



The Grasshopper

The Organ Of The Gresham Society

The best way to spend a wet winter's afternoon (*Bricket Wood Spielplatz Newsletter*)

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College Notes

Three new professorial appointments have been made recently in Geometry, Music and Rhetoric. Names will be announced shortly.

Dr Sudhir Hazareesingh's lecture last October on Toussaint Louverture has attracted 648,000 downloads to date, which is possibly a College record.

Congratulations go to Emeritus Professor of Law Vernon Bogdanor on a richly deserved knighthood.

A major new initiative is in the offing in the light of our very own Professor Michael Mainelli's installation as Lord Mayor in November. The Lord Mayor's On-Line lectures will involve an eclectic range of livery companies, learned societies and even the odd university, following the theme of Facing The Future. This will be with assistance from the Gresham Society, so more anon.

Ave Atque Vale

We note with regret the death of Joseph Butler Sloss, husband of Baroness Elizabeth Butler Sloss.

Welcome to new members Victoria Baines, incoming Professor of Information Technology and Deputy Edward Lord OBE JP. (Edward is also a member of Council.)

Members' Corner

Wilson in fine voice

A good time was had by all at the Royal Philatelic Society of London in Abchurch Lane on 8 February when Robin regaled an appreciative audience with tales of the links between postage stamps and mathematics. I did notice however that to date a stamp has not been issued to celebrate the latest results

concerning the characteristic polynomials of random matrices and their connection to Gaussian Multiplicative Chaos. (Some things are best left to the imagination...)



Profs. Robin Wilson and Tim Connell with Peter Cockburn, President of the RPSL

Wilson in print again

And Robin's latest page-turner has appeared: *Graph Theory in America*, along with John J Watkins and David D Parks and is now available in all good bookshops. Robin's June 13th Gresham Lecture will be drawing on it, so sign up now!

Being certain about uncertainty

And congratulations to Council member Dowshan Humzah for a fine case of oxymoron in his new book from Springer (co-authored with Bruce Garvey and Storm Le Roux) *Uncertainty Deconstructed* – which will demonstrate that uncertainty is nothing more than being unwilling to think the unthinkable. Sure to be a cure for insomnia.

Trotta to Trieste

Our congratulations go to Roberto Trotta who has been appointed as the Head of the Theoretical and Scientific Data Science Group at SISSA, the International School for Advanced Studies in Trieste. The prospect of all that sunshine has obviously had an effect already as Roberto has just



published his first short story. “Wunderlich Park” is about the transformative effect that someone has on coming face to face with a mountain lion. Hardly surprising perhaps, but how this fits in with the “shadow of catastrophic environmental destruction and climate change” is less clear. To find out more, you will have to download edition no. 4 of [Tamarind](#), a fairly new literary magazine.

All Alone with my Memory

Society member Colonel Howard Stevens ponders on that well-known phenomenon, walking upstairs and then not quite remembering why...

“If a young man, when leaving company, does not recollect where he left his hat, it is nothing; but if the same inattention is discovered in an old man, people will shrug their shoulders, and say, ‘His memory is going.’” *Samuel Johnson, 1783.*

I have come upstairs to my study because I have something really interesting to tell you; and now that I am here the new Word document is as blank as my mind. How can I possibly have forgotten what I wanted to write in just a few seconds? Maybe my memory bank is full, for I certainly have many memories and an amazing number of them totally trivial. I remember my early days at prep school in north London and having to take dictation about the Good Samaritan. I remember tea at the headmaster’s table and choking on a piece of bread; the next day I was moved several places down the table! I recall vividly the examination to enter Mercers’ School, taken in the awe-inspiring surroundings of Barnard’s Inn. I can still recite rapidly all the stations from Waterloo to Shepperton in a passable imitation of the announcer at Raynes Park. Eventually I was to join the Army, enlisting as a private soldier in the Intelligence Corps before going to Sandhurst. One never forgets one’s first regimental number, even if it was changed on commissioning 57 years ago and never used since.

Then came an avalanche of military trivia, most of which I never used: the payload of an elephant is 800 pounds, a camel 250, a pack horse 160. A mule of over 13 hands needs a daily ration of 10 pounds of grain, 7 pounds of hay, an ounce of salt and, depending on climate, 6 to 12 gallons of water spread over

three waterings. An officer’s saddle weighs 21½ pounds but a standard saddle, just 15 pounds. A Hercules transport aircraft has a payload of 30,000 pounds and in resupplying the training base in Canada it could carry 7 spare Chieftain Tank engines each weighing 4,250 pounds across the Atlantic.

The Latin and Greek pumped into me by Messrs Cowan and Scott at Mercers’ School, remain with me today, underpinning the learning of five more languages during my career. The last of these was Hungarian, and I recall our younger daughter and son, who frequently sparred good-naturedly, picking up some useful phrases during the school holidays. Patrick was delighted to find that “you stupid woman” could be expressed in Hungarian, with as much disdain as possible, as (phonetically) ‘booto nurr’ and Bobby was equally delighted to learn that an irritating younger brother could be dismissed as a ‘peemoss urch’. I am sure there is much more, but I can’t quite remember.

The Grasshopper Badge

Some sharp sighted members have noticed that I wear my grasshopper badge upside down. This in fact is the Chairman’s prerogative as laid down in the Society’s Mem and Arts, Section 3 Clause 4 Paragraph 2. To tell the truth we mislaid the Rule Book about 15 years ago but I remember this one clearly. As a New Year’s Resolution (unless these have been forgotten already) members might care to decide that they will wear their badge with pride on every possible occasion.

Snakes Alive

My disquisitions on our slithery friends have not gone unnoticed. Jack Wigglesworth (our very own Editor-at-Lunch) tells me that during his time in South America he once killed a six-foot snake. Only modesty prevents him from adding that he ran over it in a jeep...

Reflections

Fried Grasshopper

The Grasshopper Himself was reading the paper over my shoulder the other day and noted with interest the news that frogs living in



the vicinity of Chernobyl have reacted to radiation by turning their skins darker and darker. It is believed that this has happened over no more than ten frog generations.

The Grasshopper's view is that frogs go through so many changes that merely darkening down is hardly a challenge. Grasshoppers of course go through a much simpler growing process. The female actually lays pods which can contain up to a hundred nymphs at a time. "Very overcrowded," says the Grasshopper Himself, "Not an easy time". It must be a bit like being unhappy at school...

The real Pinocchio

The Grasshopper Himself was aghast to learn that the Disney version of Pinocchio is a bowdlerised version of a story first written in 1881 by one Carlo Collodi. Not only is Jiminy reduced to a shadowy figure called simply the Talking Cricket – but Pinocchio kills him with a hammer. Even worse, Pinocchio's feet get burnt off by going too close to the fire (though the devoted Geppetto makes him a new pair) and Pinocchio later gets hanged by a gang of gold coin forgers that he falls in with. And they say that Disney is too frightening for small children...



Pinocchio by Enrico Mazzanti (1852–1910), the first illustrator of 'The Adventures of Pinocchio', from the 1883 edition.

(Editor's Note: Benito Mussolini of course was born in 1883. Perhaps his grandmother read this story to him when he was little. If so, that would certainly explain a lot...)

Another dose of Friar's Balsam

Further to the notes on Friar's Balsam in G14, it is interesting to note that *The Lancet* was founded in 1823 (the 5th October to be precise) in order to focus on the genuine elements in medicine and to reduce the influence of quackery. Thomas Wakley was a famous radical and reformer, MP for Finsbury for many years. He spoke out fiercely against

everything from the Poor Laws to the Lord's Day Observance and spoke up for everything ranging from the Tolpuddle Martyrs to medical reform. In that respect he spoke out against nepotism in the medical profession, though it is curious to note that he later employed his own son when he had a heavy workload as a coroner. He was also a friend of Charles Dickens, who actually sat in on some of his hearings, but that's another story. And William Cobbett was one of the original contributors to *The Lancet*, which seems a bit odd at first sight, till we think of the social reform angle.

Today *The Lancet* is a world-renowned journal, with 24 supplements. 141 million items are downloaded every year from all over the world and all make interesting reading, though not perhaps for the faint-hearted.

Envoi

Fray Pieza de Bacalao was a Franciscan monk who lived in New Spain (the colonial name for Mexico) in the 1530s, not long after the Conquest. He is not as well known as other monks of the time such as Bernardino de Sahagún or Diego Durán, but he does appear in footnotes as he certainly learnt Náhuatl (the language of the Aztecs) and he did leave some writings based on interviews with surviving Aztec priests about their religious beliefs. So there was great excitement late last year when a library was discovered in the ex-Convent of Aquino Chico near the city of Aguascalidas in Western Mexico. It had been walled up probably during the Mexican Revolution in order to protect it from looters. Found among the theological works and an early atlas is a manuscript volume concerning the significance of the grasshopper in Aztec theology.



Here is a statue of the Nahuatl glyph of Chapultepec depicting a grasshopper on a hill ('chapul' – grasshopper, 'tepec' – hill). The lower part represents water and the settlement of the Aztecs (Mexico) in the area. This is the symbol of Chapultepec Park, a key landmark in Mexico City.

The Aztecs believed in a whole panoply of deities but, although grasshoppers appear in glyphs, an actual deity has never been identified till now. According to Fray Pieza, the



local priests would keep a grasshopper in their temple and use its buzzing for the purpose of divination. He even managed to transcribe a large number of aphorisms remembered by his Aztec informants (rather like the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament).

In my Mexico days I set up exchange links with the University of Aguascalientes, so they have asked me to start translating the material as it gets transcribed. I have also been asked to find a publisher in English, so if anyone has any useful contacts do please let me know as this is a major breakthrough in Meso-American Theology.

A titanic story

Nope, not the luckless ship for once, but the largest dinosaur ever found (to date). Members with grandchildren might like to know that the Titanosaur is now on display at the Natural History Museum. This is the largest dinosaur ever found. He comes from Argentina, where of course Charles Darwin had his first inklings of the theory of evolution, having come across gigantic bones – which Captain Fitzroy thought showed the truth of Noah’s Flood, as dinosaurs clearly would not have fitted in to the Ark. Curiously enough, Titanosaur bones were first discovered in India, and by none other than Sir William Sleeman, better known as the man who broke up the Thuggees, those adherents of the goddess Kali who murdered lonely travellers with a scarf called the *rumal*.

John Masters covers this episode very clearly in *The Deceivers* of 1952, which draws heavily of course on the novel *Confessions of a Thug* of 1839 which in turn drew on the testimony of one Feringhea, a thuggee who had turned Queen’s Evidence.

Even more curiously, there is a link between Rudyard Kipling and Sleeman via the fact that the latter wrote about the cases of half a dozen children who were said to have been raised by wolves. (See his *Account of Wolves Nurturing Children in their Dens* of 1852) – all of which takes us a long way away from dinosaurs!

Editorial

With regard to this edition’s Masthead, the Bricket Wood Spielplatz really does exist (motto “The Place to Come When You Have Nothing On”). It was the first place in England

in the 1930s to pick up on the Germanic philosophy of FKK. (If ever you are on a Mediterranean beach and you see a sign saying FKK Strand, just walk past it and you will soon get the idea...)

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

I see in *Navy News* that the Norwegian Navy has decided to paint bar codes on the side of its ships instead of the traditional pennant number, so it will be easier for the port authorities to scan the navy in. (Scan-Di-Navi....? Geddit? Oh dear...)

If anyone would like their very own grasshopper wind vane, an interesting one is coming up for auction. Dating from the Eighteenth Century, it is three feet high and made of copper. In 1740 two were ordered by wealthy Bostonian Peter Fanueil to imitate the one that sits on the top of the Royal Exchange to this day, having survived fire, wind and weather. One is still to be found on the top of Boston’s famous Fanueil Hall and the other has been discovered recently atop a barn in New Hampshire. In June at Sotheby’s it will go under the hammer (if that’s the right expression) with a reserve price of \$500.000. (Provost please note!)

And a reminder: The long delayed AGM and Dinner will be taking place at the National Liberal Club on Monday 24 April at 6 for 6.30 pm, followed by the celebrated seven-minutes AGM and then dinner.

The booking form will come round soon.

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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