

# LONDON TOPOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY Newsletter Number 79 November 2014

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## Notes and News

The Society held its very successful 114th AGM on 7 July, in the luxurious premises of Mansion House, the Lord Mayor's official home in the heart of the City. Despite the complications of advance booking, security and disabled parking, all went smoothly, thanks to the careful preparations by our secretary Mike Wicksteed, and the helpfulness of the administrative and catering staff. 285 members and 40 guests were able to wander with their cups of tea through the spacious reception rooms, before we were made welcome in the Egyptian Hall by the Lord Mayor, Fiona Woolf, who had so kindly made this event possible. Following the business of the meeting, a screen was available for the Secretary to demonstrate the latest developments to the Society's website, where one is now able to access back numbers of the *Newsletter*. Further improvements to the website are in progress, so keep an eye on topsoc.org; Mike Wicksteed will welcome comments and suggestions. Officers and Council elected at the AGM are listed on the back cover of the *Newsletter*. (Please note the *Newsletter* editor's new email.)

We were fortunate to hear a lively and most enlightening talk on Mansion House by Sally Jeffery, author of the definitive work on the subject, all the more impressive because she spoke without notes (having found she had left them behind). The history of the building is complex. The interiors need some explaining because, confusingly, one now enters through a modest side

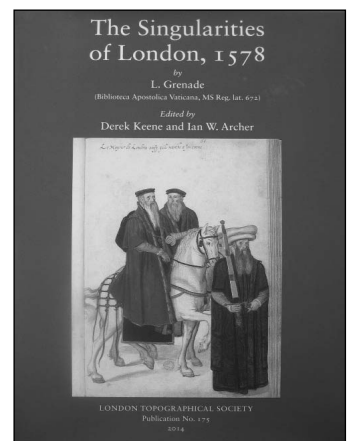
door in the basement before arriving upstairs in the central space where we had our tea. This was formerly an open central courtyard (oddly, at first floor level), which linked the entrance range, with its now unused grand portico, to the Vitruvius-inspired Egyptian Hall at the back of the building. It was amazing to sit in the Egyptian Hall gazing up at the coffered barrel vault built by the younger George Dance in 1795 and realise that in his father's scheme, begun in 1739, this colossal hall was originally crowned by an even taller clerestorey.

Discussion at the AGM raised the issue of whether the *Newsletter* should be published more frequently, or changed in other ways. After consideration, your Council has decided to retain twice yearly publication but agreed that when necessary the *Newsletter* could occasionally be extended by some extra pages (even though the extra weight would mean higher postage costs). We will also be investigating alternative types of paper, and the possibility of using colour.

## Our recent annual publications

Our latest publication *The Singularities of London, 1578*, an exceptional account of sixteenth-century London by a Frenchman, has been well received, with a favourable review in the *Newsletter of Archives for London* – see p.19.

All fully paid-up members who have kept us up-to-date with changes of address should by now have received their copy. Report any non-receipts to the Treasurer.



We are delighted to report that our 2013 publication, *The A to Z of Charles II's London 1682*, was shortlisted for the annual award for an Outstanding Work of Reference by the Information Services Group of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals). The decision announced at the event on 8 October was that it was 'Highly Commended', the winner being the Thames & Hudson publication, *The Library: a world history*, by James W. P. Campbell and Will Pryce.

### Data Protection Act

As long-standing members of the Society will know, each volume of the London Topographical Record contains a list of members and their addresses. If you do not wish your name and/or address to appear in the next volume which is the Society publication for 2015, please inform the Membership Secretary before 1 January 2015.

### Subscriptions

Subscriptions (£20 for UK addresses, £30 elsewhere) are due 1 January 2015. Most members pay by standing order (and get a discount for doing so) and need take no action unless they have changed their bank account in 2014. Others should make their payment to the Treasurer by cheque, by card through the website or direct to our bank account whose details can be had from the Treasurer. He can also supply standing order forms to those members wishing to start paying this way, but such completed forms must reach your bank before Christmas.

### Topographical interests can seriously prolong your life

One of the perks of delivering society publications is that you get to know the membership better. I learnt this year that we have at least one centenarian member, Miss Alison Kelly, of whom I have fond memories when she taught me about London History and Architecture at evening classes at The City Lit in the 1970s. Her major work was *Mrs Coade's Stone* (1990), about the stone which embellishes much of the Bedford Estate and forms the lion sculpture on the east end of Westminster Bridge. Another member who narrowly missed reaching his century (he died earlier this year) was Jack Whitehead whose books on the development of Marylebone and Paddington, Camden Railway Lands and Muswell Hill will be in many of your libraries. (He taught at a secondary school in Paddington and the books developed from projects he set his pupils.) He put his good visual sense and a delight in drawing to excellent use in all his books, so amply illustrated with line drawings. My weekend cycle rides in leafy Surrey are enlivened by the occasional visit to our Vice-President Dr Elspeth Veale who I am sure will not mind me passing on the information that she is pushing 99. She is busy on her laptop editing her latest local history book but has to get *The Times* crossword finished each day before coffee-time.

– Roger Cline

## Circumspice

Where and what is this building? Answer on p.11.



Photo Bill Tyler

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## Exhibitions and Events

**The City of London Heritage Gallery** opened to the public on 12 September. The new gallery, located within Guildhall Art Gallery, is curated by London Metropolitan Archives, and will showcase treasures held by the City of London Corporation. The first exhibition, which runs until 29 January, includes the City's copy of Magna Carta, significant medieval statutes and charters, portraits of City Aldermen and – topically – some documents relating to the First World War. There is an accompanying book: *London 1000 Years: Treasures of the Collections of the City of London*, edited by David Pearson; Scala Publishers, 2011. ISBN 978 1 85759 699 1; 160pp. £29.95.

The winter exhibition of the **Museum of London** is *Sherlock Holmes, the man who never lived and will never die* (17 October – 12 April). For further details, also of many associated events, see [museumoflondon.org.uk](http://museumoflondon.org.uk). A new acquisition for the museum now on display is the great cauldron, symbol of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, designed by Thomas Heatherwick.

The current exhibition at **Tate Britain**: *Late Turner, painting set free* (to 30 November) includes two memorably atmospheric London scenes: *the Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons*, painted in 1835, the year after the fire; (lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art), and the Tate's own *Thames above Waterloo Bridge* (1835-40). The latter shows Turner fascinated by the steam from the new-fangled river steamers just visible beyond the old wherries in the foreground.

*Terror and Wonder, the Gothic Imagination*, at the **British Library (3 October – 20 January)**. Gothic

fantasies from Horace Walpole onwards drew their inspiration chiefly from the middle ages, but in the nineteenth century the industrialised urban landscape was a new source of terror and wonder; Charles Dickens's novels, Gustav Doré's views, and the horrors of urban crime reported in the *Police News* are among the topics covered in this fascinating exhibition exploring the wealth of 'Gothic' material in the British Library.

**Kensington Palace** has been focusing on the lives of George II and Queen Caroline, in **The Glorious Georges**, one of a series of exhibitions presented by Historic Royal Palaces (to 30 November) to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Hanoverian accession (for more, see [hrp.org.uk](http://hrp.org.uk)).

**The Geffrye Museum, Shoreditch** is celebrating its centenary with two free exhibitions: a *garden display* (to 4 January) with sculpture, audio trail and digital stories, and inside, *Geffrye 100*, a brief history of the museum. The building began as almshouses in 1714, was sold to the LCC in 1911 and with encouragement from members of the Arts and Crafts movement was opened as a museum in 1914 to provide inspiration for those involved in the local furniture industry. As this declined it broadened its scope to appeal to families and children, with the old almshouse accommodation adapted as a delightful series of period rooms. An example of a sparsely furnished original interior is also on show – timed tickets to see this are available on special days, see the website for further details: [geffrye-museum.org.uk](http://geffrye-museum.org.uk).

**The Garden Museum**, Lambeth Palace Road has a special exhibition, *Gardens and War* (to 5 January) exploring how gardens have been created in the most unlikely circumstances, from trenches to prisoner of war camps. For further details see [gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://gardenmuseum.org.uk).

**History Libraries and Research Open Day** at Senate House, University of London, 20 January 2015: an open history fair, with clinics on practical research skills. Contact Kate Wilcox and Jordan Landes, [ihr.library@sas.ac.uk](mailto:ihr.library@sas.ac.uk).

## Miscellanea

### St Paul's Cathedral

A recent addition to online research material is the collection of Wren office drawings at St Paul's cathedral, with an excellent introduction by Gordon Higgott. It is part of an impressively thorough and well organised documentation of the building and its treasures which can be found at [stpauls.co.uk/cathedral-history](http://stpauls.co.uk/cathedral-history). This also includes, among much else, an illustrated record of objects, including no less than 598 monuments and memorials, which can be searched for under name or artist.

### Saving Smithfield

We are reminded, in our new publication *The Singularities of London*, of the changing role of Smithfield in the history of the City; in the sixteenth

century it was known not only for the annual Bartholomew Fair and the weekly horsemarket, but as a place of execution of criminals and religious martyrs. The wholesale food markets developed during the nineteenth century and the covered meat market still continues, but for the last ten years the future of the disused general market buildings of West Smithfield, built 1879-99, has been in the balance (see *Newsletter* 77). There is now hope for their survival, as in July the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, announced that he had rejected the proposed development which would have destroyed 75% of their fabric. SAVE Britain's Heritage campaigned for an alternative regeneration scheme, reusing and adapting what has been described as 'one of the grandest processions of market buildings in Europe', and this was found by the Secretary of State to be 'possible, viable and deliverable'. This is not only a great triumph for SAVE (for more on their campaign see [savebritainsheritage.org](http://savebritainsheritage.org)) but also an important landmark in securing protection for unlisted buildings in a conservation area. West Smithfield, strategically placed on the edge of City, close to the busy areas of Clerkenwell, Hatton Garden and Holborn Circus, may be able to adapt for today while retaining its distinctive historic character.

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## Sir Thomas Gresham: Tudor, Trader, Shipper, Spy

*Professor Michael Mainelli and Dr Valerie Shrimplin, from Gresham College, who are working on a project for a new biography of Sir Thomas Gresham, introduce this key character in the history of the City.*

### Good Tales Drive Out Bad

Sir Thomas Gresham (1519-79) is one of the most over-looked sixteenth-century merchants and financiers. Gresham served four Tudor monarchs, managed to keep his head, and all the while made money. His Will of 1575 established his most enduring legacy, Gresham College:

*I Will and Dispose that one Moiety... shall be unto the Mayor and Commonalty and Citizens of London... and the other to the Mercers... for the sustenation, maintenance and Finding Four persons, from Tyme to Tyme to be chosen, nominated and appointed.... And their successors to read the Lectures of Divinity, Astronomy, Musick and Geometry... and distribute to... Three Persons... and their successors from Time to Time, to be chosen and appointed meete to reade the Lectures of law, Physick and Rhetorick, within myne now dwelling House in Bishopsgate Street...*

Sir Thomas made London a great international financial centre by importing from Antwerp the idea

of a 'bourse' or 'exchange' for intangible items such as ship voyages and insurance. He installed the first English shopping mall or bazaar as the first floor in the Royal Exchange. From a base within St Martin's Goldsmiths he experimented with fractional reserve gold stores, cornering markets, and insider trading. His Will challenged the 'Oxbridge' oligopoly in higher education.

But there is no thorough biography. J. W. Burgon published the largest work, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Gresham* in 1839, and F. R. Salter a shorter work in 1925. Sir Thomas is a tough subject for biographers used to focusing on monarchs, their families and their wars. He traded in several lands and worked in several languages. The purposes behind many commercial dealings are not self-evident from the paperwork, even when fragments exist. To some he was austere, to others manipulative, to others ruthless. How did he really make his fortune? How rich was he in modern terms? Was his support for 'new learning' in his Will a commitment that education should be available to merchants, tradesmen, and navigators, rather than gentlemen scholars, or a throw-away bequest? The Trustees of Gresham College are working on a modern biography, hopefully to be published on the quincentenary of his birth in 2019.

To those outside the City, he is remembered for 'Gresham's Law'. Colloquially expressed as 'bad money drives out good', the law was attributed to Gresham in 1858 by Scottish economist Henry Dunning Macleod. But Gresham's Law was not his; it was noted much earlier by Aristophanes, the medieval philosopher Oresme, and Copernicus. In fact, the Law is the reverse, 'good money drives out bad'. If someone offers a debased coin or a real

coin, people take the real coin unless some monarch insists on the debased currency. The Nobel economist Robert Mundell rephrased Gresham's Law more properly as 'cheap money drives out dear money only if they must be exchanged for the same price'.



Sir Thomas Gresham. 1544 (aged 26) by Holbein

## Gresham's imprint on the City

Gresham left many marks on the topography of the City. The grasshopper, his family badge, can be spotted around the City, as weathervanes at the top of his major commercial contribution, the Royal Exchange, and in many crests, seals, and stained glass windows. A large grasshopper hangs at 68 Lombard Street, site of St Martin's Goldsmiths. His major philanthropic contribution, Gresham College, thrives four centuries on at Barnard's Inn Hall by Holborn. Its former location on Basinghall Street still exists, on the corner with Gresham Street itself, a street before the Guildhall commemorating the family. His grave is prominent in one corner of St Helen's Bishopsgate. At least two statues of Sir Thomas stand in the City, one in a north-facing alcove of the Royal Exchange, the other on Holborn Viaduct. A portrait by Holbein in Mercers Hall, where Gresham was Master Mercer three times, is possibly the first full length painting of a commoner in Britain.



Grasshopper, 68 Lombard Street

## The grasshopper

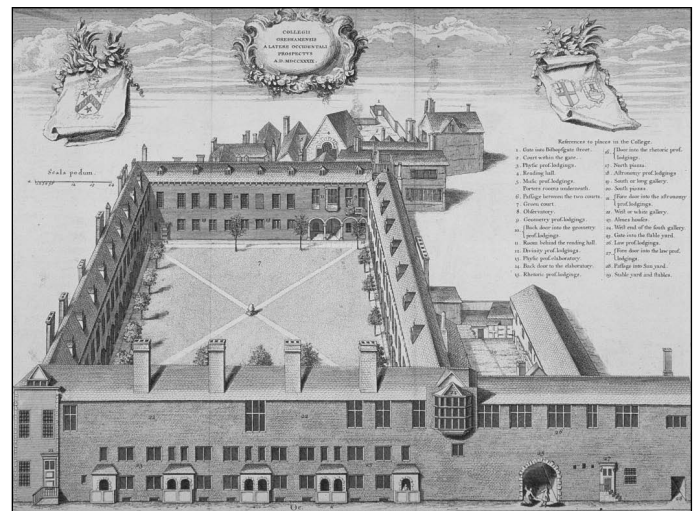
According to family legend, the founder of the family, Roger de Gresham, was abandoned as a baby in long grass in North Norfolk in the thirteenth-century. A woman's attention was drawn to the foundling by a grasshopper, hence the family badge. While a beautiful story, it is more likely that the grasshopper is simply a heraldic rebus on the name Gresham, with *gres* being a Middle English form of grass (Old English *græs*), and 'gressop' a grasshopper. James Gresham from the Norfolk village of Holt became a London legal agent working for Sir William Paston, a prominent judge. The grasshopper emblem first appears in correspondence from London to the Pastons in Norfolk in the mid-1400s.

## Gresham's career in the Low Countries

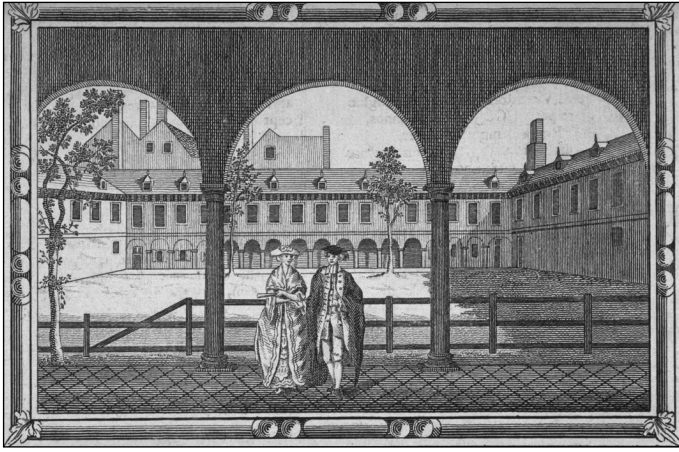
Thomas Gresham was a cockney, born within the sound of Bow Bells on Cheapside, around 1519. He attended St Paul's School and Gonville College (later to become Gonville and Caius), Cambridge. In 1543 the Mercers' Company admitted the 24-year-old Gresham as a liveryman dealing in cloth.

In the same year he went to Antwerp to make his fortune. Antwerp was then a very cosmopolitan city, with a population approaching 100,000, double London or Rome. The growth of the cloth trade between London and Antwerp was the single most important factor in the City's expansion. Just 25 merchants accounted for half of London's cloth exports, and the two biggest exporters were the brothers John Gresham and Richard Gresham, Thomas's father. On his own account and on that of his father and uncle, Thomas carried on business as a merchant and acted in various matters as an agent for King Henry VIII. He was clearly a 'merchant adventurer' with a network of agents, though the sobriquets 'arms-dealer' or 'gun-runner' might apply too. He procured armaments and munitions for defence of the realm, particularly against Spain (as Philip of Spain attempted to regain a foothold on the grounds of his marriage to Mary Tudor) and France (supportive of the claim of Mary Queen of Scots to the English throne). There are tales of bullion concealed in bales of pepper or armour. Interestingly, one of Sir Thomas's ships from 1570 was re-discovered in the Thames in 2003 with cannons inscribed with grasshoppers and marked 'TG'.

## High Finance



## The Royal Exchange



merchants together regularly to deal in intangible products such as voyages. Incorporated into the design, at ground and first floor levels, were 150 small shops, called The Pawn, London's first shopping centre. After a visit hosted by Sir Thomas, Elizabeth designated the Exchange 'Royal'.

Sir Thomas Gresham died suddenly of apoplexy on 21 November 1579. His son Richard, his only legitimate child, had died in 1564 at the age of 19 from 'a fever', and his illegitimate daughter also predeceased him, as did his sister. Gresham's wife contested his Will in favour of her own sons for 17 years. After she died in 1597, College lectures began in the Bishopsgate mansion. The first professor of geometry was Henry Brigg, populariser of the logarithm. Other notables include Edmund Gunter, with his 'Gunter's Chain' for surveying, John Greaves, setting up observation posts in the Middle East in 1638 to observe the Moon's eclipse, and John Bull, widely regarded as one of the founders of the modern keyboard repertory.

In 1710 the Royal Society acquired its own home, two houses in Crane Court, off the Strand. Gresham College fell into disrepair. In 1767 an Act of Parliament required the City Corporation and the Mercers to sell the ground to the Crown. After a peripatetic period of lecturing, a purpose-built Gresham College opened in 1842. Following a second period of wandering during the 1980s the College was re-established at Barnard's Inn Hall in 1991. This Tudor Open University today hosts over 130 physical events per year, distributes extensive recordings under a Creative Commons licence, and

## Emery Walker's 'Mercers Chappel'