

The clocks have gone forward so it was nice to drive to Norton sub Hamdon and be able to see and avoid the potholes trying to eat my car's tyres again. The lighter evening was even followed by a nice clear night with Jupiter nicely on show after the meeting. The speaker for April was David Strange who is Chair at the Norman Lockyer Observatory in Sidmouth and his subject, appropriately enough, was the life of Sir Norman Lockyer.

David started with Lockyer's early years as a War Department clerk and how he became interested in astronomy through conversations with a fellow commuter. He became a very accomplished observer of the planets and the sun and made some very detailed drawings. He also became interested in spectroscopy and started to chart the Fraunhofer lines in the solar spectrum which eventually resulted in his discovery of the yellow line of Helium. He shared this discovery with a French astronomer called Janssen who had actually seen the line some months earlier at a total eclipse. However, the discovery notices arrived the same day so they are usually jointly credited.

Lockyer went on to become the first professor of what we now call Astrophysics at (what is now!) Imperial College in Kensington. He also had time to set up and be editor of the scientific journal Nature, organise a number of solar eclipse trips (with hundreds of participants) as well as becoming a pioneer of archaeoastronomy. David showed a number of photographs of the eclipse trips taken by his son James who was a keen photographer.

After retiring, he moved with his second wife to Sidmouth and set up the Hill Observatory above the town. He was helped by his aeronautical chum, Frank McClean who gifted his father's telescope and a substantial amount of money. David then showed us a number of photos of early aircraft and balloons flown by McClean including a dare-devil flight through Tower Bridge! On Sir Norman's death, the Hill Observatory was renamed the Norman Lockyer Observatory with James Lockyer as its director.

After the death of James, however, the observatory went into decline until it was bought by East Devon Council and refurbished by money donated by the public following an appeal by no less than Sir Patrick Moore. David then showed us photos of the telescopes at the NLO and some of the other work done at Sidmouth by the Observatory's volunteers. This year's South West Astrofair will be at the Observatory on 27<sup>th</sup> June and it will be well worth a visit. Many thanks to David for his great talk about one of the heroes of English Victorian astronomy.

After the break Terry did his usual presentation of what's going to be visible in the next month or so, including the current apparition of Venus in the evening sky (see below). This was followed by some images of the Sun by Bud using his new H Alpha solar telescope. These showed a number of filaments, some prominences and the bright areas around sunspots. Terry had some images of the planets from both Crowcombe and Australia followed by images of the Sun and clusters M35 to M38 taken with his little Seestar S30.

Next month's meeting is on May 20<sup>th</sup> and will be the Ask the Panel session so come armed with your questions – they only need to be vaguely astronomical!

# Upcoming Events

## Planets

Venus is bright in the west after sunset. It sets about 2 hours after the sun (about 20:00BST at the moment). This will increase to nearly 3 hours by the next meeting and it will set after midnight BST by the end of May.

Mercury is too near the Sun to observe in the Northern hemisphere.

Mars has a triple conjunction with Mercury and Saturn 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> April but they will all rise too late to be seen here. They should be visible from the Southern hemisphere.

Jupiter is starting to fade but is still the brightest object after Venus sets.

Saturn is too close to the Sun.

Uranus is still below the Pleiades and should be visible in binoculars. Best chance is on 23<sup>rd</sup> April when Venus is less than a degree right of Uranus.

Neptune is now a fair distance from Saturn and is now close to Mars (Mars passed by on 13<sup>th</sup> April). All of them are too close to the Sun, though.

## Comets

Periodic comet C/29P Schwassmann–Wachmann appears to have faded back to normality but could erupt again at any time.

C/2024 E1 Wierzchos has faded.

Kreutz group sungrazer C/2026 A1 MAPS disintegrated when it got too close to the sun.

Comet C/2005 R3 PANSTARRS is on the verge of being visible to the naked eye but is still quite low in the East before start of nautical twilight (5am BST) and heading towards the Sun. It's nearest to the Sun on the 19<sup>th</sup> and closest to the Earth on the 26<sup>th</sup> but will be too near the sun to see then. After perihelion, it will be in the evening sky but not visible from the northern hemisphere as it heads south and not visible in the southern hemisphere until the start of May.

## Constellations

Orion and Sirius are still prominent in the west in the evening but are setting by end of Astronomical Twilight (22:15 BST). They will be gone from the evening sky by the end of April. Jupiter and Gemini are still prominent but even they will be very low by the end of May.

The spring constellations are starting to dominate the eastern sky when it gets dark with Leo nearly due south and Arcturus and Spica well up. The long straggly constellation of Hydra is below Leo and the pretty little quadrilateral of Corvus is on the meridian at midnight BST.

By midnight BST, the summer stars of Vega and Deneb are rising with Altair following by about 01:30 BST. More on those anon, when the weather gets a bit warmer!

## Upcoming Meetings

May 20 Ask the Panel

Jun 17 Hugh Allen *Reaching Across the Gulf of Space: The life and work of Sir William Huggins*

Jul 22 James Palmer *Approaching the Stars - single image shots to short exposure astrophotography*

Aug 19 Mark Hardaker *Astronomical Planning and Recording - How to Get the Most Out of your Hobby*

Sep 16 Gadgets and Gizmos Evening followed by Observing Session

# **2026 Programme**



## **2026**

**Jan 21 Bud Budzynski Albert Einstein**

**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**

**Jun 17 Hugh Allen Reaching Across the Gulf of Space: The life and work of Sir William Huggins**

**Jul 22 James Palmer Approaching the Stars - single image shots to short exposure astrophotography**

**Aug 19 Mark Hardaker Astronomical Planning and Recording  
- How to Get the Most Out of your Hobby**

**Sep 16 Gadgets and Gizmos Evening followed by Observing Session**

**Oct 21**

**Nov 18**

**Dec 16 Christmas Social and members' short talks**

**CADAS meetings start at 7:30pm and last about 2 hours including a break for tea/coffee and cake. We meet at the Village Hall in Norton-sub-Hamdon, TA14 6SF. See <http://www.cadas.net/> for further details.**