As seems usual, the January meeting was greeted with some dreadful weather with heavy rain leading to flooding across the Levels. The roads were relatively clear on Wednesday evening, though, which coincided with Bud's talk on Albert Einstein (weak pun intended :-).

In Bud's usual amusing and informative way, he described Einstein's family and early years in Germany leading up to his move to Zurich and becoming a clerk in the Patent Office. He also worked part time on his PhD and other scientific research culminating in the *Annus Mirabilis* of 1905 when he released 4 groundbreaking papers fundamental to modern physics. This included one on the Photoelectric Effect (which got him the Nobel prize) another on the Special Theory of Relativity and also one which introduced mass-energy equivalence, expressed as the famous $E=mc^2$.

Bud didn't forget about Einstein's rather colourful private life, though. He was married twice but had many (probably at least 10) mistresses. Despite these other attractions in his life, he continued with important scientific work, not least the General Theory of Relativity in 1915 which made him a scientific "rock star". While touring the US in 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany and Einstein, probably wisely, stayed in the US. He co-wrote a letter to President Roosevelt on the eve of World War II warning of the possibility of the Nazis developing a bomb, based on his $E=mc^2$ concept. This led to the Manhattan project and the atomic bomb. Einstein, as a pacifist, was considered a security risk and did not work on the project, though.

As ever, a well delivered talk on one of the most interesting scientists that ever lived.

After the break, Terry had some images of Jupiter and some southern objects while Ian had some of the moon taken with his camera phone (while walking the dog!). Terry then ran through the immediate Upcoming Events (see below) and also the Highlights for 2026 (also below).

Next month's meeting will be on February 18th and the speaker will be Brian Fraser (of Somerset Levels AS) on The Exploration of Mars. This will be followed by a (short!) Annual General Meeting, including the Treasurer's Report. Annual subscriptions will be due next month so please bring along a £20 note for your membership☺. We hope to see you all there - without all the floodwater, I hope.

Upcoming Events

Planets

Mercury, Venus & Mars are all the other side of the Sun. Mercury and Venus will appear low in the west after sunset from about 5th February. Thin crescent moon between Venus & Mercury 18th 18:00 (date of next meeting). Mars won't reappear (in the morning sky) until July.

Jupiter was at opposition is on 10th January and now rises before sunset and sets just before sunrise. There are numerous transits of its moons.

Saturn is starting to get lower in the evening sky from night to night. It's all alone below Pegasus.

Uranus is still below the Pleiades and should be visible in binoculars.

Neptune is only visible in a telescope. It's getting closer to Saturn again They are about 2½ degrees apart at the moment and closing to less than 1 degree by 20th February.

All the planets (except Mars) and the Moon will be visible at the same time from 13th to 20th February (when Mercury disappears).

The Moon occults the North part of the Pleiades 27th January 21h-00h

Upcoming Meetings

Feb 18 Brian Fraser *Exploration of Mars*
Mar 18 John Stapleton *Amateur Astronomy: Why do we do it?*
Apr 15 David Strange *Norman Lockyer*
May 20 Ask the Panel

Events

Manor Court Friday 23rd January 2026

Redstart School Thursday 29th January 2026

2026 Astronomical Highlights

Total solar eclipse late afternoon of the 12th August. This will be total across northern Spain but a very full partial from Somerset. The eclipse starts at around 18:00 BST (20 degrees altitude), is at a maximum of 94% at around 19:15 (12 degrees altitude) and ends at 20:00 (only 4 degrees altitude).

The Perseids will also peak on the night of the 12th and there's (obviously) no moon so it could be quite good.

The corresponding lunar eclipse after the solar eclipse of the 12th happens in the morning of the 28th starting at around 03:30BST becoming 90% total at around 05:10. The Moon will set (around 06:30) before the moon leaves the shadow of the Earth.

The Planets

Jupiter at opposition 10th January.

Venus has a good evening apparition between early February and early August.

It is joined by Mercury in mid February and again in late May / early June.

All the planets (except Mars) and the Moon will be visible at the same time from 13th to 20th February (when Mercury disappears).

Neptune in conjunction with Saturn (again) 20th February but they will disappear into the twilight by mid March. They'll reappear in the morning twilight by the end of June

Venus passes Jupiter 9th June. About 1½ degrees apart. Jupiter will disappear into the twilight by the end of June.

Mars starts to emerge from the morning twilight in July along with Uranus. They have a very close (10 minutes of arc) conjunction on 4th July. Mars will be near Aldebaran for the first few weeks but Aldebaran is the brighter!

Jupiter reappears in the morning at the start of August but rises later than Mercury until the 15th when they will be in a close conjunction (<1 degree). It will be quite prominent by the end of the month though still quite low down.

Saturn is at opposition on the 4th October. The rings will be more open than in 2025 though still not great.

Mars moves steadily towards Jupiter and passes it on 16th November when they will be about 1 degree apart. Mars is still much the fainter though it is much brighter than nearby Regulus.

Venus and Mercury will be visible in the morning again in late November & early December.

Uranus is at opposition on 25th November. In theory, it's visible with the naked eye but you would need good eyesight and good conditions. Easy in binoculars.