



# The Grasshopper

## The Organ Of The Gresham Society

*Bonhomie – Conviviality – Intellectual Curiosity*

Issue No. 5

9<sup>th</sup> November 2020

### **College notes**

Dr Wendy Piatt has been appointed as Gresham's first CEO responsible for running the college and implementing the new Five-Year Plan. She comes to us from University College London and previously was inaugural CEO of the Russell Group of Universities. She has also served as a senior civil servant in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and the Department for Education and Skills.

*TC: So what brings you to Gresham?*

*Dr Piatt:* I just love the huge level of intellectual curiosity. There are so many subjects of the highest quality – the lectures are engaging and compelling. And the New Learning and our historical credentials are unique – my DPhil was on Sir Philip Sydney and his circle in the 1590s, which fits in nicely with the time when Gresham College was founded!

*TC: So what about the Five-Year Plan?*

*Dr Piatt:* We do need to raise the profile of the College and attract more people in – I think a detailed route map is the key. And the rich history of Gresham is the Hook (*TC:* almost literally...) We have Sir Thomas and the Tudor monarchs, the Great Fire and Wren. And I just love Pepys (*TC:* See below!). We need to match this pedigree with innovation, though income generation and fundraising will also be important. But that is entirely consistent with Gresham's own emphasis on disseminating 'New Learning' and breaking new ground by lecturing in English - not just Latin.

*TC: How do you think the College will be in the New Normal?*

*Dr Piatt:* Ironically, the New Normal might work to our advantage as more people turn to the technology and we improve and develop our

'offer' in this area. The Hall actually works well as a studio – and of course our online lectures are the only available options at the moment given Covid restrictions on live audiences. And we do need to balance live lectures with online offerings. The live experience is still important but the online lectures should be viewed as equally important. Even so, ordinary people can ask extraordinary questions – and that is something to be encouraged via Crowdcast.

*TC: And finally?*

*Dr Piatt:* Gresham is a magnificent institution. The Quest is to take it forward.

### **The Nailor Lecture 11 November at 6pm**

One of the Gresham Society's traditional activities is to support the [Nailor Lecture](#), which this year will take place (appropriately enough) on Wednesday November 11<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. Dr Sophy Antrobus MBE (and former Wing Commander) will be speaking (online of course) on the subject of "How Are Drones Changing Warfare?" The Lecture commemorates Peter Nailor, Provost in the early 1990s when the College was re-launched. He had previously been involved with the Polaris project, hence the topic related to matters of defence.

And our congratulations go to outgoing Provost Sir Richard J Evans who has been made an Honorary Fellow of the College. A Fellowship has also been awarded to Professor Chris Budd on the completion of his term as Professor of Geometry.

### **A Nobel Prize**

The Grasshopper raises his hat in salutation to Sir Roger Penrose on the award of the Nobel Prize for Physics. Sir Roger was of course Gresham Professor of Geometry from 1998 to



2001. This particular accolade is based on his research into black holes, but his contribution to Mathematics stretches off almost into infinity.

The Penrose Institute in Oxford was set up to study *inter alia* (or quite possibly *inter aliens*) the interplay between quantum mechanics and general relativity, the origin of the Universe and the puzzle of human consciousness. And it has to be said that Sir Roger's work on [Penrose Tiles](#) (aka aperiodic tiling) gave rise to the worst headline ever seen in the Press, when Plus Magazine came up with "A Knight on the Tiles." (*The Grasshopper* eschews such journalistic devices of course...)

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

Welcome to new members Annie Prouse, Margaret Willes, Professor Leslie Thomas QC and Colonel Howard Stephens.

And hail and farewell to Emeritus Professor Raymond Flood who has stood down as Fellow after four distinguished years of lectures but of course remains an eminent member of the Society.

### ***Vita Vitarum***

*Professor John D Barrow*

It is with great sorrow that we have to record the death of Professor John Barrow. Emeritus Professor of Geometry Raymond Flood writes:

John was a distinguished and renowned mathematical physicist and cosmologist. His primary research interest was in the study of the universe on the largest scales, looking at its origin and ultimate fate. For example, he explored whether the "constants of Nature" had varied slowly during early stages of the universe and the role of dark energy in the expansion of the late universe. His work increased our understanding of the universe's deviation from perfect homogeneity and uniformity in all directions.

John also had a wide-ranging influence on the public understanding and appreciation of mathematics and science. He did this through his lectures, which included those while he was

Gresham Professor of Astronomy and later Gresham Professor of Geometry – only the second person in four hundred years to hold two posts. He wrote many popular and successful science books and from 1999 was director of the Millennium Mathematics Project (MMP). John's interest in the mathematics of sport was responsible for the MMP's partnership with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games' education programme. Recently, during his illness, he was proud of the contribution MMP made to the support for home schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members might also like to follow the link included on the [Clare Hall Cambridge](#) website to read a very detailed obituary or [In Memoriam: John D. Barrow](#) which has appeared in *Scientific American*.

### ***Publications***

The more eagle-eyed members of our readership will have spotted that Professor Joanna Bourke added a book launch to her [lecture](#) on November 9<sup>th</sup>. The book in question is *Loving Animals: Reflections on Bestiality, Zoophilia, and Post-Human Love*. It weighs in at 192 pages in hardback and comes complete with twenty-two illustrations and is available from Reaktion Books (and all good bookshops) retailing at £18. (*The Grasshopper* Himself has been dropping some heavy hints about finding a copy in his Christmas stocking...)

And Covid bites again unexpectedly: I have written reviews for *The Linguist* for many a long year – and now the publishers are sending out the online edition only for review, so I don't even get a hard copy as a souvenir.

Professor Frank Cox has spotted something that might be of interest to all you bibliophiles: John Ward's [The Lives of the Professors of Gresham College: To which is Prefixed the Life of the Founder, Sir Thomas Gresham. With an Appendix, Consisting of Orations, Lectures, and Letters, Written by the Professors, with Other Papers Serving to Illustrate the Lives](#). Published 1740 it gives a scholarly account of the Professors until that time with a vast amount of information, not only about their lives but also the background and



supplementary material plus lots of incidental information. For example, John Greaves (*Geometry* 1631) was ejected from his professorship of astronomy at Oxford in 1648, possibly because his College was pro-Cromwell, but possibly also because he may have absconded with the College silver...

The original is occasionally available (last time at £350) but a high quality facsimile can be bought from several booksellers including Book Depository (hb. £27.85, sb. £18.99). It is about 400 pages long and measures 10"x7". Perhaps the new professors and readers of *Grasshopper* might be interested in owning a copy. (*Editor's note: I hope that we may link a current professor or two with their predecessors in a future edition or two of The Grasshopper.*)

### **Members' Corner**

#### *More ocular oddities*

Following on from Professor Will Ayliffe's fascinating piece on insect eyes in G4, a palaeontologist in Cologne has found a trilobite fossil (dating back 429 million years) which has a crack in one eye, which reveals its inner workings. It is apparently an arthropod, somewhat resembling a woodlouse, and it had a compound eye with tiny visual cells rather like the modern bee. (See *The Times* for 14.8.20.)

#### *Real Tennis in Tudor Times*

I hope that members enjoyed tuning in to the webinar led by Society Member Ian Harris on the subject of Real Tennis in the time of Sir Thomas. This was followed by a social get-together of the sort that members have always enjoyed in normal times when Committee member Martin Perkins uses his instincts to find a suitable watering hole. Depending on the duration (and possibly severity) of the lockdown we ought to do something like this more often. For those of you who missed it, you can tune in to Ian's blog at [Tennis Around The Time Of Thomas Gresham, Gresham Society Webinar Presentation, 7 October 2020](#)

It contains additional material where you can watch a recording of the webinar, read an illustrated transcript of the talk, click through to

see facsimiles of many of manuscripts/publications cited and indulge in further reading. And suggestions for another webinar topic would be welcome.

### **Further Light Reading**

#### *Of orphidians and thanatophidia*

As reported in G4, the grasshopper is a form of albino, which means that they rarely survive in the wild, though they may be a talking point in captivity. The herd of deer in Bushy Park is a case in point, as an albino gene must have crept in to the breeding stock. White deer are quite common there – something you never see in the herd only a few miles away in Richmond Park.

Of course, some animals opt deliberately for very bright colours as the opposite form of camouflage. The poison arrow frog, for example, of the genus *Dendrobatidae* (which includes 170 species) displays very bright marking in vivid reds, blues and yellows. This is (as readers will recall) a prime example of being aposematic, which means that the beast in question displays particular characteristics to show that they are not worth eating, either by colour, a foul smell or taste, or the presence of spines.

This phenomenon was first noted by Henry Bates, who spent eleven years in the Amazon, much of that with Alfred Russel Wallace the man who was working towards the theory of evolution at the same time as Darwin (and of whom we shall hear more later). "Batesian mimicry" was first observed in butterflies and enables a perfectly harmless animal to persuade possible predators that they are either inedible or very dangerous. (You can read more in Bates' paper to the [Linnean Society of London on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1861](#).)

I came across a good example of this when I happened to be up the Orinoco one Thursday afternoon. I had an encounter (in the way that one does) with a jararacá, a highly venomous member of the pit viper family. It is a prime example of Batesian mimicry in that the jararacá falsa is quite harmless – but doesn't look it. (I have come across similar examples of this on some committees I have known, and indeed the reverse may well be true, though that's another



story.) Be that as it may, I didn't stop to enquire whether said jararacá was true or false, and promptly scarpered. (There is an etiquette in all these things.)



So which one is poisonous?  
Costa Rica February 2020

### **Plague Notes**

Gresham College has looked at the Great Plague over the years in some detail. You might care to look up the following lectures:

Vanessa Harding "[1665: London's Last Great Plague](#)" 30 September 2015 and answers from audience questions in [a series of short extracts](#) from the lecture.

Stephen Porter "[Disease and the City](#)" 29 October 2001

John Pick "[The Great Pestilence of London](#)" 19 November 1987 (audio)

### *More on Samuel Pepys*

The month of November was surely marked in red in Pepys' Diary.

He was elected to the Royal Society (via Gresham of course) in 1665 and was President from 1<sup>st</sup> December 1684 to the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1686. In fact, he was almost elected on to the Council on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1667, though he felt quite relieved at that point not to have been chosen, "*for I could not have attended, though above all things I could wish it; and do take it as a mighty respect to have been named there.*" (Sounds familiar somehow!)

Money as ever was an issue. On 26<sup>th</sup> November 1668 his man Will Hewer lost a tally stick worth £1000 (money he was meant to receive from the Commissioners of Excise), and Pepys "*to my great content*" learns that a porter picked it up in Holborn and returned it, for which he was rewarded with 20 shillings – no mean sum at the time.

But Pepys noticed the cost of maintaining his high position in Society: only four days later he writes, "*Thus ended this month with very good content, but most expensive to my purse on things of pleasure, having furnished my wife's closet, and the best chamber, and a coach and horses, that ever I knew in the world: and I am put into the greatest condition of outward state that ever I was in, or hoped ever to be, or desired.*"

On a sadder note, his wife Elisabeth (née de St Michel – she was descended from a Huguenot family) died on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1669, only a few weeks after a journey they had made into the Low Countries and France. Her monument may still be seen in St Olave's in Hart Street. She was only 29 – and Pepys had married her when she was 15. (Not so odd perhaps at the time – his chum John Evelyn's wife was 13 when they married.)

It may perhaps be noted that Pepys himself lived on till 1703, though his end appears to have been far from comfortable.

Pepys would seem to be the only President of the Royal Society (to date at least) to have been anatomised. It is not a practice that the Chairman of the Gresham Society would wish to emulate, although the Grasshopper (impudent insect) has dropped some heavy hints during the writing of this edition.

### **Editorial**

#### *Reflections on the Armistice*

The Cold War begins to feel quite remote, to the extent that the view of the Twentieth Century as a period of World Wars lasting from 1914 to 1990 begins to gain credence (or at least armed blocs smouldering away at each other in between periods of all-out warfare). Personally I view it as a serious shortcoming in European history that I should be the first person in my family since my Great Grandfather (born c.1860) not to have been obliged to go to the Continent wearing a uniform. (He served throughout the Great War in Flanders with the Army Service Corps as a harness and saddle maker, despite his age.)



The European Wars overshadowed the entire century, and maybe even longer if the Franco-Prussian war is to be included as a precursor of 1914. The dissolution of old empires was perhaps not as complete as might have been imagined given the return to tribalism in the Balkans in the 1990s and the events of recent years in the Middle East. This suggests that the standard O-level question about the main causes of the First World War should be revived in an attempt to comprehend the world of today and to make every effort to ensure that such events cannot be repeated. Yet much of the sheer beastliness that took place with the disintegration of Yugoslavia would seem to have its roots in the build-up to WWI.

That war and the peace talks at Versailles were to set the mould in so many ways for most of the century, as so many people were directly affected: De Gaulle captured at Verdun, Stalin in his Siberian gulag, Hitler with his Iron Cross First Class (on the recommendation of his Jewish CO) - even a young Ho Chi Minh appeared at Versailles to put the case for the independence of Indo-China. The attitudes not only of survivors such as Sir Anthony Eden and Clem Attlee (always referred to in the 30s as Major Attlee) and wounded veterans like Harold Macmillan suggest that the ridiculed (though quite possibly maligned) policy of appeasement was founded on the harsh lessons of practical experience and a genuine desire not to make the same mistake ever again - the war to end all wars indeed. And what could be more poignant than the discovery of the grave of a soldier on the Western Front and that of his son in Normandy? It is nothing less than a practical illustration of the cartoon in *The Daily Herald* showing the allied leaders leaving the conference at Versailles in 1920; Clemenceau hears a child weeping, prophetically with "1940 Class" written above the child's head.

See [Treaty Of Versailles – Cartoon Analysis](#) for a critique of the cartoon, which is entitled "Peace and Future Cannon Fodder". It was drawn by the Australian cartoonist Will Dyson – he is well worth a look at in Wikipedia and elsewhere as he became a prominent political commentator in the 20s and 30s and produced some hard-hitting pieces.

## Envoi

You will have noticed our new strapline *Bonhomie – Conviviality – Intellectual Curiosity* which I hope sums up the aims of the Society: to spread a bit of much-needed peace and understanding, to bring like-minded people together socially, and to stretch the mind in various directions, which is not so difficult given the sheer range and quality of the lectures given at the College, which deserves our every support.

Finally, as ever, I hope that you are following the [College](#) online by attending this year's wonderful set of lectures. We can only hope that the outside world reverts to what usually passes off as sanity, and that we will all be able to meet up normally again.

And in the meantime – stay sage!



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

### Editorial Team

Professor Tim Connell  
Editor-in-Chief

Basil Bezuidenhout  
Sub-Editor at work

Barbara Anderson  
Senior Revisions Editor