Norfolk Cambridge Society

December 2025 Newsletter

From the Chair

Since our last newsletter Simon Brickles has reluctantly resigned as Chair due to pressure of work. He remains a member of the committee. I am delighted to be taking on the role and continuing the good work of both Simon and Geoffrey before him. I would like to thank Simon for all his work over the years, including his two stints as Chair of NCS.

After completing my first degree at King's London I joined St John's College Cambridge as a postgraduate student of Chemistry in 1970. I worked as a teacher for thirty years and subsequently on government contracts and running my own business. I currently Chair the Le Paradis Memorial Appeal, a charity dedicated to the memory of soldiers massacred at Le Paradis in France in May 1940. In September this year a new monument to those killed was dedicated at the National Memorial Arboretum by HRH The Princess Royal after our successful fundraising campaign. My latest project is writing a book about memorials to US Service personnel in East Anglia. There must be something about being NCS Chair and writing books!

A brief report of our AGM held on October 2nd follows below as does my report of this year's NCS Student Awards Scheme. You will also find details of the programme for upcoming events organised by the East of England Royal Geographical Society as we continue to build links with likeminded organisations.

I wish you all a very peaceful Christmas and look forward to 2026 and another year of the NCS.

Rob Edwards
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From the Editor

The eagle-eyed among you will have spotted a change to the heading of this newsletter. With Covid a thing of the past (hopefully) I've renewed my gallivanting and can't guarantee that the newsletter will always appear in the 'correct' season. So, four times a year it still is but it may vary a bit between months.

This edition includes, Inter alia, details of Geoff Smart's book launch, information from Mu Gurbutt on past and upcoming social events and details of our Awards Scheme winners for 2025.

The NCS Lecture series goes from strength to strength - so much so that the next lecture on Thursday February 5th is already sold out and we are operating a waiting list. With an attendance of almost 500 we have moved the venue to the Cathedral. For full details of the new venue, timings and how to join the waiting list please see the item below.

Stay well and enjoy the Christmas season however you celebrate it!

Kathy Moyse
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NCS Public Lectures

Our **twenty-fourth** public lecture was held on Thursday 11th September in the Blake Studio at Norwich School. It was delivered by Professor Charles Forsdick, Drapers Professor of French at the University of Cambridge and Lead Fellow for Languages at the British Academy. His topic was ***The Essential Role of Language Skills in Building a Better World***. Among the reactions of those in the audience were the following.

- *I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the lecture on learning languages last week. I found the lecture fascinating and sat completely absorbed the entire time... It was a real pleasure to be sitting in a room with so many like-minded people who were equally transfixed by our brilliant speaker.*

- *What a great talk that was (and the questions weren't bad either). A great evening. Thank you too for your continuing selection of good speakers and topics.*

Twenty-fifth Lecture



The 25th Norfolk Cambridge Society Public Lecture will be delivered in **Norwich Cathedral from 7.15pm on Thursday 5th February** by Professor Neil Lawrence, the inaugural DeepMind Professor of Machine Learning at the University of Cambridge, Senior AI Fellow at The Alan Turing Institute and Visiting Professor of Machine Learning at the University of Sheffield. His topic will be ***How AI Works and How it will Transform our Lives***.

So far over 480 tickets have been sold and, for insurance reasons, we cannot allow the numbers attending to exceed 500. If you have yet to buy a ticket and wish to come, your best chance is to add your name to the waiting list. You can do this by visiting https://norfolkcambridgesociety.org.uk/

Tickets are priced at £15, discounted to £11 for senior citizens and to £6 for sixth formers and teachers accompanying them.

Further 2026 Lectures - dates for your diaries

Thursday 14th May 2026.
Robin Franklin, Professor of Neuroscience & Departmental Director of Research, Department of Veterinary Medicine, University of Cambridge. Lecture title ***Brains, stem cells and growing old: reversing the ravages of time"***

Thursday 17th September 2026.
Ed Balls, British broadcaster, economist, former Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and former Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. *To be interviewed by Phil Webster, former Political Editor of The Times. Title yet to be decided*.

Geoffrey Smart
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Student Awards Scheme

This year the Society organised its seventh Student Awards Scheme, designed to encourage and support sixth form and college students to apply to Cambridge University. The challenge was ***Tell us why we should give you £600***. We invited entries in any medium including video, audio, text, 3D, painting and music (modern or classical). After the closing date in late October, all entries were ranked independently by three NCS members and these rankings were aggregated into a single, agreed list. Following discussion, the top six entrants were invited for interview.

Interviews were held in mid-November and all six candidates are to be congratulated on their performance. However, in the unanimous decision reached by the panel, two candidates stood out and were awarded a top prize of £600 each. Smaller awards were made to the other four interviewees. Six applicants who did not make the cut also received a small financial award.

Our two winners were Becky Brown and Arthur Dannatt, both of Norwich School. Becky's entry comprised an original album, music and lyrics both composed by her, with an accompanying analysis of the project and her own design for the album cover. Her enthusiasm for her subject and the application required to realise such an undertaking over several months were both clear. Arthur wrote on *'The Archimedes Cattle Problem'* and was commended for his ability to see beyond the immediate application of mathematical models and the clarity of his explanations to the entirely non-mathematical panel!

We congratulate all the entrants on the quality of their submissions. Both ranking exercises – firstly of all the entries and then deciding who made the cut for the interviews – involved difficult and close-run decisions. However, in a very strong field Becky and Arthur were worthy and stand out winners.





Rob Edwards for the NCS Awards Committee

Incrementum Lunchtime Investment Group



Our investment club currently has nine members and there is room for one more. No money has to be put up by anyone. All investments are purely notional. We are a mix of retired professional investors, plus amateurs with some experience of managing their own portfolios. Members are drawn from both the Norfolk Cambridge Society and the Norfolk Club. It is great fun and a source of excellent ideas for investing. We meet every two months or so at the Norfolk Club for a couple of hours, followed by lunch. Our next two meetings will be on Tuesday 7th February and Tuesday 14th April meeting at 11.00am with lunch at 1pm.

Geoffrey Smart
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Book Group

Since the last newsletter we have met twice, once to discuss *Language City* by Ross Perlin - a study of threatened indigenous languages in New York – and secondly, this last weekend, to chew over *Cold Comfort Farm* by Stella Gibbons. The former came highly recommended by our September lecturer Charles Forsdick and, although I think it's fair to say it didn't get a thumbs up, it did provoke a great discussion around identity and our own language use. The Gibbons on the other hand was universally enjoyed and discussion again covered a wide range of topics: why has this comic novel survived when others appear very dated? What exactly is Gibbons parodying? (It turns out that the answer to this is everyone and everything!) And is she actually telling us something rather serious about child abuse below all the apparent froth?

I'm afraid I have not assembled the everything we've read list as promised. Next time hopefully!

Kathy Moyse

AGM. Held via Zoom on Tuesday October 2nd

Membership of the Committee

- Rob Edwards was confirmed as Chair
- Clare Allen was confirmed as Treasurer
- Committee members were confirmed as:

  Mu Gurbutt
  Bryan Guttridge
  Kathy Moyse
  George Shippam
  Peter Smith
  Geoffrey Smart
  Charles ffrench-Constant
  Simon Brickles

Note: Bryan Guttridge has since resigned from the Committee

Accounts

The draft Account s for the year 2024-25 were agreed by the meeting.
The financial position is healthy, with the lectures organised by Geoffrey Smart again the principal source of income. This has enabled the Society to continue to support financially a number of educational causes.

Visit to Cambridge



Four of us took the train to Cambridge on what must have been the coldest day of the year. First a visit to The Fitzwilliam Museum study room which includes the Fairhaven Collection of botanical art consisting of over 2000 paintings. You have to choose fifteen in advance which will be out on display. I am still trying to work out how a black background is produced on vellum and then with such detail as in the dandelion clocks.

In the afternoon we were welcomed to the Cory Library at the Botanic Gardens, a small area which can only accommodate up to six people. The librarian had some treasures ready for us to see: volumes of handmade paper with ragged edges and prints made from woodblocks or etchings and then hand coloured. She then brought out paintings wrapped in tissue paper, including a painting on canvas which Professor Henslow first director of the Botanic Gardens, had used to teach plant structure to his students, one of whom was Charles Darwin! We felt honoured to have seen work which rarely comes off the shelf. Can't wait to go again.

I will be arranging one or maybe two more trips in the spring, when hopefully the weather will be warmer and the Botanic Gardens looking their best. Anyone who wishes to come along let me know at the email address below.

Save the Day: The Boat Race 2026- Saturday April 4th

Once again, we will be inviting friends from the opposition to join us at The Norfolk Club to watch the Boat Race, which was first held in 1829. The Women's race is at 14.21 followed the Men's race at 15.21.

To date, Cambridge has won the Men's race 88 times and Oxford 81 with one dead heat recorded in 1877. In 1859, Cambridge sank, so we'll forget that one - though in 1912 both crews sank.

We look forward to cheering on both crews. Refreshments will be served. Further details to follow.

Mu Gurbutt
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East of England Royal Geographical Society Events Spring 2026

All held at 7.30pm Blake Studio, Norwich School, The Close, Norwich NR1 4DD (doors open 7.00pm). Free for RGS members and students, otherwise £8 in advance or £10 on the door

Thursday January 15th
Tides of Tomorrow: the future of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, confronting flood risk and climate change, Peter Doktor, Environment Agency

Bio: Peter Doktor is a Senior Project Manager overseeing the technical work of the Broadland Futures Initiative. He has been with the Environment Agency for 25 years and before then with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

Monday March 16th

Rethinking the Future of our Seas, and what you can do to help, Stephen Akester, Global Fisheries Specialist and Fisheries Adviser to World Bank

Bio: Stephen was a founding director of Macalister Elliott, the global fisheries consultants. He has advised national governments, FAO and the World Bank on fisheries in West Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia.

Register or buy tickets for both events using this link Event booking

Book Launch. *A Few Thoughts on Humanity - From Physics to People to Politics*.

Geoffrey Smart, a past chair of the Society and the instigator, organiser and chair of our public lecture series, has authored a new book entitled *A Few Thoughts on Humanity - From Physics to People to Politics*. In it he addresses many of the deepest questions we can ask about humankind: who we are; how we came to be here; what makes each of us unique in all time; the central role chance plays in shaping us and why this makes us all responsible for the state of the world. He also discusses the nature of consciousness, the degree to which other life forms have it, whether AI can acquire it, how much freedom of will we all have and the implications for responsibility, accountability and justice. Aimed at both scientists and non-scientists, in just 30,000 words, this extraordinary, compellingly written book builds a powerful, science-based case for a kinder, less judgemental and more compassionate world.

Along the way, Geoffrey explains how the laws of physics drive evolution, biochemistry, genetics, neuroscience, psychology and decision-making. He discusses how life probably began, how evolution works and how physics constrains what we and AI can ever know about the future. Over eighty academic papers are referenced in the endnotes.

The book has been reviewed during its drafting stages and after publication by several leading intellectuals, including an emeritus professor of theoretical physics from the University of Cambridge, an emeritus professor of genetics from the John Innes Centre and a lecturer in physics at Glasgow University. There were also several other reviewers. Geoffrey says that collectively they provided enormously helpful input.

Comments from those who have bought and read the book since publication include the following:

- *You develop your analysis with such clarity that even someone who knows as little science as I do can follow with ease. I found it exhilarating that, at the outset, what you emphasise is the uniqueness of each one of us as different collections of atoms.*
- *I admire the way in which, after stressing the centrality of science, you conclude by pursuing the moral and political implications of your account.*
- *I feel sure I will continue to brood about the book, meanwhile this note comes with congratulations, and with all best wishes.*
- *I found your book to be informative, interesting and fascinating. I was struck in particular, by your assertion that luck plays such an important part in our lives. I enjoyed reading it.*
- *It is a deep-thinking book to be appreciated on any level whether by scientists or ignoramuses like me.*
- *Concise, expressed with admirable clarity, relentlessly logical and highly convincing.*

Contacts

For information about the Society, events and meetings please take a look at our **website** ably maintained by Peter Smith who can be contacted at pdgsmith@hotmail.com if you would like to add anything.

https://norfolkcambridgesociety.org.uk/

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