

Somewhat more balmy weather for February's meeting though we still needed the heating!! For our talk this month, Gordon MacKenzie described his Astrophotography Workflow using PixInsight. He uses a number of advanced features of the software which helps produce superior results than the automatic processes in, say MaximDL.

He showed how the workflow is split into a number of stages: basic calibration and registration, stacking, linear processing, splitting the stars from the background nebulosity, colour combination and final non-linear processing. His main difference from the usual workflow is to split the stars from the nebulosity. This allows different colour enhancement of the stars and the nebulosity giving a more natural appearance with no artefacts around the stars.

He was quite candid about the amount of processing work that is required to produce first class results. Typically a 5 hour total exposure could take 5 hours to process!

He also mentioned the new class of AI processing programs (like the Topaz suite) that are becoming useful for the astrophotographer, though it will be a little while before they can take over this sort of workflow. Many thanks to Gordon for his insight into the arcane reaches of astrophotography.

Following the break we conducted the Annual General Meeting. Bud, as Treasurer, gave the financial report which is still very healthy. The Chair and Treasurer were re-elected following nominations from the floor.

Terry then gave a short description of the Anne Hodgson Memorial Fund. Anne was one of the founder members of CADAS and the fund was set up from the gain of selling land that was originally earmarked for the CADAS observatory. It provides small grants to individuals, school and organisations through the Somerset Community Foundation. Terry has taken over from Bob Mizon as trustee and another trustee was sought. Bud has volunteered and he knew Anne.

We finished off with some images from Bud (the moon, inevitably), Ken (some nebulae) and Terry (some sunspots).

## **Next Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> March**

Tim Wetherell - Drawing Astronomical Objects

## Planets

Venus is now close to the sun and very low at start of morning Civil Twilight. That's pretty much it for Venus now until the end of October when it will be low in the evening sky. It will be bright in the West around Christmas so expect the inevitable Star of Bethlehem questions!

Venus and Mars are very close together for the next few days and in the same binocular field of view. Due south at about 10:45 but **be really careful to keep away from the sun**. Mars is still too close to the sun to see in the early morning.

Mercury is near the sun but will appear in the evening mid March for its best apparition this year. It'll be at its brightest around March 17<sup>th</sup>, low in the west at around 19:00. It'll then get a bit higher but fade.

Saturn is lost in the evening twilight and won't return to the morning sky until the end of May.

Jupiter is getting smaller but still dominates the evening sky. It'll hang around until early May.

Uranus (near Jupiter) is visible in telescopes and binoculars.

Neptune is now too low to be visible even in a small telescope.

Comet 12/P Pons-Brookes may be visible in binoculars above Pegasus in the west. It'll be close to Delta Andromedae on 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> March. It has had a number of episodes of brightening already so may play ball!

## Outreach

Redstart School, Chard

Tuesday 30th January 2024

Inevitable cloud but Ken spotted Jupiter through a brief break so we were able to align on it and keep it in view even through quite thick clouds. Some saw just a faint disk but some saw the belts and moons as the cloud thinned briefly.

Stockland Primary

Monday 5th February

Completely cloudy here which was a great pity as they have a South / South West facing field with no nearby lights except for (Stockland Hill transmitter!). We gave a demo of telescopes and what we could have seen in the hall and nearly got quite good at it by the end!

Manor Court, Chard

I've suggested 5<sup>th</sup> / 6<sup>th</sup> December when Venus, Saturn and Jupiter will be joined by a nice crescent moon.

Chard School have asked if one of us can do a guest assembly on either Tuesday 14th May, or Tuesday 11th June - 3:15 pm to 3:30 pm. Peter has volunteered and is chasing Chard School.

## Anne Dodgson Memorial Fund

The fund was set up in 2015 in memory of Anne Dodgson who, before her untimely death, made many significant contributions to the promotion of astronomy in Somerset and was instrumental in the founding of the Crewkerne and District Astronomical Society (CADAS). A limited number of small grants (around £250) are available from this fund to help people of all ages across Somerset access science education through astronomy, and applications are now invited from community groups and charities.

Schools may also apply, via their Parent Teacher Association (or equivalent organisation), but in general we would expect to see a matched contribution towards these projects. We will only consider applications for projects which benefit people living in the county of Somerset (ie. Mendip, Sedgemoor, West Somerset, Taunton Deane and South Somerset).

The fund was set up with money from the sale of the land earmarked for the observatory. Trustees were Ron Westmass and Bob Mizon. I've taken over Bob's position. Ron wants to retire in the next year or so and therefore the Fund needs to appoint a new Trustee.

The Fund is administered by Somerset Community Foundation and is **not** an independent charity (so no reporting requirements, etc). The trustees **are** responsible for authorising grants, though SCF do the identification and selection of possible recipients.

It will probably be a couple of e-mail "meetings" per year.