrong! Taking professional advice can be of real benefit.

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Jonathan Duff



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Sunday – 8am Holy Communion, 10am Parish Eucharist
Wednesday – 6pm Holy Communion.

Open church for prayer, quiet and reflection Monday 10:00-12:00,
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