

Sydenham Life

July/August 2026

In and around the parish of St Bartholomew

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Patriotism



I recently had a lovely moment of feeling really patriotic. And it had nothing to do with football! I am writing this just as the World Cup is getting underway, so by the time it's published there will perhaps have been great celebrations or commiserations, but this was something very different.

One hot Saturday in June I had the pleasure of attending a performance at The Bridewell Theatre of Gilbert & Sullivan's 'Patience'. An excellent performance, theatrically and musically, featuring one of our talented Churchwardens in the role of The Lady Jane. It was fun and funny, with a typically direct and

silly English humour. Following the performance I decided to walk through town a bit, and shortly after passing St Paul's Cathedral found the road blocked and crowds cheering. Assuming at first that it might be some sort of demonstration, I got closer only to find that it was a Penny Farthing race! Impressive considering how difficult Penny Farthings are to ride, let alone steer, and at speed. I had arrived at the lap marker – a big board announced '3 laps to go' and the crowds were cheering on the riders as they passed; some clearly had fan clubs.

After watching a while I wandered away, with a cheerful sense of

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national pride. An afternoon enjoying a performance by an excellent company of older and younger members, multi-ethnic, male, female and non-binary performing an opera with very English humour that both celebrates and mocks a British art movement. And then encountering the sheer eccentricity of people enthusiastically racing Penny Farthings. This is English culture worth celebrating! This is a joyful, inclusive and slightly daft England that I will happily wave a St George flag for.

It is unfortunate that some people mistake national pride for nationalism, with the divisiveness, and xenophobia that comes with it. But rather than surrender the flag and patriotism to the hateful and divisive, I think we should take pride and joy in the many good and wonderful things that make up the strange, beautiful, noble and indeed sometimes daft muddle of culture in these lands we call home.

Rev'd Jim

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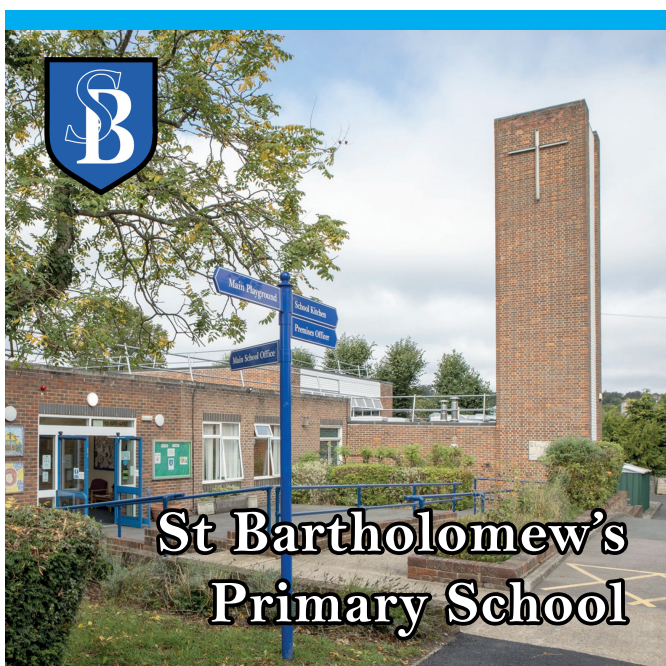
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From the Editor

On 19th June 2026 I was waiting for the 202 bus to Crystal Palace near Lidl Supermarket on Sydenham Road as were others. A stranger approached us at the bus stop offering to sell us bunches of flowers in violet wrapping paper. Although I did not quite catch what he was saying he was offering them for sale for two pounds. My fellow travellers quickly noticed that he had swiped them from the flower stand outside Lidl and were bemused by the whole incident. They commented that the price was three pounds.

I did not think the matter was funny at all. I explained that on Sunday 8 June 2026 I was across the road from Goldsmiths College in New Cross Gate and I went to investigate what appeared to be a new restaurant. Someone had stolen my laptop and revision notes. I thought that it may have happened in Sainsbury's, but their cameras revealed nothing so it must have taken place where all the people were near the new restaurant. I immediately called the police and walked up and down the road and went into shops asking if they knew anything.

The following morning, I received a call from a police officer that went over what I knew and she said the case would be closed but they would review any possible evidence. I cannot go into the effect and cost this has all had on me, but I can say that there is no such thing as a victimless crime. I do miss when the local policeman was everywhere. He would have known where to go.

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

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Hurvin Anderson: a British painter

Hurvin Anderson is one of the most distinctive painters of contemporary British art. He was born in 1965 in Handsworth, an inner-city area of Birmingham. His family left Jamaica for Birmingham in the 1960s (Windrush generation). The youngest of eight children, he was the first to be born in the United Kingdom. As a result, his work reflects on his experience of belonging and diaspora and his long engagement with cultural memory and migration. His paintings often appear to be about everyday scenes drawn from photographs and memory, creating paintings around landscapes and scenes tied to community life. The feeling of being “between” places appear frequently in his paintings. Anderson studied painting at Wimbledon College of Arts (BA) and later at the Royal College of Arts (MA). He was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2017. Tate Britain currently presents a major Hurvin Anderson exhibition. Over eighty of his vibrant paintings spanning a 40-year career are on display.

In 2002, Anderson undertook an artist’s residency in Port of Spain, capital of Trinidad and Tobago for eight weeks. This visit shaped his practice for years to come. Several series were inspired by this visit, clear views of landscapes or interiors are interrupted by fences, security grilles, moody vegetation and other barriers. Anderson painted trees that he climbed with friends in the park, each image repeats with a different mood. Scrumpling, an old English term for taking apples from orchards or gardens without permission. He imagined his older brother scrumping apples in Britain and mangoes in the Caribbean. Feeling torn between two landscapes, two homes and two cultures, the scrumper becomes a symbol of displacement. Anderson explored ways to undermine traditional landscape and life drawing. His gift of composition is remarkable. His painting style blends abstraction with figuration. He blurred the boundaries of both his personal experiences and black culture by introducing abstract elements into his images. Complex textures and vibrant colours evoke a sense of nostalgia and a sense of distance. Anderson’s paintings captured the emotional quality of a place or moment; his compositions are often painted with a certain mood in mind such as longing and alienation. However, the beauty in his landscape has an element of darkness undercuts. Another strongly represented group was the Welcome series (2004-08). The series probes the boundary between public and private space. A common feature of Caribbean architectures is the wrought iron security grilles. The paintings invite viewers to peer through the puzzle like grille into a scene that appears just out of reach, a tension between distance and closeness. It operates as an enquiry into how identify and belonging are remembered. A viewer’s gaze can be trained to notice what usually goes unseen.

Anderson’s recent work has altered from personal



Hawksbill Bay 2020

memory towards collective history. Inspired by a 1985 airport mural in Jamaica, he did a large-scale painting across sixteen panels titled *Passenger Opportunity* (2024). It takes viewers back to post war Jamaica as a generation set sail for Britain and before that to the horrors of transatlantic slavery across the America. The early work on the barbershop series in 2006 explored the cultural and social significance of Black barbershop. Some of his paintings are overly political. It feature faces of civil right leaders Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Marcus Garvey. Given to his preoccupation with race, identity and the black experience in Britain, Anderson unites their portraits on a barbershop wall.

Anderson’s “Jamaican Hotel” series (2017) recalls his walk along the island’s North Coast. His paintings depicts half-build hotel and ruined complexes. These landscapes unsettle the idealised postcard view of the Caribbean. Anderson observed as nature itself seems to reclaim the land from human settlement. The overwhelming tropical vegetation that thrives in the hot and humid condition appear ominous and beautiful. Anderson’s painting pondering the British empire legacies and celebrating the land’s regrowth and resilience.

Anderson created four new paintings (2026) especially for this major solo exhibition. These four new paintings form the culmination of his exploration of memory and history. The series is designed into two complementing pairing spanning the Atlantic world. The *Jamaican Pair* and *The English Pair*. The paintings reflect on the activity of rafting down Caribbean rivers, surrounded by lush vibrant and dense tropical foliage. Anderson explores how memory is layered superimposing the hazy nostalgic distance of his lived experience in Britain with the brilliant colours of his ancestral landscape in Jamaica. Anderson sees the future as finding form in fluid movements. He works through reminiscence, history and imagined scenes. His paintings travel back and forth from the UK to the Caribbean. He continued to rework the landscape traditions on both sides of the Atlantic. This exhibition confirms Anderson’s standing as one of the most important contemporary painters of his generation. This exhibition at Tate Britain is on until 23rd August 2026.

Dr Jitna Por

Pets, glorious pets

It was 3pm on a Sunday afternoon only a week after Easter and time to take our pet dog to the vet. This time it was different, as my wife and I knew we would be returning without our pet spaniel who had shared our house for the past fifteen years. The end was perfectly peaceful and painless. He would be put to sleep and would not wake up again.

The journey home was reflective as we were both lost in our thoughts, a lifetime of a dog memories and of course tinged with guilt. It is ultimately we who would determine his fate at this place and time. We would miss his company and presence in the house. At the same time, we realised that to prolong his life would only bring more anxiety as we extended the time when his biological clock would just run out. But as he grew older his temperament became more unpredictable which made him harder to live with. He was 16 which in dog years is well past 100. Yes, he was hard of hearing, his eyesight had deteriorated, his hindlegs had stiffened but his body had been round the clock. Who knows how much further he would have gone without veterinary intervention?

This is probably a familiar story to many of us who have chosen to keep a pet. The likelihood is that we will outlive our pet animal and sooner or later the animal will die before their owner. The main exceptions are parrots and tortoises who can easily outlive their human carers.

So why keep a pet in the first place? For a start, there are an awful lot of pet owners. A good estimate suggests that 6 in every 10 households have some kind of pet and that there are over 10 million households who own a dog. This probably spiked during the pandemic when we spent so much time at home, and we needed something else to share our lives with apart from our human family. And if you live alone, as a huge number of us do, the attraction to keep a pet is even greater.

It's certainly not a cheap option. Vet bills and the associated insurance have soared more than general retail inflation. Feeding is generally a simpler affair as their dietary demands are far less extensive than their human counterparts. Nevertheless, the options available are ever increasing, from specialist foods (high or low energy, young, mature or senior diets) and treats from the smelliest (age matured tripe) to the tastiest (dried liver or animal ears). Then there are the times you need additional helpers from dog walkers, to dog sitters or simply providers of food at mealtimes. Again, this comes at a price unless you have a helpful family or neighbour.

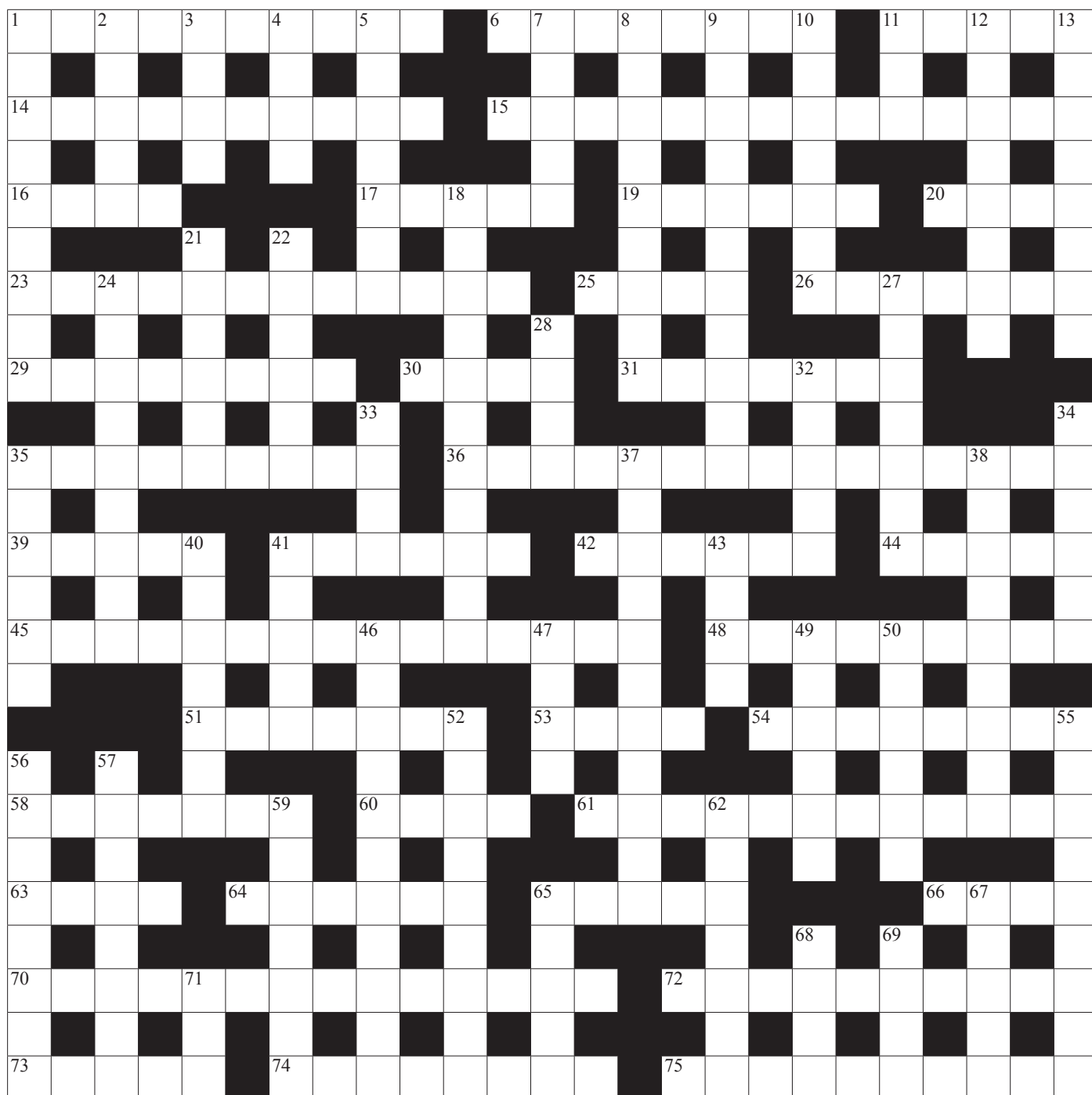
So apart from the expense, what is the benefit? It is hard to explain the pleasure of keeping a pet unless you have experienced it yourself. Children seem to relate to animals at an early age. They are usually closer to the ground, have warm and cuddly fur to fondle and don't give you instructions all the time. Those early habits may lead to a lifetime desire to look after animals and the environment, provide a career (female vets outnumber male vets by as much as 50%). But pets are not just for children; adults also enjoy their company. You can talk to them (they recognise their name), they can request to be fed, walked or stroked, and no matter how grumpy or miserable



you may feel they will always be there with the same simple requests. They are also clever at responding to our weaknesses. Yes, just one more treat, one more walk, one more stroke.....They are not persons but they do have a personality or a set of individual characteristics which can leave a deep imprint on our own conscience.

So, if you think about the expense (surely it can't be that much!), the inconvenience (I must get home to feed the dog), the hairs accumulating on the carpet (time to vacuum again), it surely can't be sensible keeping any type of pet. But then there is the priceless pleasure of an animal delighted to see you when you get home, taking you on the routine everyday outing round the park as well as more adventurous walks, introducing you to fellow dogwalkers whom you would never have talked to before. There is the wagging tail as you suggest the next meal (often marked to the nearest minute by an episode of deafening barking) and the unfathomable thoughts that lie behind their gaze (unconditional love?). Yes, we miss Boxer very much.... but there is always another waiting to be adopted.

Nigel Ralph



July/August Jumbo Crossword — Mthr Bea

Across

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 Journalist in charge gets into dating and committing (10) | 26 Exile from Ukraine free to wander around Georgia (7) | 53 Measurement from India and Switzerland (4) |
| 6 A composition. Read only starts to interpret clue (8) | 29 Ruining landmark with bandage around it (8) | 54 Abandoned food shop contains about 100 Teslas (8) |
| 11 Morning time; topless love (5) | 30 Flying saucer returns to try asian staple protein (4) | 58 Journalist following dog gets chased (7) |
| 14 Taking someone to court carries a stigma that's lasting (10) | 31 Every educator's publication around educates (7) | 60 Best ever slang animal (4) |
| 15 Troubled business rose to high spirits (14) | 35 Grow out of fad collecting recycled cans (9) | 61 Without any haste, engineer snuggles his son (12) |
| 16 A cat is a very small thing (4) | 36 I insist celibacy ruined isolation (15) | 63 Proper encounter (4) |
| 17 Initial natives upon icy territories? (5) | 39 Wet weather in among sunshine (5) | 64 Dissolved OU Dept sulked (6) |
| 19 Intimate description of naturists taking their top off (6) | 41 Lose last of money in old gambling establishment (6) | 65 Island without quiet way to make a call (5) |
| 20 Young lady whose letters make Mick sick (4) | 42 It's orange and it sounds like a parrot (6) | 66 Assistant cycles to have a thought (4) |
| 23 Offended by strange dress falling apart (12) | 44 Sounder crossing uses a ferry (5) | 70 At once, unusual, usual solemnity (14) |
| 25 Astonished, gob on ground at first (4) | 45 Pay for a crazy satellite facility to contain Tritium radicals (15) | 72 Mthr Bea fails to turn it around in a delayed digest (10) |
| | 48 Removes employee after support fails spectacularly (9) | 73 Church council to take too many drugs after seeing York's new leader's (5) |
| | 51 Worried I would make a bad souvenir (7) | 74 Examines donkeys taking some direction (8) |
| | | 75 After a party, the french smell like teenagers (10) |

Down

- 1 Aversions from this flavour's heard of with a cold (9)
- 2 Police officers have an army officer's music style (5)
- 3 After a century, the french quietly applaud (4)
- 4 Sleeveless troop protection? (4)
- 5 Goats Spooner finds with crooks in strange places (7)
- 7 Clock's weight (5)
- 8 Parliamentary number-crunchers chuckle at 50% charge (9)
- 9 Anthologies edited for Divinity students (11)
- 10 Eat the German soup (7)
- 11 Core safety feature (3)
- 12 After work, nine climbing Grand Sierra's faces and crevices (8)
- 13 Editor and his sister are opposed (8)
- 18 Indifferent? A parisian movement uplifts the French (11)
- 21 n.b. Donations given for a book of poems (6)
- 22 Country known for dressing with Caen rocks? (6)
- 24 Big fuss over a limited amount of praise (9)
- 27 Artefacts found by York banker taking 49 seconds (7)
- 28 1 0, no loss? Over the moon! (4)
- 32 Type of crime in which e is taken (5)
- 33 eg. 3, 187, 99, and 10-1 (4)
- 34 Persian king takes a quiet island (6)
- 35 Save money from the bottomless crevasse (6)
- 37 "Girl" (over 99 but under 100) is supported by a helper in the traditional manner (11)
- 38 Unproductive tiler gets fine for dossing about (9)
- 40 Wanted: reformed deanery (7)
- 41 Revolutionary former monarch's happiness (5)
- 43 Jewel sounds like an idiot? (4)
- 46 Inconsiderate goth hustles drunk (11)
- 47 Rebuilt dais and spoke (4)
- 49 Vicar's turning circle (6)
- 50 Fat Mthr Bea is leaving yankee to himself on a climb (6)
- 52 Luminaries are ultimately pacifist, and not at home aboard a ship (9)
- 55 Try end of prayer with model bible section (9)
- 56 Drug dealers put ecstasy in church vapours (8)
- 57 Seed Ukraine planted in an alien hero's name (8)
- 59 Play contains two-bit scene (7)
- 62 Pre-empted a caller on the phone (7)
- 65 Saying hello to Caesar soothes the skin (5)
- 67 Depardieu partially lifts curtain (5)
- 68 She's good in real life (4)
- 69 A man's succeeded after a boo (4)
- 71 Boy's lentil curry thrown up (3)

Revisiting old adventures



Pixels / Constantino Filmes

Over the years I have seen many a photo of the earth taken from space and while I found them interesting, I never paid a great deal of attention to them. I guess to some extent I took them for granted. When my daughter shared with me the story of an experience of one of her colleagues I was really taken aback. At thirty years of age he had obtained his first passport so as to travel abroad for the first time. We were both surprised that up until now he had not had a passport. It seemed like we had had ours forever. Now he was going to be flying to Europe with some of his friends. On the plane ride his seating arrangement was such that he was separated from his friends by several seats. He was not bothered by this as he had a window seat. In regaling my daughter of his experience, he exclaimed he 'Saw the earth from above!' An experience he had never ever had before, and was thrilled!

Do you remember your first flight? I have flown many, many times in my life and I remember my first flight but I had never thought of it from that perspective – seeing the earth from above. His experience so resonated with me that when I flew a few days later I sat in a window seat riveted to the sight of mother earth. I marveled at the various shades of green as I saw land formations, winding rivers, the trees and open fields.

I saw a plane flying parallel at a lower elevation;

watched it change course so that it flew perpendicular underneath us, it quite amused me. It felt like the two planes were dancing in the air. I watched as the cities, towns, open lands and roads scrolled beneath us. It was all so endless. Why had I never seen/noticed all of this before? I felt like a child coming upon a new discovery for the first time. Not only trains and cars; man's constructs viewed from above and looking down upon them. Parked aeroplanes that looked like toys not the massive pieces of metal that they are. I saw some birds flying below me – I am used to seeing birds above me not below; how different a perspective.

Above the clouds I felt like the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk. It was as if I had climbed the beanstalk and was looking down. How vast this earth, this planet. It was as if I was seeing it all for the first time.

When we flew to America, I again chose a window seat. While much of the ride is over the Atlantic Ocean, at one point we flew over Hudson Bay. I grew up hearing of Hudson Bay my whole life, but I had never seen it. I was taken aback that there it was right in front of my eyes. Until then it had just been a thing my parents spoke of, but now it was real. The scope of it was much more than I had envisioned. On a map it is just a blue area, but now here right in front of me it was a living formation, and it was massive to behold.

I share this with you as the summer holiday travel season commences in earnest. I urge you to take the time while you are off on your travels to revisit sites you have previously seen and see if you don't see those sites a from new perspective. It is always so amazing when we open our eyes and look, really look, at what we see before us.

You don't have to go up in an aeroplane to have this experience. Try taking a train or a bus somewhere you usually drive – as a driver one's eye is always on traffic, missing the sites going past. Amazing what we see when we stop to capture moments of awe.

I wish each and everyone one of you safe travels...
Happy Summer Holidays

Geri Falconer-Ferneau



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