

NORTHUMBRIAN CAMBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

President: Prof. Heather Cordell

Hon. Secretary: Em.Prof. Gilbert Cockton

AGM and lecture



Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle
Wednesday 30 September
2026 6.00-9.00

After the AGM Martin Farr will speak on "The UK-US Special Relationship".

Martin Farr is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary British History at Newcastle University. His research interests encompass 20th century British politics and public life, biography, political parties, elections, government, and media, but he is particularly interested in British foreign relations since the First World War. He regularly gives public lectures and talks and often speaks at schools and colleges. He is also involved in university recruitment, outreach, widening participation activities, and public engagement, including broadcasting and writing on current affairs.

1.



Visit to Spadeadam

Friday 16 October 2026

Spadeadam Research and Development carries out rarely available trials and courses in a controlled and secure 'real-life' environment. Large scale test facilities include multiple test pads, vessels and demonstration areas, which can be tailored to meet specific customer requirements and support a unique range of test scenarios for components, products, techniques, and processes from design through to analysis and recommendations.

RAF Spadeadam is the largest RAF station in England covering 9,600 acres on the border between Northumberland and Cumberland. It hosts a major industrial research and hazard testing facility for UK and NATO forces. Det Norske Veritas (DNV), which is owned by a Norwegian foundation, operate the test facilities and associated activities. Spadeadam was originally leased by British Gas R&D in 1977 for testing pipe sections and other materials. Spadeadam became part of DNV in 2013.

This will be a unique NCA visit with demonstrations of the explosion chamber, a large jet fire, and a mis-aligned pipe-flange. There will also be a welcome with refreshments, two talks, and lunch.



Due to the nature of the establishment and the demonstrations, there are security and safety requirements. All attendees must be registered at least two weeks before our visit and photo identification will be required. We will need to be at the RAF security gate before 10:00 as 15 to 30 minutes need to be allowed for everyone to enter. UK nationals can present their passport or driving licence with photograph. Other nationals can only present their passports. Detailed instructions on access, security and safety will be sent on provisional registration.



No payment is required. DNV will kindly provide refreshments, lunch and on-site transport. The deadline for bookings is Monday 28 September 2026.

Further details can be found on <https://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/group/northumbrian-cambridge-association>



Late Summer Barbecue

Saturday 29 August 2026 3.00 - 7.00 pm

The NCA will be holding a late summer barbecue at the Ovingham home of NCA president, Heather Cordell.

Burgers, sausages and rolls (with accompanying condiments and salads/side dishes) and drinks will be provided, along with vegetarian alternatives. Anyone wishing to bring more "exotic" items, such as fish, chicken, or steak, to barbecue for their own consumption is very welcome to do so.

Contributions of salads/side dishes/desserts to share would also be very welcome (although not mandatory).

Members wishing to attend are requested to contribute £10 towards the cost of the event.

Christmas lunch: Save the date



We are looking at **Friday 4th December** as the most likely date for our Christmas lunch. We are still discussing possible venues and if you have any suggestions for a suitable restaurant, please let us know. Further details will be circulated once the venue has been agreed and the menu options finalised.



Past events

Annual dinner, Blackfriars

Friday 24 April 2026

Following the success of our 95th Anniversary Dinner last year, we returned to the atmospheric Blackfriars for our annual dinner. The menu was as good as was expected, conversations flowed, and an enjoyable time was had by all.

Visit to Ushaw Historic House, Chapel and Gardens



Saturday 27 June 2026

Members of the Association visited Ushaw Historic House, Chapel and Gardens on Saturday 27 June. The visit included a guided tour of the house and its magnificent chapels, containing decorative works by four generations of the Pugin family.

After lunch, we visited the extraordinary library for a curated session, which gave us an opportunity to see some of the many rare and beautiful books and documents in the collection. The library houses more than 50,000 volumes, including unique early manuscripts such as the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493 and a first edition of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Interestingly, only ten volumes have been digitised.



Tyne Valley walk May 30 2026



A small group of NCA members enjoyed the sunshine and fresh air in the beautiful Tyne Valley on a circular walk which began and ended in the village of Ovingham.

NCA Committee activities

The NCA Committee met in February, March and May.

Gilbert Cockton has continued to liaise with Cambridge Development and Alumni Relations (CUDAR) and all our on-line content is now on their website (<https://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/group/northumbrian-cambridge-association>).

Beatrice Ollerenshaw has agreed to stand to take over from Gilbert Cockton as NCA Secretary and will therefore in due course take over the administration of the email list.

NCA President Heather Cordell, along with committee members Andrew Young and Sue Austin entertained a small party of 'Jesus Ambassadors' and the college Outreach Officer on 24 March. A number of committee members also attended a Jesus, Trinity and Clare alumni event held at Bank House in Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, on 11 June.

4.

Major donation for Cambridge University

The University of Cambridge has received US \$34.5 million (around £26 million) from philanthropist K. Lisa Yang to support research aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of autistic people and their families. The University was selected for this gift because of its world-class Autism Research Centre, which was founded nearly 30 years ago, and this donation is one of the largest ever philanthropic gifts for autism research to a UK university.

The University will join eight other research centres based at Harvard University and MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, which together form the Yang Tan Collective, created to focus research into human health, disease, and environmental challenges. The money will be used to create The K. Lisa Yang Centre for Autism Research at Cambridge and an Autism Clinical Centre, to be based in the new Cambridge Children's Hospital, which is expected to be completed in 2030. The donation is the largest single philanthropic gift to the University of Cambridge's School of Clinical Medicine since its formation in 1976, reinforcing the School's position as the UK's top-ranked institution for Clinical Medicine in *Times Higher Education's* most recent analysis of the Research Excellence Framework. The new centres will be part of a new Autism Research Institute, headed by Professor Sir Simon Baron Cohen (pictured) who anticipates that, by bringing together the world's foremost



experts in autism research, it will be able to "translate bold new ideas more quickly into real-world impact, delivering tangible benefits that can significantly improve the quality of life for autistic people".

Remembering James Wright



Victoria Crowe, Portrait of James Robertson Graeme Wright, Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle upon Tyne (1992–2000), Oil on canvas.

It was with great sadness that we learnt that the distinguished classicist and former President of the Northumbrian Cambridge Association James Wright had died on 30 May 2026 after a very brief illness.

James Wright was born in June 1939 and attended Inverness Royal Academy and the High School of Dundee, before reading Classics as a Major Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, where he won various prizes. He then taught Latin at the University of Edinburgh, before returning to Cambridge in 1978 as a Fellow of St Catharine's, where he became Director of Studies in Classics and served as Bursar. From 1987 to 1991 he was also Secretary-General of the Faculties for The University of Cambridge.

James Wright moved to Newcastle University as Vice-Chancellor in 1991. His period at Newcastle was marked by significant growth and development for the University. Paying tribute to James Wright's 'thoughtful leadership, intellectual excellence and genuine care for people', Professor Chris Day, Vice-Chancellor and President of Newcastle University, said: "He touched the lives of many across our University community and beyond, and he will be remembered with great respect and fondness"

James Wright devoted much of his retirement to supporting national charities, and served as a Trustee of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and as Chair of Age Concern England and Age Scotland. In recognition of his outstanding services to higher education, he was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2001

James Wright: A personal tribute

Peter Cleland writes: Helen and I first met James when we joined the Northumbrian Wine and Food Society over 20 years ago. We became good friends, helped by living close to each other in Gosforth.

James was a polymath with a great intellectual enthusiasm. He was a renowned authority on wine (particularly North Rhone wine). Helen regards him as her "wine mentor" and one of his pleasures was teaching people about wine. He spent many holidays in France with his wife Jenny as well as taking walking holidays with his good friend Bill Walker. He advised us on two excellent holidays in France, with suggestions of a route and places to stay with Michelin star meals

He was also an excellent cook. Each course would have a different accompanying wine and the food

would be elegantly presented. It was therefore with considerable apprehension when we first reciprocated a dinner invitation. However we later came to realise that he would be more than happy with cottage pie, provided there was an “interesting” wine. I struck a deal with him that if I caught a salmon, he would cook it. Now catching a salmon is difficult these days and few can be kept. However eventually I caught one and we had an excellent dinner.

James was widely read and had a great enthusiasm for every subject. He enjoyed debate and nearly always came out on top. He loved imparting knowledge and I understand he was an excellent teacher as well as an outstanding committee member and chair.

I remember asking him once during the pandemic whether he had read *The Plague* by Albert Camus. He said he had recently read it for the third time in the original French!



He was conservative in his views and, perhaps not surprisingly, anti ‘woke’; for a Francophile he was, however, surprisingly pro Brexit and we had many interesting discussions about this subject.

He will be sadly missed by his large circle of friends in Newcastle and Cambridge as well as by ex colleagues and generations of students.

Walking the Cape Wrath trail

In May 2025 NCA Committee Member Allan Colver walked the Cape Wrath Trail, which is said to be the most difficult trail in Britain. This is his account of his twenty-two day journey.

I knew that the terrain is very rough and would be very difficult in poor weather with mud and rain; but I was used to the terrain because I had had many walking holidays in Northwest Scotland. As I was now seventy-six, I also knew that I needed to make the trip as safe and easy as possible. So, although I had to carry a tent and wild camp half of the days, whenever possible I stayed in a Bed and Breakfast, with a shower, food and a good sleep. Luckily, I was blessed with fine, dry weather.



There is no official path and no signposts; you have to walk from Fort William to Cape Wrath, a journey of between 230 and 280 miles depending on the route chosen. You do not have to climb over mountain summits but there are many high passes and in the twenty two days I took to complete it I ascended 49,00 feet.

For those who know the region, the trail passes from Fort William through Knoydart, up to Torridon and then Assynt before going via Sandwood Bay to Cape Wrath. Cape Wrath is a military zone with live firing from on land and sea – so you have to check in advance that no military action is planned for the days you expect to be there.

To prepare, I undertook two three-day walking trips with camping to test out equipment and increase fitness. I also went to the gym twice a week for three months. I took a satellite Garmin GPS system so was in no danger of being lost; and an emergency satellite beacon system.

The scenery in the northwest of Scotland is magnificent and I took many photographs on the way. Here are a few of them.



Loch Hourn looking towards Ladhair Beinn on Knoydart

On a trip like this, unexpected events happen. At one Bed and Breakfast to which I had posted supplies, another man who had also sent supplies had failed to appear. It later transpired that he had died of a heart attack in Fort William before starting his walk.



At Glenfinnan, near to where Bonnie Prince Charlie started his Jacobite Rising in 1745, is the Harry Potter viaduct.



Camping high up at 2300 feet, just below the three-buttressed Coire Mhic Fhearchair of the mountain Beinn Eighe in Torridon



There were some bothies along the way. I stayed in one, but it was crowded and smelly. I camped outside this bothy – Knockdamph.

As I approached Sandwood Bay I met a walker out for the day who told me he had been born in the lighthouse at Cape Wrath. His parents left when he was only three months old, thinking it no place for a baby. He had never visited the lighthouse since.



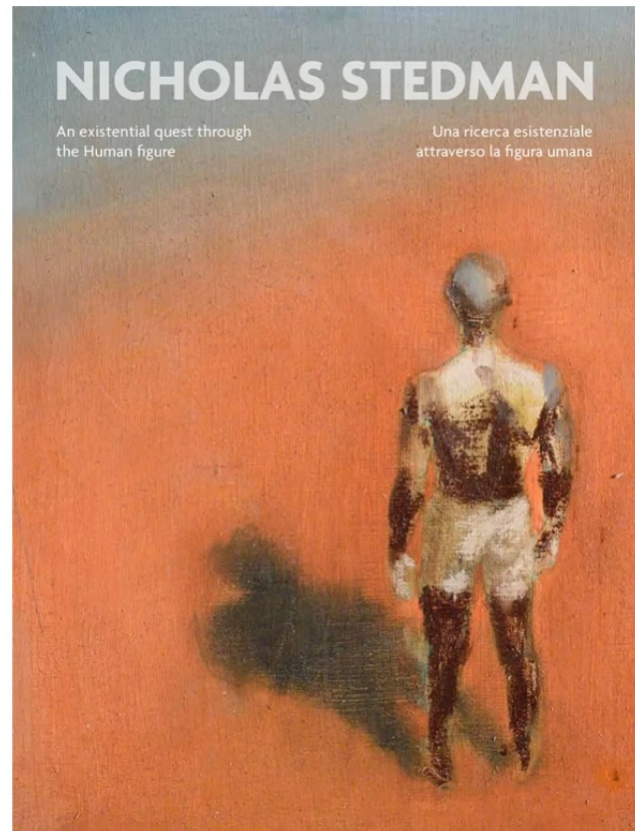
Sandwood Bay, with its famous Am Buachaille sea stack

At Cape Wrath it was so windy that the ferry that would take me to Durness was not running and would not do so for at least three days. So, I had an unexpected extra twenty miles to walk to reach Durness and its youth hostel.



The end of the trail

Nicholas Stedman: An existential quest through the human figure



A monograph about the work of the Palermo-based painter Nicholas Stedman has just been published. Stedman, who was born in Portsmouth in 1953, studied natural sciences at Queen's College Cambridge from 1971 to 1974. While there, he took part in a group exhibition at Kettle's Yard, followed by a show at King's College, where he showed paintings alongside work by future filmmaker Julien Temple. After graduating, he moved to Paris to undertake scientific research. During this time he also pursued his artistic development, studying at the Paris municipal art school (Place des Vosges), and the École des Beaux-Arts. He also studied under the lyrical abstractionist Zao Wou-Ki at the Arts Décoratifs. Stedman began his professional artistic career in 1979 and lived in Paris until 2004 before relocating to Sicily.

Stedman's work has been exhibited in numerous solo shows, including ten in Paris, as well as in Rome, Toulouse, and Verona. He has participated in several group exhibitions across France, and his paintings are held in public and private collections, including Air France Industries and the Mairie de Vitry-sur-Seine. His works have also appeared on book covers, including *The Art of Falling* by Kim Moore (2015) and the Cambridge University Press textbook *Health and Physical Education*.

"To immerse yourself in the work of Nicholas Stedman is to feel both the softness of a weightless, floating body and the vertigo of an infinite descent."

The monograph, which is edited by Julia Rajacic and published by Jardino Editions (ISBN: 979-12-986020-0-7) can be read online via the artist's website (<https://www.nicholasstedman.com/book>). It is also possible to purchase a hardback copy of the book directly from the artist. .

QS World University Rankings 2027

The University of Cambridge has come sixth globally in the QS World University Rankings 2027. Cambridge achieved a perfect score of 100 for employment outcomes and academic reputation, reflecting the University's global standing amongst employers and the academic community. The result builds on Cambridge's strong performance in The Complete University Guide 2027, where 28 subjects ranked first in the UK.

Cambridge man gets top job

Andrew Murray Burnham (Fitzwilliam 1988-1991) has been appointed Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and First Lord of the Treasury.

Around the region

Current and forthcoming exhibitions in the North East of England that NCA members may enjoy.

Laing Art Gallery

Sublime Landscapes

Watercolours and prints from the Laing Art Gallery's collection of landscape art from the 18th to the 21st Centuries. Until 5 December 2026

Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Poetry

The first large-scale exhibition to explore the connections between Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry. 17 October 2026 - 13 February 2027

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Chitra Ganesh Journey to the Great Below

The first major UK show of work by the American multi-media artist Chitra Ganesh. 4 July 2026 – 17 January 2027

Tish Murtha & Kuba Ryniewicz

A landmark exhibition of work by documentary photographer Tish Murtha, alongside newly commissioned work by Newcastle-based artist Kuba Ryniewicz. 4 July 2026 – 4 April 2027

Keiken Seeds, Stones, and Future Bones

Named after the Japanese word for "experience", Keiken is an artists' collective that creates immersive environments using installations, film, performance, and games. 19 September 2026 - 17 January 2027

Baltic Open Submission 2026

Paintings, sculpture, photography, video and more by artists, makers, self-taught creatives and hobbyists based in the North East of England. 19 September 2026 - 4 April 2027

The Hatton Gallery

The Potter's Canvas: Ceramics and Painting in the 20th Century

An exhibition examining how the worlds of ceramics and painting have shaped each other. September 2026 - 16 January 2027

The Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland

Tom McGuinness: Out of the Darkness

Centenary exhibition of work by leading pitman painter. Until 31 December 2026

South Shields Museum & Art Gallery



Mignard: The Power of Posing

A National Gallery Masterpiece Tour exhibition centred around Pierre Mignard's painting *The Marquise de Seignela*. Mignard was one of seventeenth-century France's most celebrated portrait painters, who communicated his sitters' stories with consummate skill. 29 August - 8 November

MIMA, Middlesbrough

Moxie: Generation Alpha Curates the Middlesbrough Collection

Nine artworks from the Middlesbrough Collection selected by young people from the MIMA Saturday Club. A QR code alongside each work links to a new artwork made by one of the group in response to the piece selected.

Turner Prize 2026

The annual Turner Prize, organised by Tate, showcases and celebrates the most exciting new developments in British art. It aims to promote public debate around new developments in contemporary British art. It is named for the nineteenth-century artist JMW Turner, who was innovative and controversial in his own day. Each year the Turner Prize jury shortlist four artists for an outstanding exhibition or other presentation.

This year, the work of the four artists short-listed for the prize will be showcased at MIMA.

26 September 2026 – 28 March 2027

Membership subscriptions

Subscriptions are due on 1 March each year, but a number of subscriptions are overdue. If you have not yet paid, please make a payment of £10 to the following account. This is also the account for all event bookings.

Account: Northumbrian Cambridge Association
Lloyds Bank Sort Code: 30 98 97
Account number: 87980962

Contributions wanted

If you have any news or interesting stories that you would like to share via this newsletter, please get in touch.