



The Grasshopper

Societas et Amicitia

He has occasional flashes of silence, that make his conversation perfectly delightful.
(Sydney Smith, 1771–1845)

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College Notes

Fellows, Professors and the Programme launch

The Council have extended life fellowship of the College to all former Professors, as part of making a Gresham Chair a lifetime connection to the College.

Don't forget the Provost's Lecture which kicks off the academic year on Monday 7 September. This will be followed by a reception. (The programme is up on-line already of course.)

We welcome our new Professor of Physic, Matt Higgins, who starts this September. Robin May and Ronald Hutton have been made Fellows on completion of their time as professors.

Members can keep an eye out for new podcasts where our professors can talk more widely about their work – they will be easiest to see via the YouTube channel.

Jim Al-Khalili gave the end of year Sir Thomas Gresham lecture at Conway Hall in July to a packed audience.

Society Update

The developments at the College will now involve some changes for the Society. A detailed report will be coming round in the Autumn but in future accounts will be handled from there (so thanks to Neville Leslie for his assistance in the past). The former professors who now become Fellows will similarly benefit, though of course sixty or so already belong to the Society, some of whom have been members since our early days in the 90s.

The Friends will be invited to our outings but not of course to key Society events such as the AGM – so welcome aboard to all and full steam ahead! Most of our on-line arrangements will remain the same but may be reviewed when the College's own system comes up for review in 2028. Plus *The Grasshopper* will be going out to all the Friends.

Outgoing messages will move progressively to being sent out via the College. How this will be done will be

in the forthcoming message to members as mentioned above.

Members' Corner

Our recent acting Provost goes to even greater heights: Sarah Hart has been elected President of the Association for Mathematics in Education.

Congratulations go to John Bowman, who becomes Upper Warden at the Parish Clerks.

And we remember kindly Lt. Col. Howard Stephens who was a pupil of Mercers' School, later becoming both President and Archivist of the Old Mercers' Club. Following the Sorbonne Howard went to Sandhurst and had a distinguished military career. He was a fluent linguist and used his Latin in later life in his work as a Recorder for Suffolk churches. He was also a regular contributor to *The Grasshopper*.

Reflections

Eclipses

After all the excitement of the 90% eclipse of the Sun on 12th August (and the Full Monty in Madrid and Valencia), it is curious to see how often an episode arises in popular literature whereby the hero gets himself out of a scrape by accurately predicting an eclipse. This is perhaps best known in *King Solomon's Mines* and *A Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur*, (not to mention *Nightfall* by Isaac Asimov) but oddly enough even Enid Blyton falls back on it in *The Secret Mountain* and anyone with grandchildren will know that Tintin uses the same trick in *The Seven Crystal Balls*.

But none of them will probably have been aware of the fact that Hernando Columbus used precisely that ruse to get himself out of a tricky spot with the locals on Jamaica in 1504. He literally warned the local chiefs that he would make the moon disappear, hoping to goodness that he had got it right, based on the work of Abraham Zacuto.

Of course, there was some difficulty in the calculation as Zacuto had made his observations in Salamanca,



and the day in question was the 29th February. In the event, it worked as planned.

Abraham Zacuto? Of course, astronomer to King John II of Portugal, having been expelled from Spain in 1492. But his astrolabe, maritime charts and other calculations were in advance of their time and certainly helped Vasco da Gama and quite possibly the voyages of Columbus.

More on Biblical Giants

Following on from the DNA of Goliath and his family in G27, has anyone else noted in Deuteronomy that the Emims (aka the Anamims) and the Ammonites are all above average height? So there was something particular about many of the people living in the region in biblical times (unless of course the Children of Israel were below average height, which seems unlikely). Deuteronomy 2 vv 10-22 refers. (Presumably these giants were not related to the ones mentioned rather confusingly in Genesis 6 v 4). But read on and you will see that King Og of Bashan also comes from a race of giants (though they all seem to have been wiped out except for Og – and he even had an iron bed, presumably to take his weight. See Deuteronomy 3 vv 4-11.)

More on the Gresham Ship

Interesting that a piece of 16th century merchant ship has been found near Dungeness and which reflects the building techniques evident in the Gresham Ship. Members will recall that this was found in a creek just off the Thames in 2003. Some 20% of the hull was conserved and is now at the National Dive Centre at Stoney Cove, Leicestershire. The guns found on board bear the crest of Sir Thomas Gresham which is proof (if any was needed) that he was a gun runner as well as a money launderer, exchange rate fixer and spy. (They just don't make 'em like that any more...) However, he did serve five Tudor kings and queens without losing his head, which was an achievement in itself. See [The Gresham Ship Auer-Firth.pdf](#) for a full-scale article.

From Giraffes to Elephants

Having considered the case of the first giraffes to be seen in England, we move on to elephants which, of course, roamed the land some 400,000 years ago. It is said that the Emperor Claudius brought one over for his invasion of 43 A.D. but there are no actual references to this. There seems to have been an elephantine gap until 1255, when King Louis of France presented one to Henry III. It was drawn from life by Matthew Paris in his bestiary, which may be viewed today at the Parker Library in Cambridge. An elephant may also be seen in a misericord in Exeter Cathedral.

Chunee the Elephant was one of three elephants brought over from India between 1809 and 1811. He became a famous sight at the Exeter Exchange in London, where Lord Byron remarked that the elephant could remove Byron's hat, open a door and take a sixpence from a visitor and return it. In later life, enraged by an infected tusk, he became dangerous and was executed by firing squad. (It took 152 rounds to finish him off – George Orwell in *The Shooting of an Elephant* took only three.)

[*Editor's Note: Chunee < Chunilal (Hindi: Beloved Ruby).*]

The Duke of Devonshire had an elephant at his home in Chiswick in 1827, four years before the first one came to London Zoo.

And spare a thought for poor old Jumbo, the celebrated elephant who came to the Zoo in 1865 (via Germany and France) and who gave rides to children, and even to Queen Victoria. But in 1882 (and despite public protests) Jumbo was sold off to Barnum's Circus in America, where he was not so popular. Tragedy came in 1885 when the Circus was being switched between railway lines, and poor old Jumbo was hit by a train.

But that is nothing in comparison to Topsy the Elephant who was electrocuted in 1903. She had spent several decades in circuses around the USA, but had become difficult to manage. When she finished up at Luna Park on Coney Island the owners decided to execute her in public. After objections this was reduced to an invited audience (of over 1000 people), when poor Topsy was given carrots laced with cyanide, electrocuted and strangled. These morbid proceedings were actually filmed and may be seen on Wikipedia.

Snakebite

Country folk say that snakes do not die until sunset, but that is because nerve endings in the spinal cord can keep the animal moving for some hours. Even worse, some species of snake can still bite even after death. Whilst one is unlikely to come across a monocled cobra or krait in the Home Counties, more hardy (or maybe foolhardy) explorers who go off the beaten track in countries where members of the species *thanatophidia* abound, should take care. Members of our American and Australian chapters have been informed. (The Grasshopper Himself prefers not to discuss the topic and merely shudders when grass snakes are mentioned.)

What's in a name

Noting the recent pardon for Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in England, *Lady Godiva Rides*



Again was a film comedy produced in 1951. Not much of a film maybe, but the cast pulsates with names which were to achieve fame or notoriety such as Stanley Holloway, Alastair Sim, George Cole, Dora Bryan and Sid James. It is perhaps ironic that Diana Dors, Joan Collins and Ruth Ellis all appeared in the beauty parade which is a key scene in the film. People's lives can take very different paths.

Envoi

The Grasshopper himself is quite chuffed (choughed?) at the thought of reaching out to a wider audience, but assures me that this new-found fame will not go to his head, nor will it be editorial policy to replace the Grasshopper with a locust. It must be said that there has at times been confusion with the Grasshopper badge, but the Grasshopper himself looks on locusts as the black sheep of the family (if such a simile can be used).

Locusts are indeed part of the genus Acrididae but there the comparison ends. Sometimes described as gregarious (e.g. in Wikipedia) they can cause

enormous damage to crops and indeed get a bad press because of this in *The Iliad* and the *Mahabharata* not to mention Exodus 10 vv 1-20 as the eighth of the ten plagues of Egypt. So best not to mention locusts in the Grasshopper's hearing.

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Do look at the details for the forthcoming Gresham Society outing to Benjamin Franklin House, it being an anniversary year for the US of A: Thursday 24th September at 2:30pm. Time to meet up with friends old and new, so do sign up well in time. Contact Tim Connell if you missed the flyer.

Editorial Team

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Bonhomie – Conviviality – Intellectual Curiosity

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