Norfolk Cambridge Society

August 2026 Newsletter

From the Editor and the Chair on behalf of the NCS Committee

It is with considerable sadness that we have to inform NCS members of the unexpected death of Geoffrey Smart. Some of you will already know that he died in hospital at the end of June after a short illness but we are very sorry to be the bearers of such news to our wider membership.

The NCS owes so much to Geoff that it is hard to know where to begin in paying tribute to his vision for the Society. He spent endless hours ensuring that it went from being essentially moribund 10 years ago to its current secure and growing incarnation. Many of our activities including Incrementum, Viewpoints and the Student Awards Scheme began life as a glimmer in Geoff's eye and for several years he effectively ran these and any ad hoc events singlehandedly as well as producing the quarterly newsletter. He could never have done this without the support of his wife Charlotte, to whom we also owe a debt of gratitude and offer our condolences.

Without doubt Geoff's greatest legacy in terms of the NCS is the Lectures. He believed it was the duty of us all to stand up for academic rigour and truth in an era when these qualities are too often missing in public discourse. Typically, he set out to do something concrete to enable this. At the time of his death he had, by dint of charm and persistence, organised 27 lectures and persuaded the Heads of nine Cambridge Colleges, three knights of the realm, a peer and a Nobel prize winner to contribute. For nothing. The reputation of the lectures has spread way beyond the NCS to become a fixture in the cultural life of the county with over 1000 people having attended at least one lecture since the first in October 2018. That the embryo project survived for two years online during the Covid 19 Pandemic is perhaps the best testament to his determination and conviction that such a series was needed and achievable.

It was Geoff who realised he couldn't do it all on his own and who invited many of the current committee to join him in running the NCS in January 2020. His support for us was unstinting as was his eye for detail. He had already begun to hand over organisation of the lectures to Charles Ffrench-Constant (see below) and intended to officially 'retire' from this role in January 2027. His sudden loss has underlined how much we still relied on him. The Society and the lectures will continue but he will be a very hard act to follow.

From the Editor

Geoff's death came as a shock to us all and I personally will miss him a great deal. He was one of the first people I met when I moved to Norwich and through him and Charlotte and the NCS I have made some firm friends in a part of the country where I knew no one. At his funeral there was literally standing room only and four wonderful eulogies which spoke above all to the breadth of Geoff's interests, to his kindness and to his vision, not least in connection with the NCS.

Several people have already said that they would like to contribute their thoughts on Geoff to a future newsletter so my intention is to assemble these and to publish them in the December edition. Please consider this an invitation to contact me if you would like to join them with an anecdote or appreciation.

We are thinking about a permanent way to mark Geoff's contribution and would welcome suggestions from members. Please email Rob Edwards at the address at the end of the newsletter if you have any bright ideas.

Kathy Moyse ajskcm@btinternet.com

NCS Public Lectures

The twenty sixth public lecture of the Norfolk Cambridge Society was given on the 14th May by Professor Robin Franklin FRS with the title *'Brains, Stem Cells and Growing Old: Reversing the Ravages of Time'*. Regeneration- the ability to repair and replace tissue lost following damage or loss - is as Professor Franklin explained a fundamental property of many creatures in nature. The humble flatworm can, for example, completely reform itself from each bit after being cut into pieces. In humans, however, this incredible ability is lost. Professor Franklin took us through some fascinating research showing that this loss is not universal and that in some of our tissues limited regenerative capacity does remain. He explained how new discoveries in stem cell biology had revealed that this reduced capacity can be enhanced by strategies such as fasting and genetic manipulation. Will this lead to treatments to reverse the ravages of time? Not in the near future, but at the same time we learned of ongoing work to develop genetic and drug therapies that seek the prize of an extended healthy lifespan for all.

Following a vigorous question and answer session ranging over the practical and ethical issues raised by regenerative therapies, the society marked the success of the lectures since their inception in 2018 with the unveiling of a seat in the Blake Theatre at Norwich School, named for Geoffrey Smart. As acknowledged above, Geoff created what has become an iconic institution in the wider life of the county. It was therefore a fitting tribute and huge delight to unveil a seat in pole position to catch the lecturer's eye. Geoff set the standard for audiences with thoughtful and critical questions to our speakers that got straight to the key issues and left no room to hide. His untimely death only weeks after this event means that they will be greatly missed.

Charles Ffrench-Constant cffc@uea.ac.uk



Further 2026 & 2027 Lectures: dates for your diaries

Thursday 17th September 2026. *'A conversation with Ed Balls'*. Ed Balls, British broadcaster, economist, former Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and former Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer will be interviewed by **Philip Webster**, former Political Editor of *The Times*. (Sold Out. If you have tickets and cannot now attend please email Rob Edwards rob.edwards@cantab.net as we have a waiting list)

Tuesday 10th November 2026. Norwich cathedral 6.45pm - 8.30pm. Sir Richard Dearlove former head of MI6 will talk to ***'The Geopolitical Decline of Interdependence and its Implications'***. Tickets are now on sale at our website **https://norfolkcambridgesociety.org.uk**

Thursday 28th January 2027. Lord 'Chris' Smith of Finsbury, Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Provisional title ***'Why Free Speech Matters'.*** **Venue to be announced.**

Join us for the Inaugural Millennium Matriculants Social - Friday 16th October, 6-8pm. The Norfolk Club, 17 Upper King Street, Norwich NR3 1RB

We are delighted to announce our first dedicated social for alumni who matriculated from the year 2000 onwards. On Friday 16th October at The Norfolk Club, we're bringing together our more recent graduates for an evening of connection and excellent conversation.

We recognise that staying engaged with the Cambridge network can feel challenging, especially when you're building your career and establishing yourself in a new area. This social is our response - an informal, friendly space where recent alumni based in or connected to Norfolk can meet one another, share experiences, and build lasting connections within our broader Cambridge community.

Whether you're relatively new to the area, exploring what our alumni network offers, or simply looking to reconnect with Cambridge friends, there's space for everyone here. Close friends of alumni are welcome too.

We're launching this as a pilot event to gauge interest and appetite. Your attendance and feedback will help shape how we support and engage our younger alumni members going forward. We'd love to see you there - wine, drinks, and nibbles included, with plenty of time to chat and make new connections.

Click here for your free ticket https://buytickets.at/norfolkcambridgesociety/2381811

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me at marshallsevi@gmail.com

Incrementum Lunchtime Investment Group



Incrementum meets every couple of months at the Norfolk Club in Norwich. It was set up by our late, and very much-lamented colleague, Geoff Smart. With typical optimism, it was he who coined the name Incrementum, perhaps because he could not imagine that any investment we chose could do anything but increase in value!

Unlike many share clubs we do not use real money - each regular member has a nominal £60,000 to spend on up to six investments and at every meeting we are encouraged to sell one of our holdings and buy another. As well as discussing our imaginary portfolio we enjoy a good lunch and, with varying degrees of success, try to agree about what's wrong with the world and how to put it right. It is great fun and an excellent source of ideas for investing.

Incrementum regulars are drawn from both the Norfolk Cambridge Society and the Norfolk Club and we are always happy to welcome new members or anyone who would like to come and see how it works. Our meetings start at 11.am and the next three will be on:

Tuesday 13th October 2026
Tuesday 15th December 2026
Tuesday 16th February 2027

If you are interested, please contact one of us.

Chris Watkins chris.watkins66@yahoo.com or
Matthew Darroch -Thompson matthew.dt@gmail.com

Viewpoints



1, Almary Green, Norwich School. (just inside the Ethelbert Gate into the cathedral close). Thursday, 3rd September, starting at 6:45 pm (doors open at 6:30 pm). Tickets are £5 to cover room hire and refreshments. For further details email marshallsevi@gmail.com.

In July of this year, Viewpoints celebrated its first anniversary since its revival. During this time, the alumni community has gathered six times to engage in thought-provoking discussions. Our collective ability to delve deeply into nuanced subjects never fails to impress me; personally, I have left every meeting feeling intellectually challenged and with a broadened perspective.

I invite you to join me for the September session of Viewpoints, where we will explore the following subject: **To what extent are we responsible for injustices we benefit from, given that we are shaped by forces beyond our control?** This broad question touches on the privilege we inherit without choosing, the systems we are born into but did not create, and the gap between personal responsibility and structural complicity. To provide a practical edge, we will ground our exploration in specific case studies throughout the evening.

The discussion will also be dedicated to Geoffrey Smart, the founder of Viewpoints, (originally Socratics) who until recently organised our lecture series and who earlier this year published his book *A Few Thoughts on Humanity: From Physics to People to Politics*. Several prominent themes from Geoffrey's thinking and writing will undoubtedly surface, enriched by anecdotal illustrations of this complex subject.

I hope you can join us for this session. Please also get in touch if you would like to be included in our email circulation for future meetings and topics.

Subjects we have discussed over the past year are:

- Should we judge other people, both historic and contemporary, and if so, by what standards?
- Should the state have the power to deprive individuals of liberty, and if so, under what conditions?
- If citizens are thriving, can the absence of democracy be justified
- Is religion good or bad for society's moral health
- Is wealth redistribution fair?
- Can we ever be obliged to disobey the law?

Book Group

We were once again lucky to hold our in-person summer meeting on a glorious (too hot?) day to discuss *The Bell* by Iris Murdoch, originally published in 1958.

Although quite dated in some respects, our discussion of the novel included Murdoch's treatment of homosexuality, coercive relationships, mental health and the role of the Church and whether or not it can be seen as a gothic novel. Her subtly drawn characters and acerbic social observation were appreciated by all and we also wondered whether she would even have recognised some of the issues we discussed as issues. She certainly got a thumbs up for her bravura writing and of all the texts we have read (44 and counting) this was probably the one that produced the greatest diversity of opinions about what the author was actually trying to do.

Our next text is *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self* by Claire Tomalin.

Kathy Moyse

East of England Royal Geographical Society Events Autumn 2026

NCS members are very welcome to join us at any of these upcoming events. Please register in advance at https://www.rgs.org/events/upcoming-events?filter=east-1002

Thursday October 15th in the Blake Studio, Norwich School 7pm for 7.30pm
Guardians of the Forest: Protecting Gorillas in a Changing Africa. An illustrated talk by Jillian Miller, Executive Director of The Gorilla Organization, which works to protect gorillas in their natural habitat through community-led conservation. This event offers a rare insight into the people, places and fieldwork behind gorilla conservation, and into the hopeful, complex work of safeguarding one of Africa's most iconic species for future generations.

Thursday November 5th in the Blake Studio, Norwich School 7pm for 7.30pm
***Sustainable Aviation: Reducing the Climate Impact*.** An illustrated talk by Dr Andy Jefferson. Andy has over 30 years' experience in tackling strategic and operational challenges across the UK aviation industry by stepping up and adapting to the sustainability challenges. Delivering net zero aviation by 2050 is one of climate change's most challenging and complex problems. Recognising growing scientific certainty about aviation's full impact on the climate necessitates refining and optimising activities and scaling up innovative solutions. Dr Jefferson's insights offer an enlightened way forward.

Monday November 23rd in the Blake Studio, Norwich School 5pm. ***Norwich and Norfolk schools micro lectures***. Back by popular demand for a fifth successive year. Shortlisted pupils from local schools present short talks reflecting a broad range of critical geographical issues. Please come and support, to hear the authentic voice of today's youth.

Wednesday November 25th at the Recital Hall, The Leys School, Cambridge. ***Mount Everest and Beyond: Looking Back on Three Decades of Himalayan Travel and Exploration*.** An illustrated talk with Rebecca Stephens MBE. Rebecca is Chair of the Mt Everest Foundation and the first British woman to climb Mount Everest and the Seven Summits. She will consider how the increase in independent and organised travel to the Himalaya has impacted its peoples and its environment, using her first-hand experience to share the opportunities and challenges facing these remote regions.

Tuesday December 8th at the Blake Studio, Norwich School 7pm for 7.30pm. ***The Path More Travelled: The Secret Geography of Britain's Footpath.*** An illustrated talk by Nicholas Crane.

This is our annual social event with mulled wine and finger food. Nicholas Crane will explore Britain's footpaths through the ages, from the Age of Ice 12,000 years ago to the Modern Era of national trails and city pavements, including a homing-in on the ancient footpaths of East Anglia. Nick is a former President of the Royal Geographical Society, as well as a BBC presenter and well-known author. His travels include a solo 10,000-kilometre mountain-walk across Europe, and bicycle rides across the Himalayas and the Gobi Desert.

James Firebrace
Chair. Royal Geographical Society East Anglia

Contacts

Please take a look at our **website** https://norfolkcambridgesociety.org.uk/ for more information about the society, events and meetings. Thanks to Peter Smith for ably maintaining this. If you have something to add he can be contacted at pdgsmith@hotmail.com

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