



The Grasshopper

The Organ Of The Gresham Society

*Less explosive than the Richard Montgomery, more whimsical than the Walloping Window
Blind*

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College Notes

The College is making progress in the airwaves as the audio version of the lectures are available here: <https://podcast.gresham.ac.uk>; there were 227,000 downloads in January.

The College is in the process of appointing new Professors of Divinity, Environment (Frank Jackson Foundation), Business, (Mercers' School Memorial), Physic and IT. Watch this space for more news!

Ave Atque Vale

It is with great regret that we have to announce the death of Vicki Walton on 16 December last. She was an early member and strong supporter of our activities. And we are very sorry to report that Elizabeth Nunn has also passed away. She was formerly secretary to the Gresham Society and another great supporter. Our condolences go to Peter. According to the Society rule book (if I could only find it) widows/widowers become members of the Society in their own right automatically upon bereavement.

Founding member of the Gresham Society (and former member of Council) Professor Raoul Franklin was remembered at a memorial service held at Keble College Oxford on 5th March. Messrs Connell, Floud, Haines, Seville and Wilson were in attendance, as of course was new member Robert Franklin.

Vita Vitarum

Congratulations go to Professor Alex Edmans, who has been declared Professor of the Year by Poets and Quants, the influential website used in particular by MBA students. See [Poets&Quants - Poets&Quants' Professor Of The Year: London Business School's Alex Edmans \(poetsandquants.com\)](https://poetsandquants.com) for more information on Alex's remarkable range of activities.

And a warm welcome to new members Drs June Wakefield and Norman Lazarus.

Members' corner

The AGM and Dinner were of course a roaring success (described late in the evening by one enthusiastic member as "a spiffing knees up") with 37 members in attendance at the National Liberal Club (numbers having been reduced courtesy of Covid). Thanks go to CEO Dr Wendy Piatt for giving the after dinner speech on the subject of the Vision for Gresham, and to Barbara Woodthorpe Browne for the flower arrangements, which were sold after the dinner in favour of the Tuberos Sclerosis Association (of which Robert is President). The tidy sum of £310 was raised by way of donations from those present.

People were very pleased at the prospect of getting out together again, so we are planning a Sir Thomas Gresham-themed tour of the City on Wednesday June 15th, taking in St Helen's Bishopsgate (where he is buried), the former Gresham College buildings, the Royal Exchange and Mercers' Hall, before repairing to Barnard's Inn Hall for evening drinks. More details after Easter.

Following on from celebrated grasshoppers in G10, Colonel Howard Worth tells us that there was a branch of Martin's bank next door to the old Mercers' School – with a grasshopper on display. And another one is to be found in Change Alley, marking the site of Garraway's Coffee House, famous as the first place where tea was sold in London.

Former member of Council and Times journo Professor George Brock tells me that the British Library is organising an interesting exhibition called "Breaking the News" (covering five centuries of news) which will run from April 22nd to August 21st. Unfortunately the BL is not currently arranging for group tours, but it may be of individual interest.

New Publications

Congratulations go to Professor Leslie Thomas QC on the publication of his autobiography *Do Right*



and *Fear No-One*, available from Simon and Schuster from 14th April, price £20.

Lord Peter Hennessy, Emeritus Gresham Professor and longstanding Society member, sums up the times as ever with his latest offering *A Duty of Care: Britain Before and After Corona*, out now in Penguin.

And Professor Robin Wilson's latest foray into publishing as editor is also out: *Oxford's Savilian Professors of Geometry: the first 400 years*: Oxford University £45.

Further to my research for my so far unrecognised work on Toulouse Lautrec and the time he spent gambling in Monte Carlo: on one occasion he was absolutely cleaned out and had to walk some of the way back to Paris. So my new publication will be entitled *Too Far To Trek To Lose...* (And can anyone please recommend a publisher with the acumen and vision to actually take this work on?)

The Royal Exchange Got There First!

We at Gresham have always been proud of the fact that it was our very own Sir Thomas who brought the Royal Exchange to London in 1571. We now discover that Lord Cecil himself followed suit when he opened the "British Bourse" in the Strand. It was all quite upmarket, having been designed by Inigo Jones, then King James I did the honours, and Ben Jonson even wrote a masque to celebrate the opening. This was in 1609 so imitation and flattery spring to mind. Though this New Exchange was larger than the Royal Exchange, the shops were smaller. They included haberdashers, drapers, goldsmiths, perfumers and booksellers, though of course business was not conducted on the premises.

Reflections

Strange coincidences

Following on from Julian Huxley in G10 and the fact that his list of taxonomies coincided with the publication of Professor Frank Cox's list, Professor David Spiegelhalter has devised the Cambridge Coincidences Collection. These could include surprising repetitions, simultaneous events, examples of parallel lives, uncanny patterns and unlikely chains of events. He actually encourages people to write in with examples to the [Cambridge Coincidences Collection](#) | [Understanding Uncertainty](#). One example I gave went as follows: sixty years ago (!) I was at school with Eric and Chris, with whom I have stayed in touch over the years. We all had

daughters, who in the fullness of time each produced a boy – all within a week of each other, and two of whom gave birth in the same suite in the same hospital. Odd or what?

When Kipling played pooh-sticks

We hear that the original Poohsticks Bridge is up for sale. Built in 1907, it was replaced (with help from Disney) in 1979 – and the original parts were put into storage. Now they are up for auction, with a reserve price of £60,000.

Of course, it might well go for a higher price if people realised that Rudyard Kipling actually played Poohsticks with AA Milne and Christopher Robin himself. And they went for tea at Batemans afterwards. (See *The Kipling Journal*, vol XLVI, no 210 (June 1979), p3.)

Amazon Explorers Again

So many readers have asked about Wallace and Bates that I really have to complete the trio. Richard Spruce is largely overlooked today but then he was probably the sort of person who appreciated grasshoppers and so deserves to be better known. He went out to Brazil with Wallace and Bates, and spent a year in Santarem (something I could cautiously recommend from memory, though the food is much better in Belem further downriver). Spruce of course is not remembered kindly in Brazil as he did the groundwork that enabled Henry Wickham to scoop up 70,000 rubber-tree seeds and take them back to Kew, and these went on to form the backbone of the rubber plantations in what were then Ceylon and Malaya. But then rubber tapping in Brazil never had been placed on an industrial level and the life of the rubber tappers was truly dreadful.

Having mentioned my F2F encounters with snakes over the years, the most tense situation arose not in a steamy jungle, but rather in the Pyrenees. I had stepped over a wall for a quick Jimmy Riddle when a snake poked its indignant head up no more than ten feet away. Of course, the popular idea is that snake venom has to be sucked out of any wound. Had I been bitten in such a vulnerable situation at that moment I would have really known who my friends were...

Copenhagen and Marengo

I somehow fail to see the connection, but moving on from Giuseppa Grassini in G10 I am reminded of the tale that both Napoleon and the Duke rode chargers



that had been purchased at the celebrated Cahirmee Horse Fair in County Cork on 12 July every year.

And (going back to G9 for one moment) Napoleon clearly had a thing about Chicken Marengo as he even named his horse after it (though he may have had the battle of the same name in mind, which took place in Northern Italy). Poor old Marengo not only served Napoleon faithfully through many a battle, but had the ignominy of being captured after Waterloo. Eventually he was boiled down and his bones were put on display at the National Army Museum, where they remain to this day (though they have been renovated recently). Wellington's famous steed Copenhagen fared better, with only one hoof kept by a servant and eventually turned into an inkstand.

Editor's Note: Being on display at the Army Museum is perhaps more dignified than the recent addition of a plastic Marengo in Paris, suspended above Napoleon in the Invalides. Old Boney must be revolving in his tomb.

It's who you know

Personal and professional connections are of the utmost importance in daily working life. Being a linguist, and having been up the Orinoco and down the Amazon in my time (both literally and metaphorically) I have met no end of interesting people but conscious as ever of transparency I always had my on-line diary open to my staff. However, discretion may be of importance at certain stages of negotiation, so I was not always quite so transparent about who I was actually meeting. Hence my frequent encounters with Lord Luvaduc, not to mention Lady Ellpus. (You will all have met her husband in these straitened times – Lord Ellpus of Upper Gumtree...)

Plague Notes

Little did I realise that this section would rear its ugly head again so soon. Readers may recall the Mondays at One series (Plague 29.10.01, Cholera 5.11.01, Influenza 12.11.01 and TB 19.11.01) but another quite deadly variant seems to be creeping up on us all:

The NILE Virus, type C

Virologists have identified a new Nile virus - type C. It appears to target those who were born between 1940 & 1970:

Symptoms

1. Causes you to send the same message twice.
2. Causes you to send a blank message.
3. Causes you to send a message to the wrong person.
4. Causes you to send it back to the person who sent it to you.
5. Causes you to forget to attach the attachment.
6. Causes you to hit SEND before you've finished.
7. Causes you to hit DELETE instead of SEND.
8. Causes you to SEND when you should DELETE.

It is called the C-NILE virus.

And if you can't admit to doing the above, you've obviously caught the mutated strain -

The D-NILE virus.

You have been warned!

Editorial

It hardly seems a year since the Grasshopper began chirping and already He has built up an audience which, though defined more by quality than quantity, is nothing if not intrigued by what will come up next. As one highly reputable journalist put it, it would take a star on University Challenge to pick up on all the twists and turns. Our very own Wing Commander Mike Dudgeon has gallantly nailed his colours to the mast (if airmen can do such a thing) and declared "The Grasshopper is an eclectic mix of erudition, culture and humour in support of the College's outreach" which would make a fine mission statement if we at the Grasshopper head office felt that we were actually on a mission. The word "whimsical" has been seen in correspondence (as indeed has the term "rag") but the Grasshopper Himself will hop into his second year in print with head unbowed and antennae fully a-quiver, forever on the lookout for news which will inform and entertain.

Envoi

The *Richard Montgomery* was an American Liberty Ship which sank off Sheerness in August 1944. Her hatches were open as she was at anchor and a freak gust of wind drove her on to a sandbank which made her break her back. The only problem was the fact that she was loaded with 7000 tons of explosives of which around 1400 remain, being considered too dangerous to move. The wreck is breaking up nearly 80 years later and so there is some concern that the explosives will be even more unstable. If they were to



go up, then they would take Sheerness with them, and the resulting tsunami would flood Whitstable, which is only five miles away.

The *Walloping Window Blind* is a nonsense song, written by an American, Charles Carryl, who wrote stories for children in the later Nineteenth Century, and is sometimes called the American Lewis Carroll. This gives a flavour of his work, which includes other overlooked gems such as *The Camel's Lament*, and *Davy and the Goblin*:

A capital ship for an ocean trip
Was the Walloping Window Blind.
No gale that blew dismayed her crew
Or troubled the captain's mind.

The man at the wheel was taught to feel
Contempt for the wildest blow.
And it often appeared when the weather had cleared
That he'd been in his bunk below.

The rites of Spring

The smell of freshly mown grass is so redolent of Spring time in England. I was strolling in the grounds of my club the other day (the Lensbury down by Teddington Lock) just as a man went by mowing the lawns. Strangely enough this took me straight back to a time when I was lecturing at the University of São Paulo. We were on the ground floor with open windows just as the mowing machine swept by – and I was transported straight back to England in the Spring.

Grass in hot climes of course is usually like raffia and you are not allowed to walk on it, but the USP has some wonderful grounds and is the size of a small city.

**STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS
STOP PRESS STOP PRESS**

The Grasshopper strikes again

Readers will recall the piece about Parmigianino (aka Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola) in G8 – and so too apparently have the Courtauld, for no sooner does the Grasshopper draw attention to him than they set up an exhibition showing no fewer than 22 pieces of his (out of the 1000 pieces extant, it must be admitted). It is on now till the 5th June and well worth a visit. (Our little green mascot is sure to go Himself.) Incidentally, Parmigianino was thought to be the heir to Raphael, was the first to try etchings and was a pioneer of the chiaroscuro woodcut technique.

Viewers of *Lost British Paintings* on BBC4 might note that a portrait thought to be by Parmigianino cropped up in the broadcast on March 21st – and our very own Dr Allan Chapman was brought in as an expert to confirm that the portrait included a drawing of a heart, which anatomical detail led to the conclusion that the portrait was of Rinaldo Matteo Colombo (early anatomist and buddy of Pope Julian III) and that the artist was in fact Francesco Salviati. He is little known in this country but is famous for his murals in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence and the Farnese Palace in Rome if ever you happen to be passing that way. (Allan knew that all the time of course but he wasn't going to let on...)

And as always, we welcome comments, contributions and compliments – but never (we trust) complaints.

If you have any news items for *The Grasshopper* do let Tim (t.j.connell@city.ac.uk) or Basil (greshamsociety@gmail.com) know.

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