



Norfolk Cambridge Society

Spring 2020 Newsletter

Message from our new Chairman

This is the first newsletter we have circulated for over a year and I am very grateful to Kathy Moyse for pulling it together. It was planned over two months ago and, in the current difficult circumstances, there have been good grounds for postponing its release. However, it is over a year since our last newsletter and so much has happened over that period in the Society, we thought we should tell you about them.

First, I have taken over as Chair of the Society from Simon Brickles, who has found that his heavy work commitments did not allow him sufficient time on NCS matters. Both Simon and Andrew Barnes have given us great support over the last eighteen months, as we have stepped up our range of activities. I am very grateful indeed to both of them and particularly delighted that Simon has agreed to continue on the committee as Vice-Chair.

In January Rob Edwards, Lucy Fuller, Mu Gurbutt, Kathy Moyse and Peter Smith joined our committee, expanding it from three to eight people. Rob and Peter have taken over my roles as Treasurer and Secretary respectively. Lucy has relieved me of the burden of maintaining the Society's website and has greatly improved it. Find us at: <https://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/group/norfolk-cambridge-society> Mu has set up a fascinating cultural activities programme, much of which is now, sadly, on hold. Kathy as mentioned, is now editor of our newsletter. All this has greatly lightened my workload and we now have an excellent base to take the Society forward, once this awful pandemic is over.

Since joining the Society in June 2018, my goal has been to help build a financially strong organisation that makes a significant contribution to the intellectual life of the county. The aim has been to provide a mix of high-profile public events and smaller member-and-guest only events. I believe good progress has been made over that period and everyone involved should feel a sense of pride. Norwich School, in particular, has been a steadfast partner in providing excellent support, both for our public lectures and for our monthly Philosophy Group meetings.

This is a very difficult time for all of us. In the future we hope to be able to continue to build a vibrant and hugely enjoyable society, for the benefit of all Cambridge alumni living in Norfolk. Until then I wish you all, and your families, the very best of health and good fortune. Geoffrey Smart

Message from the editor

I am delighted to be taking on editorship of the newsletter. I graduated from Homerton in English in 1980 and spent 25 years teaching in the state sector before I changed tack, completing a French degree and an MA in Translation. Last year I moved to Norfolk with my husband (a Johnian) and am very happy to be involved in a growing and dynamic society. I aim to publish quarterly and welcome contributions from members. The current situation dictates that most of the Society's planned activities have had to be put on hold so the content of this edition is not quite what I had in mind a couple of weeks ago! Nonetheless I wish you a peaceful read and good health. Kathy Moyse. ajskcm@btinternet.com

The Norfolk Cambridge Society Lectures

Since October 2018, the NCS Lectures have provided an opportunity for Cambridge alumni and others of like mind, to meet once a quarter at Norwich School, to hear leading academics speak on a range of fascinating topics. They have covered the intelligence services, politics, neuroscience, genocide, high-energy physics and international law. The numbers attending have grown steadily and our January lecture, delivered by Professor Sir Christopher Greenwood was very well received by his audience of 260, including 60 Year 12 and 13 students (sixth formers) from across the county. Sir Christopher is Master Elect of Magdalene College, taking up the reins in September of this year and is a former Judge of the International Court of Justice (2009-2018). If you were unable to attend, my summary of his entertaining and thought-provoking lecture appears later in this newsletter alongside feedback from some attendees.

In recognition of the central purpose of these lectures, which is to celebrate the rigorous pursuit and dissemination of truth, all our speakers have agreed to appear on an expenses-only basis. We are immensely grateful to them. Proceeds from these lectures will be used in part to fund the newly established Norfolk Cambridge Society Awards for year 13 students from across the county, who have been offered an undergraduate place at Cambridge University. We would like this to be an annual event and details of how it has worked this year appear below.

Unfortunately, our next two lectures, due to be delivered on 23 April and 2 June, have had to be postponed because of Coronavirus. We will reschedule these as soon as circumstances allow. Those of you who have already bought tickets have been offered the choice of a refund or a credit against future lectures. The vast majority so far have chosen to accept a credit.

Norfolk Cambridge Society Awards 2020

Three £500 cash prizes were offered this year for submissions addressing the topic of *"The problem I should most like to help solve, or the change for the better I should most like to bring about, using my university education"*.

A number of excellent submissions were received from both private schools and state schools and colleges and, once anonymised, were individually scored by committee members, according to agreed assessment criteria. Topics covered by the five shortlisted candidates included climate change, robotics, political education in schools, international human rights and the possible role of music as a therapeutic tool in medicine. We had intended to interview candidates in person about their ideas but instead, and after some technological challenges, they were interviewed via Skype on 23 March. We were so impressed by the quality of the candidates that we decided to offer two £50 consolation prizes to those who made the shortlist but did not win one of the main prizes.

The three winners were: Emily Gilbertson, from Norwich High School for Girls, Phoebe Sayer from Isaac Newton Sixth Form College and Holly Scott from Thetford Academy. The runners-up were Katya Ruda from Norwich School and Elizabeth Vogel from Dereham Sixth Form College. We were greatly impressed by all these candidates who will receive their awards regardless of whether they meet their admission offers or not.

Cultural events

We are immensely grateful to Mu Gurbutt for putting together a really interesting series of cultural events for members and guests for the Spring and Summer, which were drawn to the attention of members in February in an email from Geoffrey. Since then, unfortunately, Mu has had to take a view about the likely duration of venue closures and government restrictions. *Accordingly, the visit to Glemham Hall on May 21st and the behind the scenes visit to 'Memory of Water' at The Assembly House on June 24th are cancelled. Mu has already been in touch with those who have booked and arranged for refunds to be made.*

For the time being the 'talk and walk' (Hidden Industrial Norwich) scheduled for June 10th and meeting at the King's Centre, King Street at 10.00am will go ahead. This will be led by Dr Mary Fewster from UEA who is also a member of the Norfolk Historic Buildings group. Dr Fewster is intending to give an introductory talk and to leave at about 11.30 for the walk which will probably last an hour or so. It may be necessary to change the shape of the day nearer the time even if we are able to go ahead with it. (20 places).

We are also hoping that a visit to The John Innes Centre at Norwich Research Park scheduled for 1.30 on September 22nd will go ahead. This will include a show round by, and Q&A with, Dr James Piercy about the research and work of the centre into wheat, peas, brassicas and their diseases and adaptations to a fluctuating environment. (15 places)

If you are interested in either of the events planned for June 10th and September 22nd please email mgurbutt@hotmail.com or contact her in writing at: 5 The Walnuts, Worlingham, Beccles NR34 7EL

Philosophy Group

The NCS philosophy group began last year under the chairmanship of Geoffrey Smart and meets on the second Thursday of every month from 6pm to 8pm in the cathedral precinct at No 1, The Close. (Norwich School's music room). The meetings provide a great opportunity for alumni and guests to discuss, in a relaxed atmosphere over a glass of wine or soft drink, some of the more complex questions faced by society. Typically, ten to twenty people come along, including a number of retired politicians and academics. They are, in the main, not professional philosophers but are interested in morality, ethics and the nature of truth. And they are great fun! All that is required of those attending is that they are prepared occasionally to volunteer to lead a discussion.

It only costs £3 to attend or £5 if you wish to enjoy a glass of wine, all payable on the night. If you are interested in joining the group, please contact the group chair, Geoffrey Smart.

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The first meeting took place in July 2019 and was a formal debate on the motion *This House does not believe in Free Will*. Since then seven further discussions have taken place including:

Does a sense of identity limit or empower us?

Should politicians lead or follow the people?

Are there limits to the concept of objective truth?

The role of morality in international relations.

The group's most recent meeting in March was a debate on the motion *This House Believes Vegetarianism is a Moral Imperative*. Jane Polden spoke in favour of the motion and John Rosser opposed. On the final vote, the house was divided, with an equal number of votes cast on either side.

Unfortunately, the group's activities are currently suspended but they will resume as soon as it is felt sensible to do so and in accordance with the government's Coronavirus advice.

Book club

We are hoping to set up a book club along the lines of the philosophy group. The intention being that we would meet one evening a month (venue to be agreed). We had hoped to have this up and running for September but in the current circumstances this is unlikely. Ideal group size would be about 8-10. If there is massive demand we could consider holding two parallel sessions a month, venue permitting. I won't be holding anyone to anything at the moment but if you would be interested please let me, Kathy Moyse, know at ajskcm@btinternet.com.



Simon Brickles, outgoing Chair (L) with Sir Christopher Greenwood

NCS Lecture, January 23rd 2020: 'Civilising the World-The Highways and Byways of International Justice' delivered by Professor Sir Christopher Greenwood

Sir Christopher outlined the remit of the court as being concerned with issues of international significance such as the laws governing air travel, trade agreements and extraditions and also highlighted its importance in helping countries to achieve common goals such as maintaining the non-nuclear status of North Korea. All UN member states are automatically signatories but are not obliged to remain so and countries not in the UN may be signatories. Member states agree that rulings are binding. Sir Christopher underlined the importance of the court in the recent case against Myanmar and the treatment of Rohingya minorities in that country where it was found that Myanmar does have a case to answer. The case was in fact brought by The Gambia and Sir Christopher cited it as an excellent example of how individual states can challenge one another in an unpartisan legislature.

Sir Christopher acknowledged that enforcement of any court ruling is difficult but pointed out that, remarkably, all but two judgements by the ICJ have to date been honoured. He also admitted that thus far the ICJ has not been very successful in facilitating steps to address climate change. Political decisions by individual states can be supported through international law and the rulings of the court, he explained, but the court cannot unilaterally introduce change. In his closing comments he addressed his concerns about the possible withdrawal of the UK from the European Court of Human Rights as a consequence of Brexit.

"A great choice for a talk and decidedly topical."

"An excellent lecture and the feedback at school has been universally positive. It is a rare skill to make a complex topic accessible to the lay-person and interesting to the expert. (Sir Christopher) managed to achieve this delicate balance and to do so with so much humour too was a tour de force indeed!"

"Our students were utterly engaged, not only during the lecture but also afterwards when they had a further opportunity to talk one-to-one with Sir Christopher."

Finally, a little background on our new Chair

Geoffrey graduated from Emmanuel in 1967, where he read Natural Sciences, specializing in Physics. After a spell with a software house, he pursued a career in management consulting with a Big 4 accounting and consulting firm, eventually becoming Managing Partner of their UK Business Assurance practice and the firm's Head of UK Marketing. In 2001, he retired to Great Ryburgh, where he immersed himself in Norfolk village life, played golf, read much and wrote. In 2009, he moved with his wife, Charlotte, to Penang, Malaysia, where he set up and ran critical thinking courses on a voluntary basis at the Penang Institute. He and Charlotte also used the opportunity to travel extensively in the Far East and to other parts of the world. During this period, Geoffrey noted with alarm the drift away from evidence-based argument in public life in the West and, on his return to the UK, resolved to set up a lecture series celebrating the pursuit of truth. This came to fruition in The Norfolk Cambridge Society Lectures. Geoffrey is a keen golfer and a member of Royal Norwich as well as Captain of Golf at the Norfolk Club.

Contacts

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