

Brady Haran's Treasure Trove

The Christopher Zeeman Medal was awarded to Brady Haran on 7 May 2025 (see the recording on the IMAMaths YouTube channel). The Medal is awarded every two years by the IMA and its sister society the London Mathematical Society (LMS) for the promotion of mathematics to the public.

The event was introduced by Heather Tewkesbury, President Elect of the IMA, who gave a summary of the life of Christopher Zeeman, who was an amazing individual. Heather gave some fascinating anecdotes about his life and work, and explained how his example had led to the creation of the Zeeman Medal. At this point the evening began in earnest and the first of a series of surprises was revealed.

During the introduction, Brady Haran had, it appeared to your writer, been standing quietly by the stage wearing purple gloves. But when Heather introduced him as the winner, for some reason she did not glance at him once! Once Brady was announced, he instead jumped up from the audience and began to give his talk, *Treasure Trove: Amazing Objects from the World of Mathematics*. It turned out it was not the person with the purple gloves after all! Curiouser and curiouser!

Brady started by thanking those who had supported, collaborated with and encouraged him in his life and career; a number of these supporters were in the audience, as were Rob Eastaway and Simon Singh, former winners of the Zeeman Medal. Brady then explained how he had planned his lecture around the objects in the Royal Society archives and introduced the man in the purple gloves as the lead archivist there, Keith Moore.

Brady first explored the Royal Society Charter Book, which contains the original rules of the society and the signatures of almost every Fellow (FRS) on election. There are also several 'Royal Pages' with the signatures of the reigning Monarchs and members of the Royal Family. Brady took us on a whistle stop tour of the signature book, scoring signatures out of ten, for instance Isaac Newton's signature was an eight!



Brady presents his attempt at a signature with help from archivist Keith

While Brady was talking, Keith was walking through the audience displaying the Charter Book, before handing it to a (similarly purple gloved) colleague who whisked it away to a display case, which could be viewed during the reception. Whenever a book or artefact was discussed during the talk, Keith displayed it similarly and his colleagues whisked it away, with an efficiency that made one wonder if they had used operational research in their planning!

Brady then explored a number of books and artefacts, mostly from the Royal Society archives, which meant something to him. In each case Brady showed us the related signatures in the Charter Book and scored them out of ten. The audience were treated



Brady receives the his Medal from Zeeman's daughter, Nicolette

to both a first edition (owned by Flamsteed) and a printer's manuscript copy of Newton's *Principia*, as well as his death mask! Brady then showed us some dividers allegedly owned by Christopher Wren, and an elegant brass gadget that supposedly demonstrated squaring the circle.

Brady then left the Royal Society archives, and showed us his own Rubik's Cube, signed by the inventor, and an empty bottle of whiskey. Brady had attended a ceremony in Moscow where he found himself serving this unique bottle of Jack Daniels that was produced to mark the discovery of the element Tennessine (117).

The audience were then treated to a show of medals, including the Copley Medal (considered the oldest scientific medal in the world) awarded in 1772 to Joseph Priestley, whose signature scored 9/10. Brady then moved on to Nobel Prize medals but noted that sadly the Royal Society does not (yet) have a Fields Medal in its collection. The audience were delighted when Brady revealed that his friend, collaborator, and Fields Medallist James Maynard was present and had brought his medal with him!

Moving towards the end of the talk, Brady showed and described some of the portraits of Royal Society presidents in the collection, including Sir Michael Atiyah and the Lord May of Oxford, although your reviewer suspects Keith and his team were happy not to have to carry these anywhere! The portraits both had hidden symbolism, which Brady explained was traditional at the Royal Society, with Sir Michael's portrait having a bust of Newton and Lord May's a table tennis bat!

The talk concluded with Christopher Zeeman's artefacts – signature 9/10. The event was just over 50 years after Zeeman's election as FRS in 1975. This enabled the Royal Society to show us the certificate of his candidature, which reveals his nominator (Sir Michael Atiyah), and other papers from his election.

Some questions and answers followed, in which Brady revealed that the item he wished had been available, but never will be, was Albert Einstein's signature in the Charter Book, as although he was a Foreign Member, he did not sign the book.

Jens Marklof, the LMS President, thanked Brady for his wonderful talk, as well as all those who had made it possible, and then the audience were treated to our final surprise, when he invited one of Zeeman's daughters, Nicolette, to present the Medal.

Brady certainly surprised us all with his amazing objects!

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The views expressed in this review do not necessarily reflect those of the MOD or the AfDSP.