Sydenham Life



October 2026

In and around the parish of St Bartholomew

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All Things Dark and Hideous?

This year, the Church of England celebrated for the first time, the festival of Creation in Christ. At St. Bart's we have marked the season of Creationtide from the festival of Creation in Christ to our Harvest festival.

One of the hymns featured in our hymnal's section for creation and the environment is *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, the classic song about a well-ordered creation reflecting the glorious creator. But what about the parts of creation which aren't bright of beautiful? The pig eating its piglets? The flesh-eating bacterium? The life-abhorring vacuum of space which takes up most of all that exists? Did God create all of these things?

The festival of Creation in Christ encourages us to look at creation, knowing that all things are created through and in Christ. We can look at the universe knowing that what we see will be of God, and learn about our creator in doing so.

One of the things that can happen is we see the purple-headed mountain, the river running by, and thing about the greatness of the God who created such beauty. This is the great strength of the hymn and gives rise to all sorts of science and naturalism to the glory of God. The weakness of the hymn, however, is that we can think that all nature has to offer is a picture of the beauty of God, and we can think of ourselves not as participants in creation, but as observers of it. This way of thinking about nature is dangerous; it can make us want to ignore and minimise parts of creation we don't like, or to conceive of God as not entirely good but occasionally cruel and unpleasant.

It is good and important, however, to look at creation in its entirety because the responses that we have as a part of that interaction tell us more about God than simply majesty.



Pexels / Joseph Russo

We may feel indignation at injustice when we see a disease destroy a human life, we may feel righteous anger when we see a river full of sewage, we may feel deep compassion and sorrow when we see a runt of a litter cast out. All of these sad, painful things in creation spark in us something of God, just as the wonderful, beautiful things spark the awe of God.

For Christians, engaging with creation by doing science, by spending time in the countryside, by looking at the night's sky, by advocating for positive ecological change, by loving our neighbours, is a key way of knowing and worshipping God.

So keep your eyes open, be ready to encounter creation in its glory and in its pain, and see what is stirred up within you, because it might just be from God.

Mthr Bea

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From the Editor

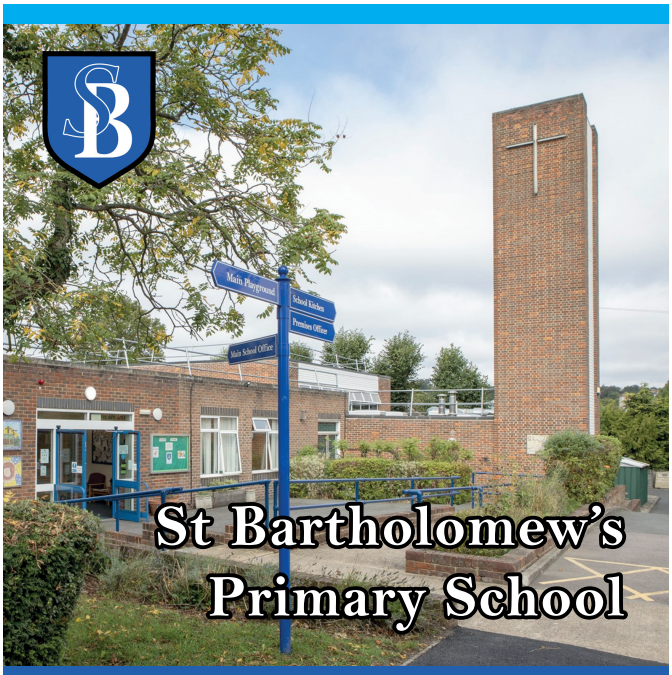
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From the Editor

I was going to use the phrase when dinosaurs roamed the Earth, but Wikipedia uses the phrase that dinosaurs ruled the Earth. They did so from the Mesozoic Era, lasting from about 252 million to sixty-six million years ago, doing their thing: eating each other, vegetation, or having a cool drink in a loch.

They may have been fighting each other for a mate or raising a family of baby dinosaurs. Some catastrophic event came along and drove them into extinction, no matter how much territory they controlled.

Fast forward many multi-million years forward and the big beasts are large IT companies with artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence stamps its foot and swings its tail, and we move out of the way.

Of course, artificial intelligence can be a magnificent tool, but that is exactly what it is: a tool. We should not elevate it to something Godlike. If AI does something it is because man has set it on that path; there should not be a separation between them and their developers. If developers set them on paths, it is they who are responsible; it is a fiction to think otherwise. It is a way of earning great wealth without assuming the responsibility.

Man's actions may ultimately lead to human extinction, from draining the Earth of scarce water supplies or resources, or robbing us of our independence as we rely more and more on it for every activity. However, no one quite knows how dinosaurs were wiped off this Earth, but it is possible for such events to occur again.

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

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Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

Christians Against Poverty (CAP), a charity that's been helping Londoners out of spiralling debt for 16 years, launches new campaign for support

London Penge churches launch crowdfunding campaign so they can continue providing coaching and free debt advice to local people

A group of churches in Penge have partnered with charity Christians Against Poverty for 16 years, helping many local people in that time to break free from unmanageable debt.

CAP's Penge Debt Centre is hosted by Holy Trinity Church and St John's Church, and is supported by other local churches. The centre serves Penge, Beckenham, South and Upper Norwood, Sydenham and West Dulwich.

Gareth Hall, Penge CAP Debt Centre Manager, says: "Unfortunately people often struggle with unmanageable debt for a long time before reaching out for help. Most clients only contact us when they are completely unable to service their debts or to afford their outgoings. Many have special needs including mental or physical health issues or addiction, and some face homelessness or relationship breakdowns.

"Spiralling debt often results in families unable to afford healthy food, living in cold, damp, unsafe properties and facing isolation, anxiety and depression.

"But we know poverty can be beaten. CAP provides advice on a route out of debt, and each year several of our centre's clients go debt free and many others learn ways to manage their debts and budgets. We offer all our Penge Debt Centre clients support from our foodbank and some even receive help with energy costs."

The centre also runs money courses where guests learn smart ways to manage their household budgets, including use of CAP's budgeting tool. They run in-person money courses open to all as well as some online courses for students and school leavers preparing for college.



CAP's Penge Debt Centre Team

Gareth continues: "We're reliant on the generosity of others to be able to do all of this completely free of charge. We're so grateful to the churches who support us financially, but this only provides about half the amount of funding needed to deliver our services.

"So we're launching this crowdfunding campaign with a target to raise £25,000 in order to help fund the centre for another 2 years. An individual's donation can be increased through Gift Aid, and matched funding of up to £250 from Aviva's Community Fund. By supporting this campaign you will be helping to transform lives, bring hope to local people in need and strengthen our community."

Gareth Hall
Debt Centre Manager – London Penge.
For more information about Penge Debt Centre and how to donate, go to crowdfunder.co.uk/p/pengecap.
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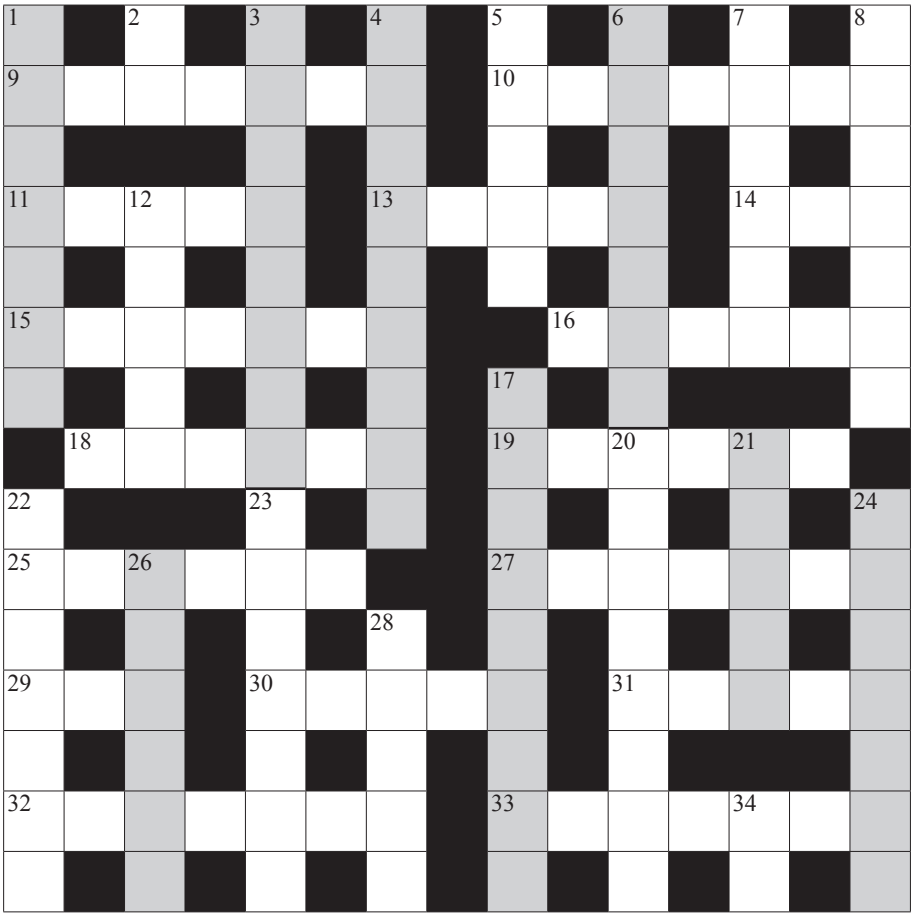
Wells Café







Above left: Wells Café, operated by Katarzyna. Alongside her is Monika from SWPIG, that looks after the park.
Above centre: The Wells Café menu.
Above right: Person enjoying a breakfast yoghurt dessert



Eastenders — Mthr Bea

This month's crossword is themed. Each column contains a silvered entry which is clued by wordplay only. The names of these *Eastenders* can be confirmed by a visit to the church.

Across

9 Difficult week in one part of the hospital (7)
10 Online, English article was draining (7)
11 Dodgy graduate's dance (5)
13 Hastily prepared rare egg? That's disgusting (5)
14 The title of "A Knight's Sale" is rubbish, basically (3)
15 Part of another court (7)
16 The ads, unfortunately, will be the end of us all (6)
18 Little sibling takes ill, very convenient when doing the dishes (6)
19 Adversary starts to treat United States leader as an under-developed baby (6)
25 Overseer makes schoolboy error at work (6)
27 A question over the radio with lots of noise is almost impossible to pin down (7)
29 Am I trying to go for the target? (3)
30 Durable fabric worked in the pit on reflection (5)
31 Halal confection for God (5)
32 Mean, mature lady goes inside (7)
33 Terrible greed surrounding sodium explosive device (7)

Down

1 American woman eats soft cheese (7)
2 Positive state (2)
3 Steer a carpet uphill (9)
4 & 17 Big fuss concerning the magician half eating a food allotment (9,2,3,4)
5 Morning star occasionally in view before sun rise (5)
6 Harp playing angel loses new guitar head (7)
7 Storage unit is alternately cold or sweaty (6)
8 A garment delivered from the stage to St. Bartholomew's Church, Westwood Hill, SE26 6QR, say (7)
12 Machine on truck or road primarily (5)
17 (see 4dn)
20 One point short of UCAS after Edward and Edmund are schooled (8)
21 Heard of Gagarin on a Chicagoan train (5)
22 Lot's uncle giving an undergarment to Noah's son (7)
23 Defunct pub wants staff, we hear (7)
24 Note approximate time Leah turned up (7)
26 The french Mthr Bea is a small climber (6)
28 Audibly want to be attacked by a kickboxer? (5)
34 I understand about half at first (2)

A Gardener's Lament

(With apologies to the Old Testament prophet Joel, writing around the sixth century BC.)

In my garden foxes have crushed plants.
What the foxes left, the cats have damaged.
What the cats left, the squirrels have dug up.
What the squirrels left, the mice have nibbled.
What the mice left, the magpies have eaten.
What the magpies left, the pigeons have gobbled.
What the pigeons left, the blue tits have pecked.
What the blue tits left, the caterpillars have attacked.
What the caterpillars left, the slugs have munched.
What the slugs left, the snails have devoured.
What the snails left, the lily beetle has consumed.
What the lily beetle has left, the leafcutter bee has destroyed.
What the leafcutter bee left, the black fly has infested.
What the black fly left, the fungal infection has wiped out.

All these have been in my garden. No doubt I should be grateful to have such a variety of God's creatures visiting, but it would be good to have some plants to enjoy sometimes!

Stuart Forbes

The cash machine nightmare

We bank with Natwest; and have done so since we moved to Sydenham over a decade now. In that time we have come to know the bankers personally, and they us. They translate my American English banking terms into British banking terms very well. For instance, when I call it my checking account, they understand we are talking about my current account. They also know when I refer to the ATM, we are talking about the cash machine.

Needless to say, I was very saddened when I learnt of the upcoming closure of the bricks-and-mortar bank on Sydenham High Street. The personal help I received from my bank was vanishing, and the relationships with the employees would be gone.

I know life is filled with changes, and in order to survive one must adapt. So I begrudgingly started to acquiesce to the idea of using a banking hub. That is until the August Bank holiday weekend when I had a ghastly encounter with the Natwest cash machine on the High Street.

I have used the cash machine on many, many occasions, and on some instances found the machine not working, out of order or temporarily out of cash. Over the holiday weekend I went to withdraw some funds from my American bank. During the process the machine froze up so that after providing it with my PIN, I could not push the selection buttons nor cancel the transaction. Despite several attempts at pushing the buttons nothing happened, nor would my card eject from the machine. A message came on the screen instructing me to contact my card provider. It all looked so official I merely thought the machine had malfunctioned again.

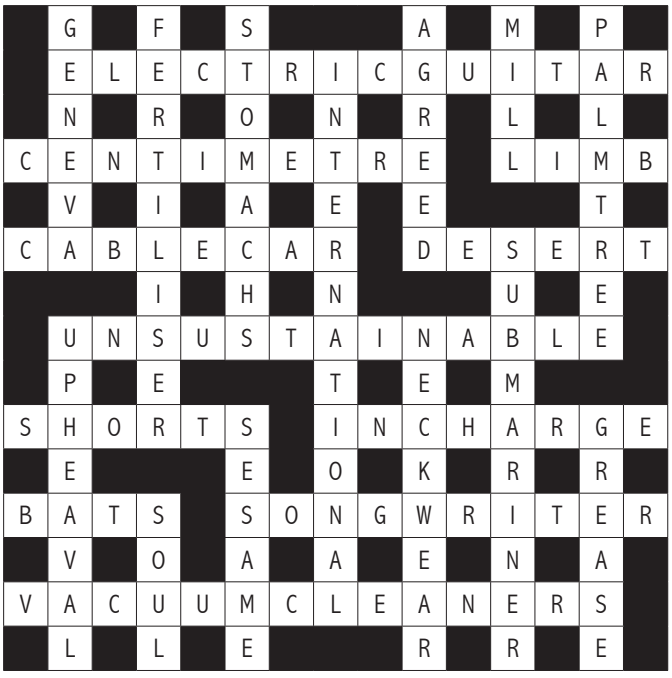
Because I was still determined to get funds from my American bank, we decided to seek out another Natwest Bank cash machine and use my husband's bank card. I called upon my secret British resource, my daughter, for a suggestion as to where the closest Natwest machine was located. When she asked why I told her of my mishap. She told me where I could find another cash machine, but also asked if I had checked my American bank account. I initially brushed her suggestion off but when I got off the phone with her, I decided to do it. (I always tell people' if you have a suggestion voice it. Someone may not take you up on it, but it never hurts – it may actually prove helpful.') Good thing I listened to her. When I opened the bank app I discovered that eight, yes eight withdrawals had occurred in what turned out to be less than 5 minutes to the tune of over £2000!!! I was horrified, to say the least. Turns out it happened at the Tesco cash machine across the street from the bank.

I learnt the thieves used what is called an ATM skimmer to steal my card data and PIN. I had heard of this happening at petrol pumps but was not aware of it actually happening at bank cash machines. I immediately notified my American bank reporting a fraud incident. The bank is currently in the process of investigating it with Natwest. On Tuesday after the bank holiday I went to Natwest seeking information on my bank card. I was informed that indeed the cash machine had been tampered with so severely that the bankers could not reset the machine and were awaiting a bank engineer to repair it. The staff was most understanding and sympathetic to my situation even though they were unable to personally resolve it.

Since this harrowing experience I now have refrained from using cash machines that are not inside the bank buildings. I also learnt that the safest way to use one's debit or credit card is to use touchless tapping. I have now developed a warmer attitude to the idea of a banking hub.

Make no mistake, I am incensed about this and the heartbeats it has cost me, but on the opposite side I am thankful that in this robbery no one was physically attacked or injured.

Geri Falconer-Ferneau



September – Solution
Across: 7 (ARTICLE GUTHRIE)*-H **9** CENTRE around TIME **10** (c)L(u)B around IM **11** RACE< after CAB(a)L **12** dd **14** UN SUABLE around STAIN **16** SH SORT cycled **18** MARGE with INCH instead of M **20** STAB< **22** WRONG CITER spoonerised **23** dd
Down: 1 (h)(E VENGA)* **2** (RESLI(en)T REF)< **3** S THOMAS* around C **4** A GREED **5** MIL around L **6** (PERT MALE)* **8** INTERN ON A L(ot) around (A TI) **13** ((AM after REN(o)IR) BUS)< **14** (LAVA EH PU)< **15** (KNEW RACE)* **17** (u)SES AME(rican) **19** "GREECE" 21 S(e)OUL

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