



The Grasshopper

Societas et Amicitia

"The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest men of past centuries" (René Descartes)

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College Notes

The leaflet with details of this term's lectures is out now. The College is planning to appoint new Professors of Divinity and Physic with a plan to appoint for ten-term periods, allowing for a new appointment once a term, which will give time then for inaugural and valedictory lectures.

We say goodbye and thank you to Ray Long CB as he ends his stint on Council.

Lecture numbers continue to flourish – there are now nine million views on-line per year.

Obituaries

Gresham is rightly known for its characters (I would hesitate to call them eccentric) and long may it remain so. But none quite so special as Allan Chapman: Visiting Professor of the History of Science from 2004 – 2011. Allan first came to Gresham in the 90s and went on to give the Colin Matthews Lecture and the BSHM Lecture. One great benefit of the Gresham Collection of Lectures Past is that we can see Allan in full flow, speaking passionately, confidently and without notes. Obituaries sometimes comment that we shall not see their like again – but I hope (and somehow expect) that we will.

And I really should have noted the passing of Fr Jack Mahoney SJ who was Gresham Professor of Commerce from 1988 to 1993. Among many other things he was Principal of Heythrop College from 1976 to 1981, and Professor of Business Ethics (if that is not an oxymoron) at King's London, the London Business School and Georgetown University.

(Editor's Note: Jack had a lovely quiet sense of humour so he would have enjoyed this one: Basil and I were reviewing the Society membership list and could not find a record of a Mr JMA Honey...)

Plus it is with enormous regret that I record the death of Society member Paul Clark as we shared rooms at Queen's in those far-off days and he was Best Man at our wedding. Erudite, witty and amusing, a Historian who was also keen on music. He became a town planner and continued with consultancy long after formal retirement. A serious loss in all sorts of ways.

Members' Corner

For whole volumes in folio

Robin Wilson continues to write with both hands at once, having produced lately one book on Graph Theory (but just co-authored); one (but merely co-edited) on Oxford's Astronomy professors and then of course there are his very own Sum Stories, on the topic of eighteen equations.

[Editor's Note: I must say that none of this came up in O-level Maths - all I can remember about equations is Some Old Hippos Can Always Have Tons of Afters – being the mnemonic for trigonometry.]

Be that as it may, these are being turned into 15-20 minute films for schools and an eagerly awaiting audience. Some of these may be viewed on-line (the films that is, not the audience...) See [Sum Stories: Equations and their Origins](#).

[Editor's Note: Take care if searching for our Robin on-line as he is not to be confused with the Robin Wilson who was lead singer of the Gin Blossoms (yes, them) who go back 35 years. You are less likely to confuse our Robin with the other Robin Wilson, the female singer who had a hit in 1968 with "Where Are They Now". Indeed,]

Jo Delahunty might not be overtaking Robin's standard output yet, but she is appearing in print again with *We Set The Bar* which looks closely at life in the legal profession. Just out now from Bristol University Press.



City News

Congratulations go to Society member Chris Hayward on the commendation from the Chief Commoner for his twelve years of service on the Court of Common Council and his many useful contributions. It is refreshing to see hard work and dedication recognised.

And congratulations also go to Tim McNally on his election as Master Glazier.

Christmas Eve again

And on from G25

Tony Mann reminds me that Thomas Hardy's poem *The Oxen* also deals with the Christmas Eve legend:

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

Reflections

Baconian Principles on an anniversary

It is interesting to note that the polymath and early scientist Sir Francis Bacon was keen on setting up a college himself. Given that his dates are 1561-1626 I wonder whether he ever did discuss the matter with Sir Thomas Gresham. Sir Francis actually tried to buy "Twitnam Parke [i.e. Twickenham] "for a residence for such deserving persons to study in, since I experimentally found the situation of that place much convenient for the trial of philosophical conclusions". Quite what he found in Twickers to make him so reflective I can't quite understand. There are some pretty good pubs even now, though take care not to be in The Swan at high tide as you may need to exit via the cellar...

In the event Bacon's estate did not reach far enough to fund the chairs he had hoped to leave for both Oxford and Cambridge. But then Sir Thomas' financial situation at the end of his life was not entirely clearcut either (the excellent biography by John Guy refers: *Gresham's Law* [Profile Books 2019]).

Taking a pot shot

Doubtless everyone has had just one of those moments at the end of a long hard day when

they just want to go gunning for someone. Oddly enough, the chance has come up more than once in history. In January 1778 Major Patrick Ferguson actually drew a bead on none other than George Washington, who was doing the round of his pickets just before the Battle of Brandywine. Ferguson of course was the inventor of the Ferguson Rifle which (if adopted) might have changed the whole concept of line regiments. It was a breech loader, had a high rate of fire and a range three times that of the standard Brown Bess musket. Ferguson recounted that he saw an officer doing the rounds, at a range where he could have picked him off without trouble. But he decided it would not be honourable to fire on an individual "who was acquitting himself very coolly of his duty". It was only the next day that a wounded prisoner informed him that it was George Washington himself. Ferguson (who would be killed in action a year later at King's Mountain) simply commented, "I am not sorry that I did not know at the time who it was."

Lord Tennyson – Revolutionary

Alfred Lord Tennyson seems an unlikely person to claim as a revolutionary but there is no doubt that he was involved in the lead-up to the abolition of the monarchy in Spain in 1834 with the creation of the Liberal government.

It turns out that one General Torrijos, a veteran of the War of Independence (as the Spanish still call the Napoleonic Wars) was living in London. But in 1830 he led an abortive attack on Algeciras, which was easily put down. Quite what the young Tennyson was doing in the Pyrenees at the time is unclear (his knowledge of local geography must have been quite vague as the revolt was taking place at the other end of the country). In any event, he and a few friends slipped back over the border to Bordeaux and got back to Cambridge in time for Michaelmas term. Queen Victoria would never have approved.

And General Torrijos? He was captured and shot, but he has his own memorial in Malaga, just opposite Picasso's birthplace if you happen to be going that way.

Plus if you don't believe me (the Grasshopper himself would have raised his eyebrows if he had any) just look at the article by Graham



Greene in the *Spectator* for December 1937, in connection with the ferment going on among British intellectuals regarding the Civil War in Spain at the time. *Quid novi* as they say.

[Editor's Note: Indeed they do. It was Pliny the Elder, quite an expert on geography and the like, who is said to have coined the phrase "Quid Novi ex Africa" given the legendary marvels reported by travellers such as the giraffe, hippo or rhino.]

[Note to Editor's Note: Before anyone writes in, this should properly read "Ex Africa surgit semper aliquid novi." Of course it should.]

The Day Job: T S Eliot

Following on from Walter de la Mare in G25 it is curious to note how many literary greats seem to have either pondered or festered during their time working on menial jobs.

T S Eliot worked for the Colonial & Foreign Department of Lloyds between 1919 and 1922 (being paid the princely sum of £270 per annum). He was tabulating and charting the balance sheets of foreign banks (so it did at least involve the use of languages). In *The Waste Land* he recounts crossing London Bridge and going down King William Street to St Mary Woolnoth and thence to Cornhill where you can still see the thick green class squares in the pavement that must have given a ghostly light to poor Tom working below.

The Waste Land indeed:

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William
Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.

It sounds like he didn't like the job much...

Editorial

Members should be aware that the Russian authorities have recently published the latest authorized version of the Russian language dictionary. It has been compiled by St Petersburg State University with approval from the Russian Orthodox Church. Unsurprisingly

perhaps, "authoritarianism" is defined as "the most effective form of government in difficult times". Quite.

Mind you, attempts to formulate the language are by no means unique. The Académie Française has been trying to do that since 1635 and the Greeks agonised over Katharevousa (formal written Greek) from the 1820s to the 1980s.

Envoi

We are so used to poor service everywhere ("the bus was late" is now more credible than "the dog ate my homework") that when something has worked smoothly then it is worthy of note. Initially, when I realised in January that a new passport was due I felt relieved that I would only have to do this once every ten years, especially when I looked up the instructions on-line. I also found out that to use my professorial title (of which of course I am inordinately proud) I would have to offer proof. Fortunately I could just print off my staff page on the University's website but a recent photo was more of a challenge, les neiges d'antan being quite as deep as they are. However, not to worry as all passport photos are uniformly dreadful.

And with regard to great excuses, Society member Sir Vernon Bogdanor recalls in the FT the time that some wretched student explained that he had lost his weekly essay as it had been blown into the Isis. Vernon says that he believed him – and indeed said wretched student has written in to LinkedIn to say that this was actually true. The dog ate my homework indeed...

I read with concern that the new passport would take three weeks, not least because I had only just received confirmation that one of my regular meetings at ESCP in Paris was going to be in five weeks' time. So I sent off the form by recorded post with the old passport and the professorial proof. The very next day (16 January) I got a text message to acknowledge receipt; then (in quick succession) I got a note to say that the new passport was being processed; that it had been approved; that it had gone to the printers; and that it was ready for despatch – plus a time for delivery (so the £7 I



spent to include first class recorded was well worthwhile.]

[Editor's Note: ESCP was the first business school in Europe, founded as a grande école in 1819 and is currently ranked as number 2 in France. This is clearly as a result of my 26-year association with the School...]

Credit where it's due, but I would still advise members to renew their passports well in time – France for example insists on a passport being valid for the next three months rather than the six that you will sometimes read.

Visit to the Animal Reception Centre at Heathrow

Finally, I am sorry that hardly anyone took up the invitation to the Animal Reception Centre at Heathrow (perhaps the thought of 100,000 reptiles a year put people off).

So I hope we can have a better turnout for the AGM which will take place on Tuesday 12 May at 3pm at Barnard's Inn Hall. Tea and cakes will be served. Papers will come round shortly.

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

Fleet Street Festival of Words

Keep an eye out for the Fleet Street Festival of Words which will run from 12th – 16th May at such prestigious venues as Stationers' Hall and St Bride's. There will be some 40 events around the theme of "The Age of Wisdom and Foolishness". See [Fleet Street Quarter event tickets from TicketSource](#).

What Goes Up Must Come Down

Following on from Artemis II it is encouraging to note that the space debris initiative launched by Society member Michael Mainelli during his mayoral year is going great guns. More and more organisations are signing up and there is even talk of creating a livery company in the Square Mile for space professionals.

See [Space Protection Initiative](#) for more blue sky thinking.

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Bonhomie – Conviviality – Intellectual Curiosity

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