



# The Grasshopper

## The Organ Of The Gresham Society

An autumnal reflective edition - like the *Graf Spee* gliding at you out of the mist

Issue No. 9

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021

### College Notes

*An interview with Dr Clare Loughlin-Chow, Academic Registrar*

The last year has been quite remarkable and almost unique in the College's history. Staff had to work from home, whilst technical staff not only operated from home but also enabled some speakers to address an albeit empty hall. Overall, only thirteen lectures had to be held over to this year – and 140 were delivered. Speakers have been extremely flexible, which has been enormously helpful in the delivery of the programme. But above all, everyone at the College has worked extremely hard to make sure that everything can proceed as normally as possible.

We are looking forward to re-opening this year, mostly at Barnard's Inn Hall, but still in some cases at the Museum of London. Full precautions will be taken in both venues.

And it will be a bumper year for professorial recruitment – Environment and Divinity in the Autumn, and three later in the year – Business, IT and Physic. The lectures will also be characterised by a range of new thematic series, spearheaded by the Provost, Dr Simon Thurley.

The Five-Year Plan continues to roll, led by CEO Dr Wendy Piatt. On-line viewing figures are up, and schools outreach especially so, with 10,000 pupils and teachers watching lectures on-line. Over 100 schools are now on our on-line mailing list. The website is being updated and should make viewing present and past lectures much easier and the College's profile should be raised significantly.

*Editor's Note: A more detailed report on the Five-Year Plan will appear later in the year.*

*The Programme for the new academic year*

Communications Manager Lucia Graves reports: Gresham College's 2021-2022 programme is up on-line at [www.gresham.ac.uk](http://www.gresham.ac.uk); printed copies are now

available. We are currently planning for 100% capacity lectures with audience members wearing masks, but watch the website for changes in guidance. All lectures will be ticketed for both in person or online audiences, so please register for lectures online. Anti-Covid measures will be in place.

*Sir Hew Strachan on Afghanistan*

Readers might be interested to see the analysis by Professor Hew Strachan (our Nailor Lecturer in 2018) of the current situation in Afghanistan, at [The real reason for leaving Afghanistan | Hew Strachan](#).

### Ave Atque Vale

A big welcome to Professor Katherine Blundell OBE, Gresham Professor of Astronomy, as the Academic Board representative on Council, along with Professor Jo Delahunty.

And also Linda Appiah-Spick as the new Digital Marketing Manager.

*Soirée and AGM: Keep the Date*

The world-famous Soirée will be taking place this year on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December at 6 for 6.30. We will have our usual professional performers, there may well be a surprise turn – and there should be space in which to display local talent. (Do get in touch if you would like to do a turn – or maybe give everyone else one...)

And our AGM and Dinner will be held at the National Liberal Club on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> February.

We are still hoping to arrange for Sir Roderick Floud to give his lecture on the Economics of Gardening at the Lindley Library but (as with the above) it all rather depends on the post-Covid world.



## ***Vita Vitarum***

The Grasshopper Himself doffs his hat (metaphorically of course) to Alderman Professor Michael Mainelli and Chris Hayward CC, who are standing down now as sheriffs after their historic two-year Covid-driven stint. And our congratulations to Society member Alderman Alison Gowman, who takes on the shrieval furs from September 29<sup>th</sup>, along with Alderman Nicholas Lyons.

Michael also appeared in the columns of *The Economist* last month, in a letter commenting on Boris Jonson's recent remarks regarding one fell swoop or one foul swoop. Michael points out that in the Scottish Play by Shakespeare, Macduff wails, "Did you say all? Oh hell-kite! What, all my pretty chickens and their dam? At one fell swoop?" As Michael points out, Shakespeare is using an avian metaphor to compare the murder of Macduff's wife and children to a hawk swooping down on defenceless prey. He then asks, "Surely, one fowl swoop is to be preferred?" It is clearly a reference back to the earlier line, "So fowl and fare a day I did not see..."

Plus hearty congratulations to Emeritus Gresham Professor Frank Close, for his admittance to the Royal Society. Frank was Professor of Astronomy between 2000 and 2003. His specialisation is theoretical particle physics.

## ***New Publications***

Congratulations go to our Provost Dr Simon Thurley on the publication of *Palaces of Revolution: Life, Death and Art at the Stuart Court* (William Collins). Covering everything from palaces, shipyards to tennis courts and dog kennels, it is the result of twenty years of study.

Following on from my frustrated attempt to write a biography of Toulouse Lautrec (as admitted in G8) I have offered my manuscript to another publisher. I suspect that in the louche atmosphere of Montmartre in the 1890s he associated with the local *filles de joie*. So I have tried another proposal, provisionally entitled *Absinthe makes the tart grow fonder*. Allons voir...

## ***Members' Corner***

Further to my remarks in G8 about wishing people to break a leg, some members have queried my reference to literary allusions to life on a bicycle. Many authors took advantage of the first bicycle craze at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Somerset

Maugham has a positively bucolic episode in *Cakes and Ale* with cycling lessons in Joy Lane (my old turf in Blackstaple); Jerome K Jerome wrote a whole book about cycling in Germany as a sequel to *Three Men in a Boat*; and H G Wells produced *The Wheels of Chance*. However, not all went well in reality: George Bernard Shaw took some very nasty tumbles, while Thomas Hardy had quite a serious accident while cycling round the West Country (though it was quite a placid day when he rode out with a young Rudyard Kipling in 1896); and Mark Twain in the ominously titled *Taming the Bicycle* recounts all sorts of mishaps, though admittedly that was on an old-fashioned vehicle more like a penny farthing, and he claimed he needed eight hours of instruction in order to tame it.

[See [Wheel life and fiction: bicycling in literature | Books | The Guardian](#) for a very good piece on cycling and authors.]

## ***Reflections***

### ***The Great European Bake-Off***

Rivalries in professional life can last for years and sometimes even longer. Think of that famous exchange between two jaundiced academics: "Jones is his own worst enemy." "Not while I'm alive he's not..."

It is a curious historical fact that the Duke of Wellington only met Napoleon in open battle once, though he had overcome numerous Marshals of France during his campaigns in the Peninsula (Soult, Ney, Masséna, Marmont...) However, the rivalry extends to this day in sometimes unlikely ways. It is surely only a matter of time before Beef Wellington versus Chicken Marengo appears on a Great European Bake-Off. (The chances of them being trumped by a Prussian delicacy seem rather remote.)

Chicken Marengo? Yes indeed, it appears that this celebrated dish was concocted after the Battle of Marengo in June 1800, though the curious original combination of items including crayfish and chicken seems to stem from the fact that Napoleon's chef had to forage for ingredients in the nearby town after the battle.

### ***Crickets vs Grasshoppers***

We apologise to the entire family of Orthoptera (all 24000 of them) for the confusion between crickets and grasshoppers in the Gresham College logo, as reported in the scoop in G8. Just to remind,



grasshoppers have short antennae and are largely diurnal, whereas crickets by and large don't and aren't. Their song is different too. The Grasshopper Himself, needless to say, waxes lyrical on the subject.

Of course, in the interests of diversity and equal opportunity, we at the Grasshopper should not be seen to favour our own little green mascot too far. Cicadas are also quite remarkable: There are actually 3400 varieties of cicada, though only a mere seven are periodical, meaning that they have this curious life-cycle of spending years underground. But you certainly know about it when they come out as the male cicada makes a noise of up to 96 decibels, which is more than a jumbo jet landing. Yet despite their huge numbers, the species is in decline. Global warming may well be a factor.

### **Plague Notes**

In the hope that this section is near to ending its usefulness, the following from Professor Frank Cox might be cause for some cheer (or not, of course):

Contrary to popular belief, plague is still with us. Some 1,000-2,000 human cases are recorded every year, with a fatality rate of 5-15%, in about twenty counties including the western states of the USA, Peru, Brazil, Mongolia, China, Russia, India, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar, but epidemiologists believe that this is a vast underestimate. Rats are the natural, but not the only, hosts of the bacterium, *Yersinia pestis*, that causes the disease and about 15 species of mice, voles, and other rodents, pigs, dogs, cats and even chickens are known to harbour the bacterium.

In the USA, the most common hosts are prairie dogs, chipmunks and ground squirrels. There was only one fatal case in the United States in 2020 but there are still occasional outbreaks elsewhere. Last year, for example, in Mongolia, there were a number of cases along the border with China, where the animal hosts were marmots (the source of a 1911 epidemic in northern China that affected 64,000 people). This recent outbreak was taken very seriously by the authorities and the imposition of border controls, quarantine regulations and flight cancellations (sounds familiar) prevented any spread.

*Editor's Note: If any Grasshopper reader is thinking of hiking in a plague area you can find out where they are and get very good advice from*

*the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) in Atlanta, Georgia.*

### *Exhibition at Queen's Oxford*

The Queen's library is *inter alia* particularly strong in its early medical collection. Bibliophiles and medics alike will enjoy the exhibition on early works concerning the plague which is on-line at [Contagion on the Page | The Queen's College, Oxford](#) (Robert Hooke even gets a look-in with his *Micrographia*).

### **Envoi**

#### *The curious copperhead*

As mentioned in G8 the copperhead is a curious critter. The fact that it tends to freeze when threatened rather than slither away can cause problems as it is so well camouflaged. (Come to think of it, I have sat on a few committees where I have observed similar forms of behaviour...)

Be that as it may, the venom of the southern copperhead contains a protein called contortrostatin and laboratory tests on animals indicate that this can inhibit the growth of cancer cells and even prevent the migration of cells to other parts of the human body. Isn't Nature wonderful?

#### *Another slice of Parmesan*

Parmesan cheese (as mentioned in GG7 & 8) actually seems to have had a bit of literary history. Following on from Dr Trelawney and the cheese in his snuff box in G8, I note that Parmesan actually figures in the diary of Samuel Pepys – whose main concern at the onslaught of the Great Fire was to bury his Parmesan cheese in the back garden. I doubt whether that improved the flavour, but he could have been dining on toasted cheese for a long while otherwise. (See his diary for 4 September 1666 and as recounted by Society member Margaret Willes in her excellent account of the Great Fire in *The curious world of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn* page 35).

#### *The Lincolnshire Farmers of Paraguay*

Curious to see (following on from the colony of New Australia in Paraguay) that an interesting study has been published recently on the Canning House website, concerning an emigration project to Paraguay in the early 1870s following on from the slaughter of the War of the Triple Alliance, which



ended in 1870, as reported in G8. Unfortunately, the emigrants (few of whom were actually Lincolnshire Farmers though many were skilled artisans) were totally misled with regard to everything, ranging from the climate to the incentives being offered, which included seed corn and farm animals. After some years of misery (and many fatalities) the survivors were taken by concerned philanthropic organisations back down river to Rosario and Buenos Aires, where some of their descendants are still to be found today.

It is instructive to note that one of the child survivors, William Case Morris, went on to become a major benefactor himself. Known as the Dr Barnardo of Argentina, he founded children's homes and schools across the country, so perhaps he should be better known here too. See the fascinating "Forgotten Histories" page on the Canning House website at: [Forgotten Histories: The Lincolnshire Famers in Paraguay](#).

*Intrepid explorers*

I would not wish to place too much emphasis on the explorations of Henry Bates in the Amazon (see GG5 & 6) as he went out originally with Alfred Wallace, a fellow entomologist. In the event, Wallace put up with the climate, snakes, poisonous spiders, alligators and hostile locals for a mere seven years, but during that time he explored both the Río Negro and parts of the Orinoco. He was eventually struck down with malaria and so loaded hundreds of specimens and live animals aboard the brig *Helen*, only for it to catch fire en route back to England, which meant that most of his collection was lost. He did produce a book out of his experiences, but it did not sell well (750 copies in eight years). However, he had the strength to go off to the Malay Archipelago and New Guinea, and from his observations there he coincided with Darwin in his view of evolution, though of course he never got half the credit.

*Editor's Note: in an interesting fictional parallel and for a graphic evocation of fire at sea, surgeon and natural philosopher Stephen Maturin, in the Lucky Jack Aubrey naval series by Patrick O'Brian, loses his entire botanical and zoological collection from his time in the Far East. He is returning to England from the Cape in the despatch vessel La Flèche when it suddenly catches fire and is lost at sea. In "The Fortune of War", though I wonder whether Patrick O'Brian had Wallace in mind when he wrote that episode.*

**Editorial**

I was pondering on the curious life cycle of the cicada and all its years underground, when it occurred to me that *The Grasshopper* has followed a similar pattern, having been out of print for about fifteen years. And back then it was printed on a single sheet of A4, albeit in bright colours. We in the Editorial Office trust that our readers have acquired a taste for its successor during the time of Covid, as we intend to appear termly or quarterly or whenever we have something positive to say.

**STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS**

*Corrigenda, addenda (but never pudenda)*

The Grasshopper is positively abashed by its far too light-handed approach to entomological nomenclature in G8. Professor Frank Cox has written sternly to remind us that there is an International Commission which oversees classifications within the animal kingdom. It runs from: Kingdom> Phylum> Class> Order> Family> Genus> Species. Prefixes may be added to include Supra-, Super-, Sub-, and Intra- (and all of these can have their own special ending). And typesetters beware – they should all be in upright script with upper case initial letters. But *not* (you will note) in the case of genera and species, which should always be in italics, genera with an upper case initial letter and species with lower case. So now you know.

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*Editor's Note: Readers might wish to cut this out and stick it up on the wall next to their laptop for future reference.*

And as ever, if you have any news items for *The Grasshopper* do let [Tim](#) or [Basil](#) know.

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