From the Chair

Dear Fellow Alumni,

I hope you have all managed to remain virus-free and are keeping well through these difficult times. The new government guidelines on coronavirus, operating from 4 July, signalled some relaxation of the rules but clearly these may need to tighten again if infections increase significantly. In the circumstances, we have taken the view that it is too early yet to plan for a resumption of physical gatherings.

However, I am pleased to announce that we are restarting the quarterly Norfolk Cambridge Society Lectures online, from September onwards. The first will be Professor Richard Harvey’s lecture on “Artificial Intelligence - How Much is it Likely to Impact Your Life?”, originally scheduled for April but now to be broadcast live on **Thursday 24 September, from 6.30pm to 8.00 pm**. More details elsewhere in this newsletter.

For those in search of even more intellectual stimulation, this surely is an excellent time to reach out and make new friends and acquaintances online across the county. You don’t even have to leave your house! We already have a lively philosophy group and book group operating, both welcoming new members. We have also just set up two more online discussion groups, one on current affairs and the other to discuss more whimsical matters. More details later in this newsletter. All alumni and partners are welcome to join, as are others of like mind. Indeed, if anyone wishes to set up a new group on any topic, under the NCS banner, please feel free to contact me at geoffreyjnsmart@gmail.com  **We are especially looking to expand the number of people of working age who get involved with us.**

I wish you continued good health, good fortune and plenty of intellectual stimulation throughout this crisis and beyond.

Best wishes to you all
Geoffrey

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Geoffrey Smart
Chair
From the editor

May I add my good wishes at what is for many people a very trying time but for others a pause in an over busy life. I’m anxious that the newsletter is not only a vehicle for the committee to tell you about what we’ve been doing on your behalf but that it should also provide a forum for you to let other members know what you’ve been up to. I would like to run a selection of ‘Lockdown Musings’ from members in the next edition (due out in October) so whether you have just been taking timeout to read more or have completely redecorated your house please let me know! You may have been caring for a family member or have got to know your neighbours better. Our experiences have been so individual but at the same time such a shared moment in the life of our country that it would be nice to mark it here if possible. Please send contributions to me at ajskcm@btinternet.com anytime until September 26th. Stay well, Kathy.

Seventh NCS Lecture - Artificial Intelligence

The Seventh Norfolk Cambridge Society Lecture, which was to have been given by Professor Richard Harvey in April, will now take place as a webinar from 6.30pm to 8.00pm on Thursday 24 September. The title of his talk will be *Artificial Intelligence - How Much is it Likely to Impact Your Life?*

This should be a fascinating lecture of wide interest to people of all ages, particularly those facing career choices. Richard Harvey is Professor of Computing Sciences at the University of East Anglia and IT Livery Company Professor of Information Technology at Gresham College, London. He undertakes research in a wide variety of highly technical fields related to AI and has advised many start-up companies in this field. He also holds several posts in the Vice-Chancellor’s Office at the University of East Anglia, including Academic Director for Admissions and Academic Director of Internationalisation.

*As this is our first online lecture, we are making it available free to schools and students across Norfolk.*

*However, we are asking all adults who choose to watch it to make a contribution of just £5 each.* This will not only help to cover Norfolk Cambridge Society costs but, more importantly, help keep our NCS Student Awards going in 2021. They offer three £500 prizes each year for the best submissions received on the subject of “*The problem I should most like to help solve, or the change for the better I should most like to initiate, using my university education*”. In the past, these awards have been financed entirely by the proceeds from the Norfolk Cambridge Society Lectures.

Many alumni already have credit balances with the Society as a result of their having already paid for tickets for the cancelled April lecture. These credit balances can, of course, be used in whole or in part as payment for the webinar.

Please email geoffreyjnsmart@gmail.com for details of how to pay and how to access the webinar via Zoom.
NCS Discussion Groups

For those of you wishing to make interesting new friends and acquaintances across the county, whether alumni or others of like mind, now could hardly be a better time. With Zoom and other online meeting facilities so readily to hand and so easy to use, it's not even necessary to leave the house. You can just join one of our discussion groups. Or set up a new one!

We already have a lively monthly philosophy group, which meets on the second Thursday of each month from 6pm to 8pm. Until March we met in the Music Room at Norwich School. Our first meeting by Zoom was in June. Over the past year, we have discussed a wide range of topics, from “This House does not believe in free will”, a Cambridge Union-style debate held last July, to “The role of morality in international relations” and “The philosophy of Karl Popper”. We are, on the whole, not professional philosophers but we do have an interest in discussing some of the deeper questions affecting humanity. The group's name has been a subject for discussion recently and, after a brief transition through “NCS Thinkers” we have now settled on “NCS Socratics”. Its strap-line is “Stimulating discussions on things that matter – over a glass of wine.”

We have also recently set up two new discussion groups. The first, NCS Sceptics, is a current affairs group and the second, NCS Symposiasts, provides an opportunity to discuss more whimsical matters. The first meeting of NCS Symposiasts was in June, when we discussed “If people could choose their country of birth, which country, other than Britain, would you recommend they choose. And why?” Future NCS Symposiasts meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of every month from 6pm to 8pm. Meetings of NCS Sceptics, at which we will discuss a selection of matters topical at the time in the media, will alternate with meetings of the NCS Socratics on the second Thursday of the month, also between 6pm and 8pm. Contact Geoffrey Smart if you would like to try out any of these groups. Anyone is welcome to suggest a topic and volunteer to chair a meeting.

Check with our website https://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/group/norfolk-cambridge-society for details of topics and possible changes of date.

We would welcome anyone setting up a new discussion group, whether online or, as soon as circumstances allow, entailing physical meetings. (It is not necessary to use a name of Greek origin!) We would particularly like to welcome more people of working age. So, whether you would like to set up a group to discuss music, stocks and shares, travel, history, art, drama, opera, rugby or anything else, please contact Geoffrey Smart. If you wish to make a small charge to cover Zoom costs or, when appropriate, the costs of hiring a room or serving refreshments, the Society can help with monitoring payments. The only requirement is that all groups aim to break even, or make a surplus for the Society.
Cultural events

Sadly, it will not be possible to reschedule Mu Gurbett’s varied programme of events for this summer. She has however been busy on our account and suggests the following online exhibitions for our delectation!

- Cranach: Artist and Innovator. Compton Verney, Warwickshire at comptonverney.org.uk. The exhibition explores the legacy of Lucas Cranach the Elder and includes his portraits of German nobility together with modern and contemporary works inspired by him.
- Andy Warhol. Tate Modern, London. Tate.org.uk. A seven minute video with the exhibition curators.
- Linderism. Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge. kettlesyard.co.uk. A video tour with the curator looking at Linder’s photo-montages and other of her works.

I can also highly recommend ‘Art Deco by the Sea’ at the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts at UEA, re-opening on July 7th with timed and pre-ticketed entry which will run until September 20th. It is an exceptional collection of artefacts from the period which really shows how Norfolk was shaped as a holiday destination almost 100 years ago.

Book club

The inaugural meeting met via Zoom on June 16th when seven of us discussed Penelope Lively’s Booker prize winning novel Moon Tiger. The varied hinterlands of the participants led to an extremely eclectic and thought-provoking consideration of theme and character. On a personal note, having taught the text at A Level for several years it was fascinating for me to see what a different take a group of ‘mature’ adults brought to it by contrast with seventeen and eighteen year olds.

Our next meeting will be on Thursday July 16th between 6 and 7.30pm also on Zoom. We will be discussing Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind by Yuval Noah Harari which is available in book form and on Kindle. All members are invited to suggest a book (fiction or non-fiction) and to lead ‘their’ session if they are comfortable with this. If you would like to give it a go, contact me at ajskm@btinternet.com. The online format works so well for this that we’re seriously considering staying online even when we don’t need to!

Annual General Meeting

The 2020 AGM will take place on line, using Zoom, from 7pm on Wednesday 16th September. It’s a great pity we can’t get together as in previous years but this shouldn’t stop the committee engaging with you and answering your questions. You will need to register with the society’s Secretary, Peter Smith, pdgsmith@hotmail.com in order to attend and to be sent a Zoom link. We do hope to see many of you there. Unfortunately, none of the usual tea and cake will be on offer!

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