

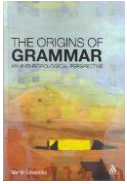


MAIDEN ROAD NEWS

2010:
International Year of Biodiversity
International Year of Youth
Evidence found of interbreeding
between Neanderthals & Humans
Noam Chomsky is 82

Publish and be damned

I suppose my big news for this year was the publication of the book. Having spent all 2009 writing it, I spent a large part of 2010 waiting. There were the galleys to edit, of course, but mostly it was a case of being patient with the publishers.



However, in July, or August, or September (depending on your perspective and country of residence) the book was finally published; and so began a new type of waiting. *The Origins of Grammar: an anthropological perspective* may have been released into the wild, but will it prosper? That is a question for next year.

Teaching and Talking

I did some more teaching at the beginning of this year, Psycholinguistics for 70 full-time and part-time MA students. The ten lectures seem to have gone well, and I am still in contact with some of the students. Of course, marking 70 essays was a task-and-a-half, but I got there eventually.

I also attended three conferences, giving a poster at one, a paper at another, and just listening at another. The first conference was in Hatfield, which is within commuting distance, but I stayed over anyway. The second was at the new Royal Society conference centre at Chicheley Hall in Buckinghamshire – an opportunity to mix with some very well-known names in the RS. The third was in Aberdeen and was the most disappointing in terms of food – and, let's face it, that's a major reason for going to conference; but, on the other hand, my paper was a success. You can read the papers and posters on my new website (see end of newsletter) if you ever have a very slow day.

Not Teaching and Kvetching

Meanwhile, my other source of work, the Academy, continues much as before. I won't go into details about the general experience, but I will mention a few visitor highlights. In June we had Education Minister Michael Gove MP launching the *Sports for Schools* initiative (this now appears to have been quietly shelved – I think someone mentioned money). The highlight of the visit, which saw many worthies telling us how sport is good for us, was London Mayor Boris Johnson, who complained about his daughter's sports day: "nobody was allowed to lose – a bit like the General Election". Gove's head went into his hands and the Department for Education bods began muttering in a panicked way. (Incidentally, note that it is Department FOR Education: they are definitely in favour, but not necessarily involved.)

The second visit (October) was by *Question Time*, which went well although with a compact audience. Philip asked a question, which he said he wouldn't do because his minister, Ian Duncan-Smith, was on the panel. His question, however, was about the appointment of the Government History Czar, Simon Schama, so was directed mischievously at panel member David Starkey. This was only one of Philip's radio appearances this year, as will later be related...

The final visit, on 30th November, was Sir Ian McKellen, who came to talk to the school about homophobia. He enchanted the little ones, made the older ones think, and challenged the book-ridden knee-jerk reactions of the charismatic church students. He left the Academy a better and more thoughtful place. The fact that he was followed the next day by Business Secretary Vince Cable MP, trying to justify his fees policy (as much to himself as to the students), only emphasised the difference between political visitors using the Academy and other visitors working with the Academy.

Seeing the World

This has been another year without an official shared holiday, but we have done well with days out around London. As well as the regular trips to check on the building of the 2012 Olympic Park, we have had several walks through bits of London which were new to us (or to me, at least).

The first was Sir John Soane's house, a museum in Central London set up by Sir John Soane when he decided to disinherit his wastrel son. The place is set up as if Sir John had just left the room but was still somewhere in the house, and it is full of the most unusual objects. It is both an insight into late Georgian life and an eclectic collection of strange knickknacks. We enjoyed our visit so much that we went back in July with Philip's nephew Patrick and his family, when they visited London.

In June we went to Chelsea Physic Garden, founded in 1673 by the Society of Apothecaries as a source of medicinal plants in London. Plants have been gathered from around the world, and the collection is both extensive and unusual. There is also a very good tea shop, something which is becoming our benchmark for a good day out – we are definitely settling into our sunset years now.

Also in June we visited the Elephants' Parade in Chelsea. A set of elephant models had been placed around the capital to bring the plight of the Asian elephant to the attention of London. They were then brought together at the Chelsea Hospital before being auctioned to raise funds for conservation. They had all been painted (or designed) by leading artists, and it was amazing to see them all together in one place. It took nearly two hours to see them all.



Philip and an elephant

We attended London Pride in July, of course. We watched the whole parade from a vantage point in Regent's Street, and were clutched to a drag queen's heaving bosom; but the post-march event in Trafalgar Square was a little too noisy and crowded for me (mind you, I would find the South Pole to be too touristy). Still, at least I can say that I saw it.

Despite oncoming age, we still have our legs; and we took them on long walks in September, around the Docklands and through Bloomsbury. The Docklands walk took us through the new development along the North side of the Thames, an area that was left largely empty after Hitler's bombing and the birth of container transportation. Now there is the Excel Centre, the High Bridge, City Airport, Thames Barrier Park and the New University development to be seen, as well as occasional relics of the past, such as the memorial stone for the Becton Explosion of 1917.



London from the High Bridge

The Bloomsbury walk was mainly a chance to see the Skin exhibition at the Wellcome Museum – an eclectic collection of psoriasis, eczema, molluscum, scabies and abscesses. The tea room was also very good, although we avoided the ham sandwiches.

And that's about it from me for another year. I'm sure there are whole swathes of my life I've failed to mention, but I have to leave some space to comment on Philip's year.

Philip's Corner

Philip's stardom continued this year, with radio appearances on the Rosie Wilby Show (see www.pinksingers.co.uk/index.php/tampa-pride-marches-hand-in-han/), and twice on the Joel Kafetz show (for the first appearance, see www.pinksingers.co.uk/index.php/being-in-an-lgbt-choir/#more-2051).

He has also continued singing with the Pink Singers, who have survived the resignation of their Musical Director this year. The choir is so well-known that they had no fewer than four replacement candidates, all of which were of excellent standard. They are now settling in very well with their final choice, Murray Hipkin. Philip is now in his third year of post-retirement-age work, but he is beginning to recognise that it may be time to slow down. Who knows, by this time next year he may even have gone part-time – but maybe not...

That Techie Stuff

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The crib scene was first created by Francis of Assisi to counteract Yuletide pagan influences. He used real people and real animals, but the birth itself was simulated.