



The Grasshopper

An occasional paper for odd occasions

Issue No. 2

16th June 2020

Welcome to another edition of *The Grasshopper*. This is meant to be (and surely will be) an occasional paper, but there are a few more occasional oddities which justify putting thumb to keyboard and clocking up Issue No 2 that might provide a bit of light lockdown reading.

Habemus Papam

Well, not quite, but I am delighted to welcome Simon Thurley as our new Provost. He is no stranger to the College, having been Visiting Professor of the Built Environment since 2009. He has also previously been Curator of Historic Royal Palaces, Director of the Museum of London, and Chief Executive of English Heritage. Simon is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research, and Honorary Fellow at Royal Holloway College. He is also a Director and Trustee of the British Library. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, of the Royal Historical Society, the RIBA and the RICS.

And a further warm welcome to the new CEO for the College. Dr Wendy Piatt comes to us from University College London. She has previously worked at the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Department for Education and Skills, the Prime Minister's strategy unit and as Chief Executive of the Russell Group. She will be responsible for the implementation of the College's forthcoming five-year plan.

New Appointments

And more white smoke up the chimney: yet another warm welcome to Leslie Thomas QC as the new Gresham Professor of Law. So in the best Pooh-like tradition a third QC has joined the other two, namely Professors Jo Delahunty and Sir Geoffrey Nice. In case anyone enquires, the collective noun for QCs (according to Geoffrey Robertson QC) is a purse of silks. Then of course we have a wiggery of barristers, a solemnity of judges (and so on ad infinitum...)

Obituary

You may have seen that Sir John Chalstrey, Lord Mayor in 1995-1996 and Gresham Society member,

passed away on 20th March 2020, at the age of 88. Perhaps unusually for the post, he had a medical rather than a business background, but he was firmly grounded in the City as Past Master of the Apothecaries and through his work with Barts, where he was an early exponent of keyhole surgery. He was also an honorary Colonel of the City of London field hospital of the RAMC and a Knight of the Order of St John.

New Publications

Professor Robin Wilson has clearly not been idle during lockdown as he has just clocked up his fiftieth publication. (There is no truth in the rumour that he has learned to type simultaneously on two keyboards with each hand.) "Number Theory: A Very Short Introduction" has been published by Oxford University Press and it is hoped that there will be a book launch at Gresham on September 28th, circumstances permitting. Robin of course has had to live with the frustration of seeing that the Oxford Operatic Society's production of "Annie Get Your Gun" will not now be going ahead, which means that the Society has been deprived of the opportunity to see Robin in his rôle as a whisky-swillin', six-gun totin', tarryhootin' cowpoke (a classic piece of type-casting if ever there was one...) Gyles Brandreth has also been his usual industrial self, with *Dancing by the Light of the Moon*, an anthology of 250 poems which are worth learning off by heart (something which is widely recommended as a way of warding off cabin fever during lockdown on the one hand and quite possibly Alzheimer's on the other – so something for all of us to bear in mind!)

Sponsored Shrieval Slim

At the time of going to press Chris Hayward is a shadow of his former self, having lost 42 of the targeted 46 pounds, though we at *The Grasshopper* suspect that he is simply limbering up for all those extra meals he will be consuming in his extended year as Sheriff.

You still have time to contribute, so why not go to the Just Giving page [Christopher's 46 lb Sheriff's Slim down](#) and make whatever contribution you see fit, please. The sum raised to date is over £12000 and



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will be in favour of the [Sheriffs' & Recorder's Fund](#). The fund was set up in 1808 and gives small grants to ex-prisoners and their families in London to help them to stop offending and start a new life. When a prisoner is discharged the Government gives them a resettlement grant of just £46, hence the figure of 46lbs – and Chris still needs a bit of support to get him over the line.

Gresham: the Sage on the Stage versus the Invisible College

The College continues its activities on-line and the Academic Board is in the process of filling in the last slots for next year's programme which should be issued at the end of this academic year. The College has been going great guns during the lockdown. It was of course well placed to take advantage of greater interest in on-line activities, but it has developed a streamlined way of getting lectures up on-line, and its marketing activities have led to a significant increase in the number of downloads from schools. Unsurprisingly, the Chris Whitty lecture on May 6th has attracted a lot of interest with 156,500 hits to date and a showing on the BBC Parliamentary Channel. So congratulations to all concerned.

It will be interesting to see whether demand will continue at the same level for the lectures on-line in real time or whether Gresham's supporters would prefer to return to the traditional delivery of F2F lectures plus live questions.

There was an interesting reprise on May 20th of a series of lectures that the College organised back in the Year 2000 on the shape of London in the Year 2020. We were indeed fortunate to be able to bring together the same team to review the success of those predictions on the one hand and speculate on London in 2040 on the other. Using the Z/Yen webinar platform as a vehicle, Professors Michael Mainelli, Richard Susskind and Tim Connell, plus past Chair of Council John Carrington, were able to make a further contribution to this interesting subject, although there were echoes of Donald Rumsfeld's famous utterance about knowing that there were things we knew we didn't know, and not knowing that we don't know things that we don't yet

know. All of this sounds a bit like the academic equivalent of the hokey-cokey until you reflect that 9/11, the financial crash of 2008 and COVID19 all came out of nowhere or at least with little warning.

The webinar is available to view at [2020 Vision & The 21st Century: Looking Back To 2000 And On To 2040, A Gresham College Event Two Decades On](#).

This was also an opportunity for people to meet up again, as panellist Gill Ringland was a former associate of Anthony Hodson, and Professor Alex Edmans will be doing a webinar for Gill's organisation Ethical Reading (Reading the town that is, and not one of the 3 R's...)

Webinars: endemic in the pandemic?

There is likely to be increased competition between providers with webinars becoming more widespread from organisations as diverse as the Corporation of the City of London, The Financial Services Club and Canning House with its up-to-date coverage of Latin America. Ironically, it may be easier to get keynote speakers to participate in a webinar or to offer a guest lecture as they can do so from the comfort of their home and even from abroad – the LSE must have scored a first with a recent webinar involving no fewer than four former presidents from Latin America on screen at once. (It remains to be seen whether eminent speakers will agree to waive their fee as so little of their time is taken up by a brief televised appearance!).

And of course a new generation of students may well become accustomed (or resigned) to the prospect of lectures by distance as universities increasingly are turning to distance learning as part of the post-COVID world. Subjects in future could be taught at cross-university level rather than from within a single faculty, which could have an interesting effect on final year options and even topics for MAs.

A web page for the Gresham Society

On the basis that you join them if you can't beat them, work is now proceeding on a proper web page for the Gresham Society. Apart from making it easier to view details of forthcoming events, it is hoped that



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booking will be simpler and will not require any reiteration of addresses or dietary requirements – once we can go back to organising events, of course!

Editorial

Hopefully we are now beginning to emerge from lockdown, so that we can start to look forward again to the joys of early morning starts and commuting. However, it does mean to say that all those niggling jobs waiting to be done around the house (like, for the past ten years) have been completed. My garden is now gleaming and the tomatoes on Basil's windowsill are coming on a treat.

Nature has bounced back too. On Telegraph Hill near us (so called as it was on the semaphore line that ran from the Admiralty to Portsmouth during the Napoleonic Wars), deer have been added to the usual sightings of badgers, rabbits and foxes, and red kites have been seen moving into the area, much to the disgust of the local crows who try to mob them.

And talking of which, we have witnessed the rare sight of a Court of Crows in our own back garden. In a scene worthy of Alfred Hitchcock the air was full of dozens of angry crows while others were pecking at a young bird on the ground. (Not so much COVID19 as 19 corvids...) All I could do in the circumstances was to hand Pilar a broom, and she sallied forth to save the wretched creature, who ambled away shortly after. Had it been badly injured I would of course have taken it to the animal hospital over in Leatherhead. (I took a sick parrot there once, but that's another story...)

Envoi

Speculation is already mounting on the "New Normal" though the more cynical may look at the gradual breakdown of social distancing in London parks and suspect that most people will rush back to doing everything they did before. However, it is interesting to note that the world of fiction (with the possible exception of *The Archers*) is beginning to speculate on life in the post-COVID world. *The Guardian* reports that Avon already has *Love in Lockdown* on the stocks and Hodder and Stoughton will be bringing out the first post-COVID whodunit,

which will make a change from the sleuth wondering how the victim was murdered in a room locked from the inside.

And as ever, if you have any news for *The Grasshopper* do let us know.

In the meantime,

Stay Sage!

Professor Tim Connell
Stern Editor-in-Chief
The Grasshopper

Basil Bezuidenhout
Bulawayo's answer to
William Caxton