



The Grasshopper

The Organ of The Gresham Society

*“Writing criticism is to writing fiction and poetry as hugging the shore is to sailing the open sea.”
(John Updike)*

Issue No. 24

17th September 2025

College Notes

We welcome the new Provost Jane Shaw (from Manchester Harris College, Oxford) who will join us in December. (Interview to come in G25 as part of our bumper anniversary edition.)

And, as previously advertised, don't forget the inaugural lecture for Matt Jones (IT, 23rd September). Plus, as is by now traditional, the audience will be invited over to the Sir Christopher Hatton over the road, to continue discussions. Helen Czerski gave her inaugural lecture on the Environment on September 11th and Daniel Susskind gave his inaugural lecture on 9th September. No doubt his dad Richard will be proud of him, having been a Gresham professor back in the day. Such a tree, such a splinter as we say in Spanish.

Salvete et Valet

Hail but by no means Farewell to Myles Allen, Rags Rau and Victoria Baines, who have ended their term of office, but we welcome Rags back as a Fellow and Jagjit Chadha (Professor of Business 2014-2018) will be joining him. Alec Rylie and Richard Harvey have completed their terms as fellows. Martin Daunton stands down as visiting professor, while Ian Mudway and Victoria Baines return in that capacity. We hope that they will all continue their association with the College through membership of the Society.

How to access LML from College website

The Lord Mayor's Lectures which took place during the mayoralty of Alderman Professor Michael Mainelli are to be found on the College website. Just search on knowledgemiles.net and this will come up from his own page.

Obituaries

We note with regret the death of Rodney Barker, Gresham Professor of Rhetoric from 2006-2009. His lectures covered topics relating to government and the modern world. He was a longstanding professor of government at LSE for many years. His book *Many Enemies* drew on his Gresham lectures and in retirement he wrote *Why Plumage Matters*.

And we also regret the death of John Kiely, who was a longstanding member of the Society. John came from a South Wales mining background but found a path into academia via Bangor and King's London, studying Chemistry, Maths and latterly Computing, which led to a career in the polytechnic sector. John was a man of many parts and will be missed.

Members' Corner

Gresham Society Committee

We still have two vacancies on the Committee for members, plus one for the role of Treasurer. Do please let me know if you would like to help.

Congratulations go to:

- Michael Mainelli who has been appointed as Chair of the London Chamber of Commerce.
- Tim McNally who has been elected Upper Warden at the Glaziers' Company.
- Carolyn Roberts who has been elected as Master of the Worshipful Company of Conservators.
- John Bowman who has been made Under Warden at the Parish Clerks, so the Gresham Society certainly seems to be doing its bit for the City in one way and another.



- And Yours Truly has been upgraded to the Court Emeritus at the Stationers' Company as we have an age bar to becoming Master, but I have put in a fair amount of hard graft during my time at the Company.
- After five years at the Food Standards Agency, Robin May has been appointed as the interim Chief Scientific Officer at the UK Health Security Agency.

Plus, a happy 90th birthday to Emeritus Professor of Divinity John Bowker (1992-1997).

Maggie Butcher reports: Baroness Brenda Hale introduced the event and former students (many of whom were in eminent positions) were there. The discussion highlighted the importance of religious studies as a brilliant way of developing intellect and understanding, particularly in today's world and, as John said, a very necessary subject at all levels of education if we are to have any understanding of and dealing with the many conflicts around the world in which religions are involved.

[Editor's Note: some of John's lectures are available on the College website. More is available on Wikipedia and elsewhere.]

Publications

Allan Chapman has widened his scope from the Tudor period (see his many entries on the Gresham College website) with a new publication y-cleped *The Victorians and the Holy Land* (Eerdmans 2025.)

Gresham Professor Emeritus Richard Susskind is keeping up-to-date with *How To Think About AI: A Guide For The Perplexed* (OUP 2025).

Alec Ryrie chirped up at the Oxford Literary Festival about his new work *The Age of Hitler and How We Will Survive It* (Reaktion £15.95). Worth reading, if only to see how Darth Vader fits into the general picture.

Dominic Broomfield Hughes has clocked up his tenth book (along with Cliff Eisen): *The Letters of Frank Loesser* concerns the great American songwriter. (Yale University Press £25 hb.)

The Annual General Meeting June 18th 2025

Ian Harris reports on The Gresham Society's Journey To The Underworld, AGM & Gresham College Provost's Lecture:

The irony of the Gresham Society AGM being held underground in the basement meeting room of Barnard's Inn Hall, ahead of the Provost's lecture entitled, *Galileo's Journey to the Underworld: The Case for Interdisciplinary Thinking*, was not wasted on me.

Under normal circumstances, The Gresham Society AGM is held in the early evening, followed by a dinner. Indeed, last time, I ended up being the "guest" performer...I mean, speaker. Obviously the Society couldn't go through all that again, so they opted for high tea and some very interesting updates from the new top team at Gresham College: Professor Robert Allison, Professor Sarah Hart & Richard Smith. All had very interesting things to say.

Bob Allison, in particular, teased us with a potted academic biography – basically he is a geographer with expertise in landfalls and stuff like that – so what is the connection between that discipline and his accidental occasional career as an expert witness in high-profile murder cases? We managed to wrinkle out some intriguing answers. There should be at least one Gresham lecture in those fascinating topics, Carolyn Roberts will doubtless concur.

Tim Connell thought he was doing a smart thing by peppering the AGM material with the updates from the college top team, making it impossible for me to do my usual thing of timing the AGM itself and challenging Tim's assertion that he can get the main business done in less than 10 minutes. That was a shame, because I suspect that on this occasion Tim really did keep the substantive business down to less than 10 minutes.

By the time we emerged from the Barnard's Inn Hall underworld, after some high tea and further chat, the early evening was cool enough for some pleasant further chat in the courtyard before attending the Provost's lecture. Most but not all of the attendees for the meeting stayed for the lecture, but some were unable to do so.

Professor Sarah Hart's lecture was absolutely fascinating. If you missed it live, you can still of course see it. Indeed, if you visit the Gresham College website you can see lectures going back into the dim and distant past; even the couple that I gave "back in the day". Here is a link to Sarah Hart's lecture on that site – [Galileo's Journey to the Underworld: The Case for Interdisciplinary Thinking](#)



Then after the lecture the thirstier members of the Society repaired to the Sir Christopher Hatton. *[Editor's Note: This is coming well on the way to being a Society tradition. All traditions have to start somewhere – and a pub that brews its own beer would seem to be a good starting point...]*

Things you may have missed

Members may not have spotted a rare opportunity to acquire an Elizabethan grasshopper ring, once belonging to Sir T himself. The heavy seal ring, dating from circa 1560-1575, was carved with the coat of arms of Warner, with the underside of the bezel engraved with a green enamelled grasshopper, being the Gresham family crest. It is believed to have been a gift from Thomas Gresham to Mark Warner, of All Hallows, Lombard Street in the City of London, a cloth merchant and liveryman of Drapers' Company.

It was sold at auction in June by Noonan's of Mayfair for £42000 (four times the pre-price estimate). A pity my own bid of £41,999.99 got trumped at the last minute...

Reflections

Following on from the longest words in German (G13 refers) our Berlin correspondent tells me that a Church tax is chargeable in Germany at the rate of 8 or 9%. This is collected via a declaration to one's employer – using an electronic payroll deduction certificate. Only the Germans would come up with the *elektronischelohnsteuerabzugsmerkmale*. I just wonder how long the form takes to fill in.

Grasshoppers around the world

WhatsThatBug.com is a useful source of information about bugs and beetles. But only go into it if you have time. The entries for "grasshopper" run to 32 pages. The Grasshopper Himself tells me that it is his favourite bedtime reading.

Desolation Island

In one of the Lucky Jack Aubrey novels by Patrick O'Brian our eponymous hero is on his way to Australia when his ship (HMS *Leopard*) runs into an iceberg. By virtue of

excellent seamanship, Jack Aubrey manages to get his ship to Desolation Island where, amid many adventures, the crew succeed in repairing their ship and going on their way.

It is a curious fact that Captain Cook also visited Kerguelen, at a time when it did indeed appear on maps as the Island of Desolation, and the crew also noted the presence of the sea cabbage which is such a wonderful specific against scurvy – a point made by Jack Aubrey and the crew of the American whaler which comes into Kerguelen precisely to collect said cabbage.

By mere historical coincidence Sir John Franklin is on his way to the Antarctic in 1840 with HMSs *Erebus* and *Terror* via Kerguelen Island where they take magnetic readings in order to aid navigation – and to collect the famous cabbage. And indeed, some time later, HMS *Erebus* really does run into an iceberg and is also saved by a magnificent display of seamanship. (This expedition is much less known than the grim one to the Arctic.) *[Editor's Note: there seems to be quite a history of ships running into icebergs in both true life and fiction. See G21 for the escapades of Captain Edward Riou on board HMS **Guardian** and his monument in St Paul's Cathedral, which is near the coffee stall in the crypt.]*

Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens: Victorian domestic arrangements

Dickens nowadays has achieved a certain degree of notoriety because of the rejection of his wife and his liaison with the actress Ellen Ternan. But this pales into insignificance when compared to the domestic shenanigans of Dickens' great friend Wilkie Collins, who appears to have had a range of twin arrangements with a mistress or two doubling as occasion required as a friendly widow, domestic support or housekeeper.

The culmination of all these ménages appears to have come when Collins' two families (each having a daughter named Caroline) rented holiday homes opposite each other down in Kent. And we talk about blended families today.

And talking of Sir John Franklin, Dickens and Collins actually collaborated on a play concerning said knight and the search for the North West Passage. Entitled "The Frozen



Deep”, it appeared in 1856 and was based on the doomed Franklin expedition. It was actually played before Queen Victoria, who was suitably impressed by this demonstration of derring-do in outflung places which arguably were not quite part of the Empire. As a footnote in history, the play was quite successful on the stage, and when it played in Manchester, a member of the cast was one Ellen Tiernan.

Editorial

Extraordinary General Meeting (by e-mail)

Whilst all our meetings are extraordinary, I am required to call one whenever I have a bright idea concerning the Society. This is under Rule 23 paragraph 4 sub-section 6. (We actually lost the Rule Book about 15 years ago, but I remember this one clearly.)

I read that the Romans had a favoured nation policy with countries they preferred not to invade. This was called *Societas Et Amicitia*, although the plan didn’t always work (Egypt was on the list at one time). I certainly think that this would make an excellent motto for the Society.

If anyone has any objections to this proposal, please let me know by last Thursday.

Envoi

A comfortable easy chair is an important aid which permits the brain to wander down its own avenues, especially late at night. Just recently, I found myself pondering a possible link between three completely discrete items which were connected by a single word: *Pigling Bland*, *Blandings Castle*, and *Mr Blandings Builds His Dream House*. Even late at night I could hardly think of a common link that might have persuaded Beatrice Potter, Evelyn Waugh and a film starring Cary Grant to come up with such similar titles, though of course *Pigling Bland* is one of Beatrice Potter’s more adventurous characters, the Empress of Blandings is the prized pig belonging to Lord Emsworth, and Cary Grant is under pressure to come up with a slogan for selling ham. Answers please on a postcard from fellow insomniacs.

Overheard in the Senior Common Room:

Professor A: How was your summer vacation?
Professor B: So busy – I have been finishing my new book.

Professor A: Do tell me – what are you reading?
(Game, set and match...)

STOP PRESS 1

The Guildhall Library is offering a talk about the Gresham Music Collection, which was formed by Gresham Professor Edward Taylor in 1837. It has been held there since 1958 (and I organised a visit there for the Society in 2016). It is an eclectic collection and is in the process of investigation and restoration, following a decision by the Joint Gresham Committee in 2020. The talk will take place Thursday 25th September from 2-3pm.

STOP PRESS 2

Members will be interested to know about the three new art galleries opening later this month at Number 1 Poultry. Galleries 1 and 3 will focus on contemporary art and Gallery 2 will have exhibitions on the living environment. All this will run until next September.

If you have any news items for The Grasshopper do let Tim (t.j.connell@city.ac.uk) know. Anything on awards, recent publications or odd curiosities will doubtless suit.

Editorial Team

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