



The Grasshopper

The Organ of The Gresham Society

"Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where people come from and where they are going." (Rita Mae Brown.)

Issue No. 25

29th December 2025

College Notes

It is time to say heartfelt thanks again to Sarah Hart for her role as Acting Provost, which came to an end at the beginning of December. Under her watch the College has devised a cracking programme of lectures for the year. Now we welcome Jane Shaw, *olim* Principal of Manchester Harris College, Oxford. (An interview will appear in our next edition.)

The College's fundraising programme The Big Give has been very successful. Between donations and matched funding over £62,000 has been raised. We have high hopes for the revival of Gresham in the North. Senior members will recall that, mainly courtesy of our very own Professors Frank Cox and Stephen Pratt of Liverpool Hope, some Gresham lectures were exported or extended up to the North Country (or at least way beyond the Watford Gap, which itself is some way from Watford).

Current technology now makes this a more viable proposition and the College is delighted to welcome Jolyn Mitchell, Principal of St John's College Durham, which we hope to establish as the Northern base.

Congratulations go to Dr Sophy Antrobus MBE, who has been elevated to the House of Lords as a Labour Peer. She presented the Nailor Lecture in 2020.

Also congratulations to the College's press officer Phil Creighton on the award of an honorary doctorate by the University of Reading for his contribution as a journalist to the town.

Salvete et Valete

A hearty welcome to the positive flood of new members:

Jagjit Chadha, *olim* Gresham Professor of Commerce and Professor of Economics at Cambridge; Helen Czerski, current Jackson Foundation Professor of the Environment; Jolyon Mitchell, Principal of St John's College Durham; and Rags Rau *olim* Professor of Business; and Daniel Susskind, incoming Professor of Business.

We are always delighted to welcome new members. If anyone would like to put a name or two forward, please just contact Tim. And a volunteer to help Basil with the



secretarial work would go down well, as would a committee member who could take charge of our very straightforward finances. Any volunteers?

Obituary

Bobbie Scully 1962-2025

It is with great sadness that we record the death of Gresham Society member Barbara (Bobbie) Scully, following a fall, in October 2025. Born in 1962, Bobbie studied Law & Politics at Keele 1981-1984 and was called to the Bar in Middle Temple in 1985. Bobbie became a law reporter in 1987, where her career was illustrious yet characteristically low key. She became the first woman editor of The Times Law Reports in 2011, a post she held until her untimely death. Bobbie will be fondly remembered and missed by all who spent time in her orbit.

Amendment to Rodney Barker Obituary in G24

We have been asked to clarify that *Many Enemies* by Rodney Barker was not the title of an autobiography! As his publisher observes, the book in question was an “analysis of enmity narratives and the language used to describe enemies”. Rodney himself was of course a greatly liked figure both at LSE and the College.

Members' Corner

New Book on the Livery Companies:

Helen Esmonde (past master of the Stationers' Company) and Society member Margaret Willes have produced a very interesting book on the livery companies of the City of London. It is very informative and beautifully produced.

They and the publisher Profile Books have kindly agreed to make this available to members for a very special discount price of £17.50 for a limited period.

See the details here and you need to specify that you are a Gresham Society member:
[The City Unlocked: London Livery Companies from Wool to Digital | Profile Editions](#)

Just the right thing for some of that Christmas money!

Tony Mann openly admits to reading Viz Magazine (he swears that he does so for the Mr Logic column). However, this does mean that he has spotted a new comic strip called “Grappling Hooke” which is set in Gresham College in 1665. Could this be by one of our members? It is slightly odd to see Robert Hooke and various other historical figures engaging in tag wrestling, but if that gets the message across to the young (and young at heart) regarding Hooke’s many inventions, then so be it. (Perhaps someone will look him up in Google as a result...)



Extract from Viz Magazine: “Grappling Hooke” – Robert Hooke discovers cells... with a wrestling twist!
(Click image for full size)



Harold Thimbleby is the Expert Advisor on IT to the Royal College of Physicians, a member of the WHO Patient Safety Network an advisor to the Human Clinical Factors Group and the UK Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). What he does in his spare time remains a mystery...

Congratulations go to Jo Delahunty et al for the latest weighty legal tome “Domestic Abuse and the Family Justice System – Law and Practice”. She has also received a positive flood of accolades this year: Family Law KC of the Year, The Lawyer You Aspire To Be, and recognition for all her work on DEI. (For remarks on spare time *v.supra*.)

Society member Joan Bowen likes to collect old words that have fallen out of use but which seem to be apposite for the present time: what about *sparple*, a 14th Century word meaning “to deflect unwanted attention by making a big deal of something else”; and then there is *spuddle* from the 17th Century meaning “to work ineffectively and to be extremely busy while achieving nothing”. Odd that there is an onomatopoeic element to both words – and the world does not seem to have changed much in seven centuries.

Reflections

Obscure Origins

It is curious to see how many famous literary figures started out in quite humble positions. For instance Walter de la Mare had trudged Bob Cratchit-like for over eighteen years as a humble clerk at the Anglo-American Oil Company, until he was rescued by none other than Sir Henry Newbolt, In 1908 Sir H arranged for him to have a Crown grant and within weeks W de la M’s literary career was taking off.

[Editor’s Note: Sir Henry of course is he of “Play Up, Play Up and Play The Game” “Drake’s Drum” and “The Gatling’s Jammed and the Colonel’s Dead”.

Incidentally it was in fact a Gardner machine gun and although the tribesmen did break the square at Abu Klea (Sudan 1885) it was not what Kipling would later refer to as a “Bally Run” in The Drums Of The Fore And Aft. (That would have been Maiwand in 1880. Not a good decade for military disasters).

The right way to say things

A shibboleth is, as we know, a way of identifying people who do not belong for whatever reason. It comes of course from Judges 12:5-6:

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

Such tragic scenes have been witnessed in more modern times, for instance with the Parsley Massacre of 1937 when Haitians were shot down in their thousands at the Río Dajabón which divides Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Being French speakers they could not pronounce the Spanish word for parsley – *perejil*, which is



why it is sometimes known as the Parsley Massacre. Even today, Ukrainians identify Russians by using the word *palianytsia* (a type of Ukrainian bread).

Customs at Christmas Eve

There is a rather nice legend that says that stable animals can speak at midnight at Christmas Eve. Some legends also relate that the oxen kneel down. This is reflected in literature by the hilarious tale “Bertie’s Christmas Eve” by the Edwardian writer Saki where a young “nut” contrives to lock an entire house party in the stables. The story also appears in *Tess of the Durbervilles*. In Chapter 17 there is the story of William Dewey (he of “Friends Beyond”) who manages to placate an angry bull while crossing a field on Christmas Eve by playing a Christmas carol on his fiddle. *The Tailor of Gloucester* might also be mentioned in this context, though of course those were mice.

I have also just come across a further Christmas Eve legend, which comes from Ukraine: a widow with three children takes a piece of fir tree into the house for Christmas but is too poor to have decorations. So the spiders come in on Christmas Eve and spin the decorations for her.

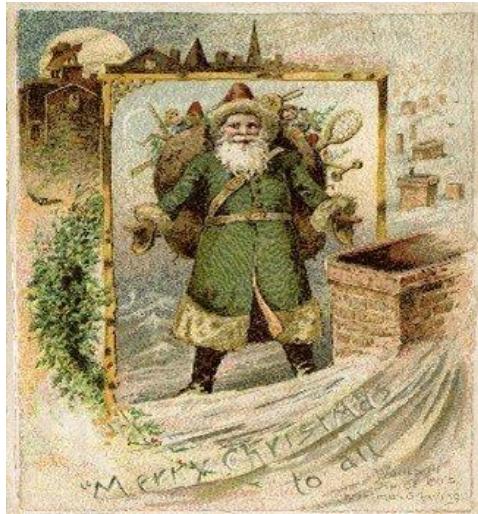
Editorial

It hardly seems possible that the Editorial Team (not to mention our brave composers at Z/Yen) have clocked up 25 editions. Not a quarter century in the temporal sense, though in fact the Grasshopper’s roots (can an insect have roots?) go back to around 2005, when it was a one-page Newsletter. In my archives I have actually found a key copy from September 2006 which I append more out of the desire for historical authenticity than to claim any glory as of course it was our stern Editorial Reader Barbara Anderson who (as with so much at Gresham) was the driving force behind it.

I revived it (having promised to do so for some years) at the beginning of Covid, simply to give people something to read, and to stay in touch with everyone. But I hope that it will prove a source of interest and curiosity for the membership, and that it will add a mild soupçon of delight for readers. [Click here to see the September 2006 newsletter.](#)



Envoi



**Merry Christmas &
A Happy New Year
To All Our Readers!**

**STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS
And we look forward to seeing everyone at the Soirée on Monday January 19th
at 6pm. Please can you book promptly now as we need to know numbers
soonest in order to confirm the catering.**

This is a slight departure from tradition, but we found that everyone was so tied up before Christmas that a convenient date could not be found. It was a clear case of being punch drunk on Christmas punch...

Editorial Team	
Professor Tim Connell	
Editor-in-Chief	
Barbara Anderson	Jack Wigglesworth
Senior-Revisions-Editor	Editor-at-Lunch

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