



# The Grasshopper

## The Organ Of The Gresham Society

### Some light lockdown reading

Issue No. 4

15<sup>th</sup> September 2020

#### **College notes**

*An interview with the Provost, [Dr Simon Thurley](#)*

*TC: Could you just outline your longstanding connection with the College?*

*Provost:* I have been Visiting Professor of the Built Environment since 2009 and have enormously enjoyed giving seven seasons of lectures at the Museum of London. I have mainly spoken about architecture and society in Britain, and two of my lecture series have been turned into books.

*TC: You have a wide range of outside experience: how do you think this might be of direct benefit to Gresham?*

*Provost:* My whole career has been about communicating specialist information to the public, working at Historic Royal Palaces, Museum of London and latterly English Heritage. I have been a great advocate for bringing history, archaeology and heritage to a wider audience. I hope as Provost that I will be able to continue to uphold the high standards of Gresham lectures but reach a wider audience.

*TC: How do you see Gresham post-Covid?*

*Provost:* Obviously, the pandemic has been very difficult for Gresham and other institutions. We, like theatres, thrive on a live audience and this has been impossible for the last 4 months. Taking lectures online has given us valuable experience and we hope that when we resume lectures in person that our online activities will have benefitted from what we have learned.

*TC: Thank you Provost*

These are exciting times for the College with the new 5-Year Plan in prospect, plus a new house style. We hope to have an interview with the incoming Business Development Manager Dr. Wendy Piatt in the next edition of The Grasshopper.

*The new Programme out now*

The new Programme (in its new go-green format) is now available. To request a 2020-2021 copy go to

[Request a Programme](#) or email [Enquiries](#), but of course it is also all up on-line. There is a truly fantastic line-up of lectures for the coming year, all of which will be on-line till December – and then hopefully back to Barnard's Inn Hall, the Museum of London and other venues in 2021. (The two lectures to be held on 28<sup>th</sup> September at 4:30pm and 6pm are highly recommended in particular...)

#### ***And lectures on-line till New Year (at least)***

Gresham lectures will be held virtually during the Autumn 2020 term. All of the links to individual lectures are given in the new academic programme, available via the College website. The College will be using a new system that will allow for audience members to ask questions of the speaker – the system is Crowdcast, and there is a very simple registration process prompted via the lecture link. You only need to enter your registration details once. Registering also means that you will be reminded of the lecture's start time, and the College can email you if there are any changes to the schedule.

#### ***The Grasshopper goes green***

Our Editorial Board would like to make it clear that absolutely no pressure was put on the College to transform the house style into its new green-toned format in order to bring it in line with the mascot of our new soaraway publication. Of course, the College could have chosen a wider range of options for its colour card, as grasshoppers come in a variety of colours, including green, white and black – and even purple. It is said that a genetic mutation termed erythrism occasionally creates a pink variety, but the Grasshopper Himself huffily refused to discuss the matter.

#### ***Salvete et Valete***

The Gresham College Council has an arrangement whereby members retire by rotation after six years' service. We would therefore like to express our thanks to Alderman and Sheriff Professor Michael Mainelli, Professor Daniel Hodson, Professor George Brock and Tom Hoffman MBE for their many and



varied contributions to the College over the years. And a warm welcome to Alderman Sheriff Chris Hayward, Michelle Gurney and Geoffrey Matthews who replace them. Floreant!

And welcome too to John Mullan, our incoming Visiting Professor from UCL, who will be speaking on the power of the novel. (Interesting to note that his lecture on Crime in Fiction reflects our June 2012 Mondays at One series on Literary London Crime, not to mention Crime and Retribution back in October 2009.)

### ***The portrait of Robert Hooke***

There has been an interesting flurry of debate recently as to whether a portrait of Robert Hooke has been found. It is widely believed (with little firm evidence) that Sir Isaac Newton destroyed a portrait as part of his vendetta with Hooke, but it is not certain that Hooke ever actually had his portrait painted. Now an American academic believes that internal evidence within a painting by Mary Beale (1633-1699) points to Hooke himself. This is called "Portrait of a Mathematician", though it shows someone who appears to be more florid and prosperous than contemporary descriptions of Hooke. But Associate Professor Larry Griffing of Texas A&M University claims that the orrery in the background reflects Hooke's claim in 1684 that he could mathematically demonstrate Kepler's First Law. Then the urban landscape in the background appears to include the church of St Michael, which had been renovated by Hooke in 1686. A further curiosity comes from the record of a visit to the first Gresham College in 1710 by the German traveller (none other than Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach himself) who refers to portraits there of Boyle and "Hooock". It is suggested, however, that what he saw was a known portrait of a less eminent Fellow by the name of Theodore Haak – and von U. simply misheard the name. See [The Royal Society - Hooke, Newton, and the 'missing' portrait](#) for a further detailed discussion.

*(Editor's note: there is a good example of an orrery in the Library of the Queen's College Oxford. And Kepler's First Law of Motion? "The orbit of a planet is an ellipse, with the sun located in one of the two foci." Of course it is...)*

### ***New Publications***

Our very own College Chairman Loyd Grossman has flown into print with a highly unusual (if not to say highly original) volume entitled *An Elephant in Rome*, which starts off with a curious monument to

Pope Alexander VII and then leads on to much else of curious interest in the Eternal City. Published by Pallas Athene at £19.99, though the *Daily Telegraph* is offering a discount at £16.99 (call 0844 871 1514.)

Some readers have expressed concern that there has been no announcement recently of a new book by Professor Robin Wilson. But rest assured – there will be at least three (available from all good bookshops) in time for Christmas. We do have to reveal, however, that two are co-authored and one is simply edited. They are all on the topic of graph theory, which should while away the hours while the Christmas pudding goes down.

It is neck-and-neck as to whether Robin or Gyles Brandreth will be getting their next book out first. (I should never have used that horse race analogy in G3...) Gyles is ahead by a short neck with *What's Black and White and Red All Over? The Best Worst Joke Book in the World*, published by Puffin in August (price £9.99.) So we can look forward to a photo finish in December.

### ***The very first Gresham Society webinar***

Our very own Ian Harris of Z/Yen fame has spent lockdown researching the origins of Real Tennis and has also been seen to be gracing the Court at Lord's, though his insistence on playing in full Elizabethan costume has probably hindered his game. Be that as it may, he began with the interesting question as to whether Sir Thomas himself ever played. Sir T probably never had time as he was constantly toing and froing between London and Antwerp, but several of the aristocratic houses along the Strand managed to find space for one, as of course did the Palace at Whitehall.

It is interesting to see that Real Tennis has a long history and did seem to be all the rage in Tudor times, though it was probably imported from France. The rules bear some resemblance to modern lawn tennis, though the racket is an unusual shape and the ball is still made of cork, though it depends of course whether you are playing *jeu carré* or *jeu à dedans*.

The Grasshopper Himself gets excited at the thought of all those humans hopping about, so a Gresham Society visit to the Real Tennis Court over at Hampton Court may well be on the cards, though Elizabethan dress is unlikely to be compulsory. So watch this space – and indeed, watch the first [Gresham Society Webinar, to be led by Ian on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm](#). A reminder with booking details will go round closer to the date.



## **Editorial**

### *The website*

As announced in G1, the Society website will be going live early in the Autumn term. Watch out for further details.

## **Members' Corner**

### *Jambalaya, crawfish pie and filé gumbo*

Well, not quite, but following on from fried grasshopper, Father Bill Joseph S.J. (a longstanding member of our American chapter) tells me that in Alabama the key delicacy is fried catfish. Apparently people can tell by the taste which lake their helping comes from because of the quality of the mud in the lakebed. I would rather not have known that myself, but it is worth bearing in mind if ever you are passing through Alabama.

## **The Covid Tarantella**

Professor Frank Cox has come up with the following response to lockdown in verse:

Do you remember an Inn,  
Miranda?  
Do you remember locked-in?  
And no coming and no going  
And no toing and no froing  
And no days at ease in the High Pyrenees,  
And the masked troubadours and the cafes all closed.

Do you remember an Inn,  
Miranda?  
Do you remember locked-in?  
And the wipes at the doors, and the two-metre  
clause,  
And the ting, tong, tang of a lonely guitar  
And the lovers with hands held afar.

Do you remember an Inn,  
Miranda?  
Do you remember locked-in?  
And no sound  
Of the tread of the feet on the ground,  
No sound  
But the boom  
Of a feeling of doom.

### *With apologies to Hilaire Belloc*

Of course, it is said that the Tarantella was a frenetic dance originating in the Taranto region of Italy when poisonous spiders were a pest during the harvest season, and frenetic dancing was the only way of

counteracting the poison. It should be noted however that the spider local to Taranto is in fact the wolf spider (*lycosa tarantula*) and not the more commonly known Mediterranean tarantula (*Latrodectus Tredecimguttatus*) which is indeed highly poisonous.

*(Editor's note: it seems that global warming is encouraging more aggressive spiders to come to the UK. See [spot the UK's biting spiders](#) for a list of creepy crawlies that can bite. There are also some video clips that will make arachnophobes shudder...)*

## **Plague Notes**

On September 14<sup>th</sup> 1665 (so 355 years ago yesterday) Samuel Pepys muses on the growing list of deaths amongst his wide circle of acquaintances, and not just the great and the good:

*One of my own watermen, that carried me daily, fell sick as soon as he had landed me on Friday morning last, when I had been all night upon the water... is now dead of the plague – to hear... that Mr Sidney Montague is sick of a desperate fever at my Lady Carteret's at Scott's Hall, to hear that Mr Lewes hath another daughter sick – and lastly, both my servants, W Hewer and Tom Edwards, have lost their fathers, both in St Sepulchre's parish, of the plague this week – doth put me in great apprehensions of melancholy, and with good reason.*

W Hewer of course is Will Hewer, who began as Pepys' clerk and eventually became MP for Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight and Master of the Clothworkers' Company. He is also well known for being Pepys' executor.

## **Envoi**

### *Mexican Independence Day September 15<sup>th</sup>*

Today is Mexican Independence Day, though strictly speaking the call to arms came on September 16<sup>th</sup> 1810 with the *Grito de Dolores* (that's a place, by the way, not a person). A long war with Spain followed for independence, but at least slavery was abolished. People today gather in the Zócalo (the main square in Mexico City) to celebrate. It is an interesting setting, with the top of the Aztec temple visible alongside the Cathedral, and the National Palace on the other side with its intriguing murals of Mexican history by Diego Rivera, so well worth a visit. In the meantime, if you happen to bump into a passing Mexican today, do remember to shout *Viva México*.



### ***The all-seeing grasshopper***

It is part of our editorial policy that *The Grasshopper* will leave no stone unturned in search of a good story, which is only appropriate as our little green friend has the most remarkable eyesight. Our very own Professor Will Ayliffe (oculist extraordinaire) can tell us more:

“Our homocentric view of the world leaves us blind to the incredible vision of most other life forms, with whom we share this planet.

Compound eyes such as those of our beloved grasshopper are the commonest type of eyes in existence. Evolving in the Ediacaran but exploding in the Cambrian Period, 541 million years ago, compound all-round-vision eyes gave trilobites a distinct advantage in the evolutionary arms race, enabling them to survive an astonishing 260 million years into the Permian. Extremely common in the fossil record, trilobites were named incorrectly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the Dudley locust because of their frequency in the Wenlock limestone.

Compound eyes of amazing diversity survived through mass extinctions as witnessed in horseshoe crabs of our own era, and via a cadet branch, the mandibulata, which includes millipedes, crustacea and insects. The compound eye remains the commonest way life forms have evolved to interrogate their world.

We poor mammals along with other backboned creatures use the simple camera eye, along with a few other life forms which have separately evolved single chamber eyes, such as cephalopods. How slow, how locally focused is our world compared to the faster all-round view of the grasshopper and its cousins. Never mind the amazing 16 coloured vision of the mantis shrimp, including polarised light. Anyone tried to catch a fly, or a grasshopper recently?

Our all-seeing mascot may have lessons yet to teach us about the visual world.”

*(Editor’s note: do visit the College website to view all of Will’s fascinating series [Vision and the Eye](#) on a truly encyclopaedic –if not telescopic- range of lectures concerning vision.)*

**STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS**

The Grasshopper Himself would like to thank the many readers who have written in to express sympathy to those cicadas who have been afflicted with massospora, a rare mind-controlling fungus in West Virginia. Apparently these so-called “zombie cicadas” are driven to behave in ways rarely seen in respectable grasshopper circles. “They have brought shame on the entire Acridoidea Family,” He says as these poor beasts are driven to mate relentlessly while being eaten away by the fungus. (See *The Times* for 8<sup>th</sup> August page 45 and [Parasite of the Day](#) for some really gruesome pictures.) The Grasshopper has pointed out (with relief) that He is not actually a cicada and is therefore hopefully immune and has no immediate plans to visit family in West Virginia.

*(Editor’s note: readers will remember that the cicada comes in two main varieties – the annual cicada, which lives for about three years, and the periodical cicada which has a seventeen-year life cycle, most of which is spent underground. See [Cicada Mania](#) for more fascinating details.)*



**Trilobite Eye**



**Grasshopper Eye**

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