



The Grasshopper

The Organ Of The Gresham Society

-It does for grasshoppers what the Great Plague did for London. (Entomologists Weekly)

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College Notes

Chris Lintott (from Oxford, and one of the presenters of *The Sky At Night*) has been appointed as Professor of Astronomy; the composer Milton Mermikides as Professor of Music (currently with Surrey University and the Guildhall School of Music); Melissa Lane (from Princeton) as Professor of Rhetoric. Dominic Broomfield-McHugh (University of Sheffield) joins us as Visiting Professor of Film and Theatre Music, while Professors Katherine Blundell (Astronomy), Marina Frolova Walker (Music), Joanna Bourke (Rhetoric); Imogen Gould (Medical Law) and John Mullan (English Literature) stand down.

Welcome to Sophie Scott-Brown the new programmes manager, who will be joining us in October, and it's goodbye to Kevin Thompson from AV.

Ave Atque Vale

It's farewell to Mariam Ismail after six years' valued service with the College.

We regret to record the death of Trevor Sibbett, a longstanding and supportive member, who passed away in early July. He was a leading light in the field of actuarial history.

Reflections

Pablo Picasso

Could it really be true that in 1881 Picasso was christened Pablo, Diego, José Francisco de Paula, Juan Nepomuceno, María de los Remedios, Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad, Mártir Patricio, Clito, Ruiz y Picasso? Yes indeed, - and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* would have us believe that there is a Crispín Crispiniano somewhere in that lot too. (It is possibly no coincidence that passports were not introduced at international level till 1920...)

Baby Pablo clearly had a lot of relatives wanting to welcome this rather late baby into the family (his parents were by no means young and there must have been lots of little cousins running around already.) We may assume an element of devotion towards St Francis de Paul, not to mention San Juan Nepomuceno, who was actually Bohemian and is considered to be the patron saint of the confessional. There was even a 74-gun ship of that name at Trafalgar, commanded by a Spanish Admiral, Don Cosme Damián de Churruca y Elorza no less, who was killed in action. (The Spanish do go in for resounding names – there is a lovely Spanish word *rimbombante* which sums it all up. The Madrid telephone directory is if course a nightmare – but that's another story.)

Anyway, little Pablo would not have been teased at school for being called María (it is quite customary for boys in the Spanish-speaking world), and Santa María de los Remedios is the Madonna closely connected to the Reconquest of Spain and hence would have been popular in the Picassos' home town of Málaga. Readers will recall that the wife of the leader of South American Independence José de San Martín was actually called María de los Remedios Escalada y la Quintana, but it is unlikely that Picasso was named after her. (There is of course a famous church in the Mexican town of Tlachihualtepetl dedicated to Santa María de los Remedios – but if we start on Mexican place names we'll be here all night. And who am I to digress?) The reason for all this of course is quite prosaic – his godparents were Señor J.N. and his lady wife was Señora M de los R.

The curious thing of course is that Picasso is a very un-Spanish name as the –ss- is not found in this phonetic language. However, it has been shown that Picasso's mum had Italian ancestors from Liguria, which is near Genoa (and Italian does allow for –ss-, as in er... "Mussolini" for example). The Family can be traced back to the Eighteenth Century – and



one of them was indeed an artist. So there can be more than meets the eye in a name.

Tucking into a plate of locusts

The Grasshopper Himself is becoming positively alarmed at all the discussion in the press about how insects have become a source of protein. As Editor-in-Chief I have to confess that I have remarked previously that grasshoppers are in fact edible. I noticed while browsing the other night that they are also kosher. King James tells us in Leviticus 11 v 22 “Even these of them ye may eat: the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind and the grasshopper after its kind”. And of course St John the Baptist thought that locusts went down rather well with a spot of wild honey, so it is perhaps not surprising that there are all sorts of recipes out there on the internet.

When looking at recipes, though, do not confuse the locust with the black locust [tree](#) (*robinia pseudoacacia*) and the critter itself. Black Locust Delight is actually a rather tasty vegetarian dish – but watch out as the bark, leaves and seed pod are toxic.

(For a nourishing and simple locust recipe see [Explainer: How to prepare a locust meal.](#))

That said, locust swarms have stretched recently from areas ranging from Kenya and Somalia to Pakistan and India and have caused enormous damage. A small swarm (say about a ton of them – weighing in at two grams each) will consume in one day the same as ten elephants, twenty-five camels or two thousand five hundred people. And of course people should not try to eat the locusts where they have been sprayed with insecticide. All a far cry from the home life of our very own mascot.

And talking of who eats what (and going back to the constant theme of herpetology) the honey badger actually eats cobras, pythons and black mambas. Far from the cosy and reassuring image of Mr Badger in *The Wind in the Willows*, the honey badger is a fierce little beast which (unsurprisingly) bears little resemblance to the genus *Melinae*, though there are various sub-groups spread across India, the Middle East and Africa. He might be the sort of animal you might want to keep in the garden. In that respect he resembles Rikki Tikki Tavi, the heroic mongoose in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*.

More on Mussolini

Reflecting further on Mussolini (G15 and G16 both refer): it is curious to see that General Franco was exhumed in October 2019 from the basilica at the Valley of the Fallen near Madrid and re-buried privately alongside his wife in a small private cemetery in Mingorrubio, not far away, and not the Almudena Cathedral, as his family had suggested.

Mussolini himself lies in a crypt with other family members in the small village of Predappio in the north-eastern province of Emilia Romagna. It has become a focus of attraction for neo-fascists, the nostalgic and the simply curious. There are plans to create a mausoleum, though that may prove to be controversial.

Romansh

I did rather unguardedly mention Romansh (or Romansch) in G16. It is of course a Phaeo-Romance language spoken in the Swiss Canton of Grisons. Although it is only spoken by around 60,000 people it comes in a range of dialects. Strictly speaking it is Switzerland's fourth official language and goes back to provincial Latin in the time of Augustus. It is not quite in a class of its own, as Ladin and Friulian are to be found not far away in the Italian Alps, and Friulian may still be heard in Trieste and further East (if you listen out closely).

Getting hot under the collar about freezing points

Thank goodness we moved over from Fahrenheit to Celsius (aka Centigrade) some time ago (plus or minus 32 and multiply by 9/5 or 5/9 or was it the other way round?) Anyway, it is not widely known that in the 18th Century the French early scientist René Réaumur came up with a scale of 0° to 80°. (Quite why is not clear, but the scale apparently is still used in Italy and Switzerland in the manufacture of cheese.) In actual fact Réaumur is rather more important in scientific history than might seem. He experimented and speculated widely, ranging from whether spiders could produce silk to the process of tinning iron (which is still in use today.) He even has a metro station named after him in Paris, though why his name should be linked to Sebastopol is not at all clear.



Mind you, he is arguably eclipsed by Lord Kelvin (aka William Thomson of Belfast and Glasgow) who decided to go one further and use absolute zero rather than 0°C. This makes it -273.15°C or -459.67°F. In fact, these figures are found by fixing the numerical value of the [Boltzmann constant](#) k to $1.380649 \times 10^{-23} \text{ J}\cdot\text{K}^{-1}$. I just hope that is all clear.

(Editor’s Note: the Grasshopper Himself has confessed that he just copied this bit from some Scientific journal or other. If any member can actually explain what this all means, they are welcome to try...)

Editorial

I mentioned in G16 that Alderman and Gresham Professor Michael Mainelli’s plan for his mayoral year will include the Lord Mayor’s Lectures. These will consist of 30-minute webinars (with questions) on a wide range of topics, which will be designed to showcase the forward-looking aspects of life and work in London (with a bit of history thrown in, needless to say!) Speakers will be drawn from many of the 110 livery companies (especially, though not exclusively, the more modern ones) plus some of the many learned bodies located in London, not to mention one or two of the 70 university institutions in the capital. Yours Truly will be master of ceremonies, along with an eclectic team of supporters, and we hope to draw on the services of some of the 60 emeritus Gresham professors in the Gresham Society, not to mention the two dozen professors from other institutions up and down the land. The cycle will kick off in November, so watch this space.

Envoi

Great Balls of Fire

Well, not quite, but it is interesting to note that the Great Fire of London (2 September 1666) was not the only major conflagration to have hit the capital. In November 1623 a fire began in Broad Street (a sought after location at the time) and began to spread rapidly. According to an observer, “withal the fire was so furious that the flakes and coals were carried far and near some into the Thames and some beyond the Cross in Cheap.” However only a few houses were burnt down – and a dozen or so actually had to be pulled down in order to stop the fire from spreading. (One of these belonged

to the widow of Sir Walter Raleigh.) Huge hooks were actually stored in the eventuality of a fire. A pair may be seen in the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral to this day.

Of course, London was prone to fires given the use of thatch up to the Great Fire and the reliance on open fires and candles or tallow dips for lighting. Rarely mentioned is the Southwark Fire of 1212 which left London Bridge in ruins. The fire was first spotted on the south side, whereupon people ran onto the bridge from the north side to try and help. Sparks from the fire then spread and set fire to the north side of the bridge catch light, thereby leaving everyone trapped. It is thought that perhaps as many as three thousand people died as a result. (That’s worth thinking about next time you have to go out into the rain for a fire drill.)

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

We will be visiting The Royal Tennis Court, Hampton Court on Thursday 14th September when Society member Ian Harris will be showing us the finer points of Real Tennis. We will be having tea while being serenaded by Elizabethan music (though whether Ian will play in costume remains to be seen.) See the [flyer](#) for more details and you may book online [here](#).

If you have any news items for *The Grasshopper* do let Tim (t.j.connell@city.ac.uk) or Basil (greshamsociety@gmail.com) know.

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