



Lewes Astronomical Society

December Newsletter



A tribute to LAS member Richie Jarvis

1972



2025

“It is with the deepest sadness that we learned of Richie’s recent death. He joined the Lewes Astronomical Society in September 2023 and remained a valued and much-loved member since then. He had also been involved with the Lewes Astronomers group long before it became a society in September 2022.

Richie’s passion for astronomy was truly infectious. His knowledge of telescopes—including the software used on modern instruments—was exceptional. He was a constant and generous presence on our WhatsApp group, frequently sharing the superb images he had captured, of a quality that could rival the best. He was always quick to help when anyone needed assistance with their equipment, offering practical, thoughtful advice with unfailing kindness.

Each year, Richie organised a Star Party at the Earth Camp in Chailey to raise money for charity—an event that was always popular. Some people just went along for the evening, while others camped for the whole weekend, enjoying the welcoming atmosphere (and the pizza van).

We attended 3 of these events, and were always impressed by Richie’s ability to present slideshows that appealed to a wide audience. He was genuinely appreciative of the support from fellow amateur astronomers who brought along their telescopes for visitors to enjoy.

Richie will be greatly missed. His enthusiasm, generosity, and warmth leave a lasting legacy within our community.”

~ Judith Pyett and Steve Ward



More memories of Richie shared by LAS members

"I didn't know Richie well. I mostly knew him for his joyous and insightful messages on the LAS WhatsApp member's chat. From the wonderful messages I received I can see that he was a kind, friendly person with a passion for astronomy and astrophotography. He understood how to take the most incredible photographs of the night sky and was always happy to share his expertise."

~ Carina Garland

"I was so sad to hear that we lost Richie. He was always up for helping folks. It was a privilege to have known Richie even for a short time. He was so enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and so keen to help anyone with an interest in astronomy and astrophotography. He will be sadly missed. My thoughts go out to his friends and family."

~ Paul Whitmarsh

"Richie's Images and posts were hugely inspiring and I looked forward to them"

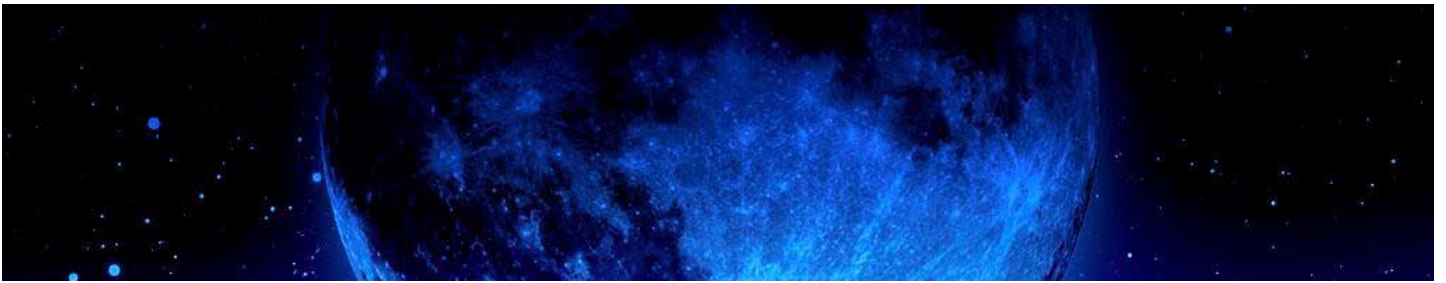
~ Deborah Hudson

"I found Richie's photos and posts hugely inspiring and uplifting. Richie's absence from our WhatsApp network is palpable. As a member who knows very little of the astronomical world, Richie always inspired me with his beautiful astrophotography, astounding knowledge and very distinct sense of humour. As well as a huge generosity with his time and thought. He is missed."

~ Nicole Vann Monney

"Richie was a fixture of amateur astronomy in Sussex for many years, and a member of multiple local groups. I first met him many years ago when he recorded an interview with me for his podcast - and again after moving to Lewes when it was obvious he was a big presence in our local society. Richie was incredibly enthusiastic, never shied away from helping people with sometimes complicated technical questions and generous with his time. We'll miss him!"

~ Robert Massey



“Richie and I started talking almost as soon as I joined LAS. He saw I had an interest in astrophotography and that was it, we were just friends from then on!

Over the next few months, we learned we had a lot more in common, having similar careers, having interests in music, a similar sense of humour, and both being Neurodiverse. It meant we could talk about most topics freely and enthusiastically.

Richie was incredibly easy to talk to, forthright and kind. He liked to help with things he knew about and gave me lots of tips about things like camera and scope choices for astrophotography versus observation. He talked to me about how best to use outdated technology to recover some old family photos from old data storage I'd found, helping me save some precious memories of my late father. We even talked about different projects you could do with a Raspberry Pi and how to have the most fun with them, or the trials and tribulations of our ND diagnoses. Really niche stuff, yet all with one person. There was a huge breadth of interest and knowledge in which we overlapped.

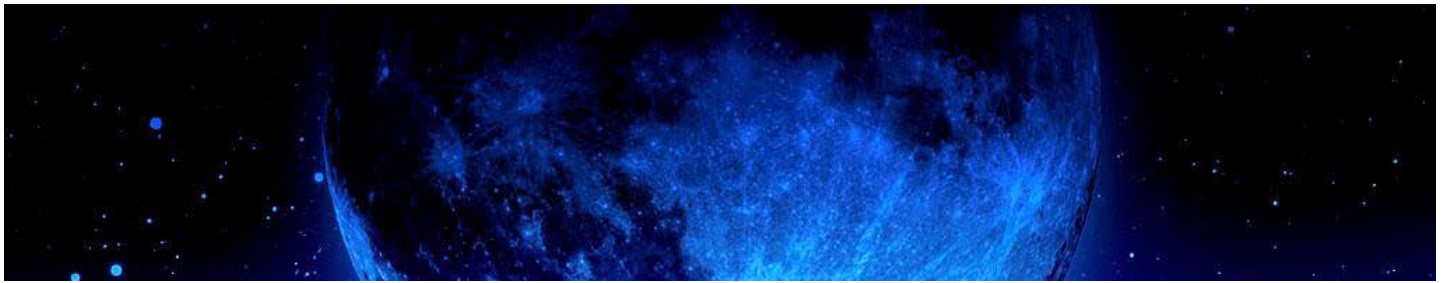
I'd really enjoyed starting to get to know Richie, and we were discussing meeting up so he could lend me some of his older gear and teach me some new ways to capture the night sky, as well as just going for walks with his dogs, or having a coffee. It was incredibly kind, and generous, and a palpable blow to have lost a friend with such an incredible brain and talent.

Richie was also the first proper friend I made in this area, having moved here only a couple of years ago. Many of my friends here are friends through my partner and her family, but Richie was the first friendship that was independent of that, and it gave me a sense of starting to build some roots here of my own.

I shall feel his loss keenly and really miss the growing friendship that we had begun. I had hoped to be his friend for many years and held him in high regard.

I wish his family comfort, and send them my sincerest condolences on the loss of such a kind hearted person. He will be missed.”

~ Taylor Hughes



“As I live in Norfolk, I never had the opportunity to meet Richie in person. However, I got to know him a bit as we exchanged some messages and spoke on the phone a couple of times, after I joined a 'smart telescopes' WhatsApp user group, of which he was a member, when I started experimenting with a SeeStar S50 earlier this year.

His knowledge, experience and practical help was excellent, enabling me to quickly get to grips with this new astrophotography device. His sudden passing was a huge shock and I was very saddened to learn of it. I send my condolences to his family and friends.”

~ Geof Lewis

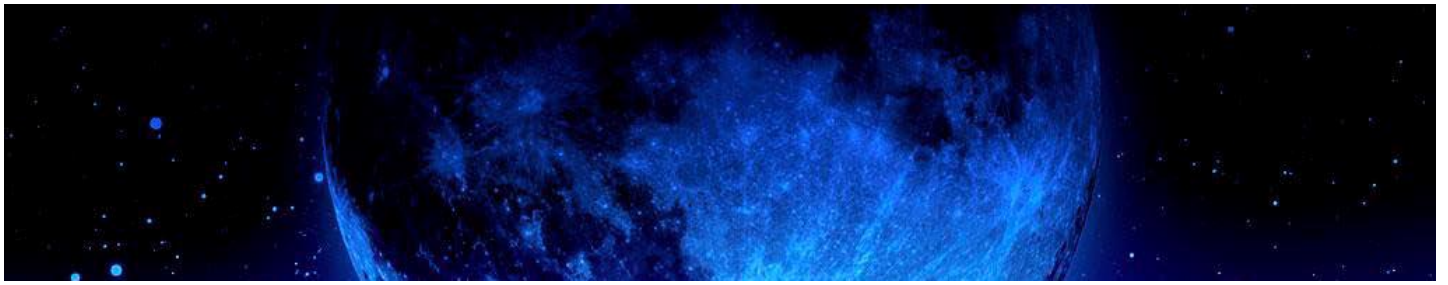
Richie's Wake

A wake will be held for Richie at **The King's Head** in Lewes from 3pm on Tuesday 16th December. Anyone wishing to pay their last respects is welcome. If you plan to attend, please let us know (email Kate Land at kate.land@lewesas.org.uk) or contact the Jarvis family directly.

Richie's Star Parties

The photograph below shows Richie hosting a Star Party at the [Earth Camp](#) near Chailey in East Sussex. All profits from these regular events each year went to a local charity, namely the [St Peter & St James Hospice](#)





Oddments

- According to a [new study](#) the expansion of the universe is slowing down, not speeding up. Dark energy lies at the heart of the report.
- It's not too late to visit the Herschel Museum [exhibition](#) of astrophotography by Bath astronomers. The exhibition ends 4th January.
- Coincidentally, Caroline Herschel made several astronomical discoveries about which you can learn more at our meeting on Wednesday 3rd December entitled **Historical Women in Astronomy**.

From LAS WhatsApp

- Robert Massey has been enjoying [Once Upon A Time In Space](#) on iPlayer, which covers the space programme from the Shuttle to the present day. As with the best histories, it focuses on the people, and frames it in the wider context.
- We were reminded of an incredible photograph of a skydiver in freefall

against the Sun's chromosphere. The photograph on [Instagram](#) captures the moment with a brief explanation of how it was done.

- Here is an unexpectedly moving [embroidery](#) of a page from [William Herschel's](#) notebook. A reminder that these moments continue to touch us through generations. Visitors to the RAS can sometimes get to see Herschel's original Uranus discovery sketch. It was originally named Georgium Sidus in honour of King George III.
- The latest [Supermassive Podcast](#) episode is out. Can [JWST](#) detect exomoons? How can black holes keep absorbing more mass? How big is our cosmic neighbourhood? And what is a rogue black hole? Izzie Clarke, Becky Smethurst and our Chairman, Robert Massey, answer your questions.
- There was a recommendation for [Siril](#) image processing, including the star removal prior to stretching, and re-adding the stars after. Well worth a [watch](#).



Binoculars for stargazing

An LAS member asked for some advice on buying a decent pair of binoculars for astronomy. Here are some of the replies:

- The Sky at Night website has a [best budget binoculars](#) page as a helpful starting point. That website also has several other pages of [general advice](#) relating to binoculars.
- If you wear glasses make sure you buy binoculars with long eye relief. Another good [site](#) with helpful reviews.
- And finally, it was suggested that you would need 10x50 as a minimum for astronomy. The first figure represents the magnification (in this case, 10 times power) and the second figure is the diameter of each of the large 'objective' lenses (in this case, 50mm). The bigger these lenses, the greater the resolving power but the binoculars become heavier to hold. It is generally accepted that if these lenses are larger than 50mm, then you will need to mount the binoculars on a tripod for stability.

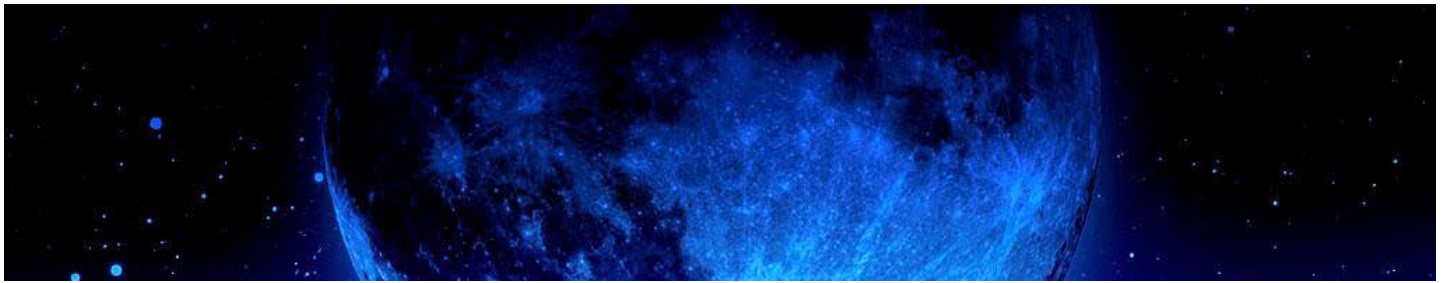
Previous meeting

Our November meeting presented by Cenk Turkoglu on **Dark Matter** generated debate and confusion in equal measure. Dark matter is an absolute cornerstone of modern astronomy. If you couldn't make the talk, here is a [12 minute overview](#) on YouTube about dark matter and why it's important.

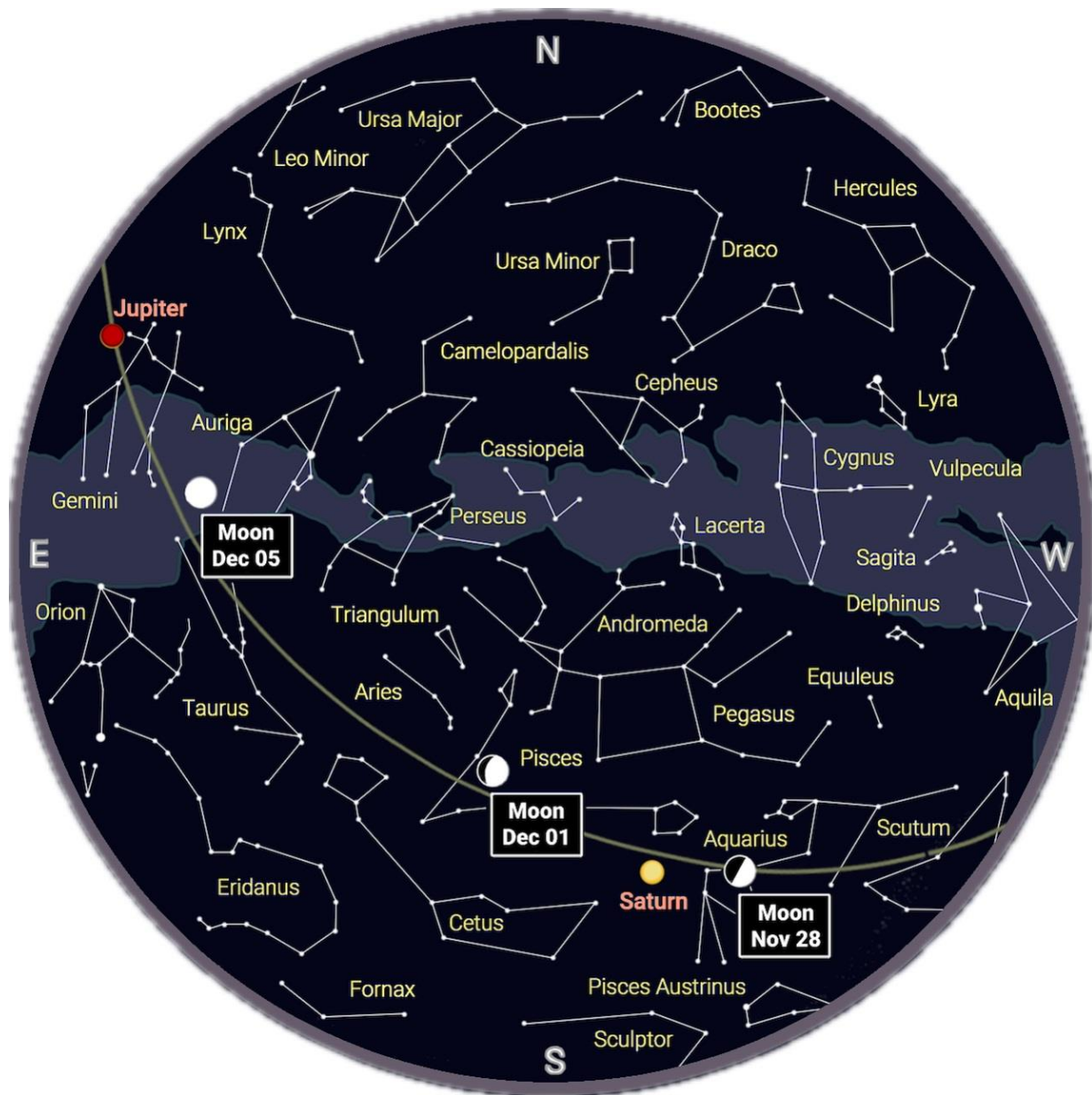
Next meeting

Wednesday 3rd December, Lewes Subud Centre. Dr Sian Prosser, Archivist and Librarian at the [Royal Astronomical Society](#), will talk about **Historical Women in Astronomy** highlighting the pioneering women who have contributed to our understanding of the universe. Complimentary refreshments will be available. Everyone is welcome, non-members £4. Doors open at 7pm. The talk begins at about 7:30pm.

Judith Pyett will also give a short eulogy for Richie Jarvis.



Star Guide for December 2025



The chart depicts how the night sky will appear at 8pm at the start of December, 7pm mid-month, and 6pm at the end of December. The position and phase of the Moon are given for the 28th November, and the 1st and 5th of December. The centre of the chart represents the point directly overhead, known as the Zenith, and four ordinal points are shown around the edge, representing North, East, South and West on the horizon.



The winter sky is full of wonders including one of the oldest constellations, Taurus the Bull, and Orion, one of the brightest in the sky, and a particular favourite for many people.

The brighter stars in Taurus form a V shape representing the head of the bull. The brightest star in Aldebaran is his eye, and is distinctly red. In 1972 the space probe Pioneer 10 was launched; it was the first probe to visit Jupiter a year later in 1973. Now Pioneer 10 has left the solar system and is heading off in the direction of Taurus.

The horns of the bull extend forward over the famous winter constellation of Orion the hunter.

Orion too has a red star, Betelgeuse. Both Aldebaran and Betelgeuse are old dying stars they have swollen to many times their original size. As they expanded, they cooled and changed colour, just as an iron bar cools from white hot to red. Orion with his glittering sword and belt of stars was named in many ancient texts. This constellation was mentioned in J.R.R. Tolkien's stories of middle earth, along with the star

Borgil, and students of Tolkien still argue whether this was Aldebaran or Betelgeuse.

Jupiter is rising earlier and can be seen as a brilliant star in the east. Binoculars will easily show the four largest moons discovered by Galileo more than 400 years ago. Saturn is now in the south west in the evening sky, with the rings slowly opening up to give us a better view, and easily visible in a small telescope.

Mercury, the closest planet to the Sun, will be visible low down in the southeastern morning sky between 6am and Sunrise from around the 1st to 12th December.

The Geminid meteor shower runs between the 4th and 17th with a maximum on the night of the 13th and 14th December. Meteors are the fiery end of small pieces of debris entering the Earth's atmosphere at high speed, in this case from the 'rock comet' Phaethon. The Geminids are one of the richest showers of the year, with up to 100 slow moving bright meteors visible each hour. This year it is best viewed before the waning crescent Moon rises at around 2am.



Lewes STEM Fair

The 8th annual Lewes STEM Fair took place on Saturday 29th November at Lewes Town Hall. This free event was aimed at children aged five and above, though the adults seemed to enjoy it every bit as much.

The Fair—celebrating Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths—featured a wide range of exhibitors, including the University of Sussex, The Observatory Science Centre, East Sussex Fire and Rescue, the NHS, the Girl Guides, a fossil display, and many more.

On the LAS stand, we showcased a collection of stunning photographs, many taken by our members including the late Richie Jarvis. Visitors could design an exoplanet, build a rocket, and browse a selection of astronomy books and magazines. We also set up two telescopes to view the Moon and stars (represented by posters on the stage at the opposite end of the hall). Alongside

this, we ran a scrolling slideshow, displayed an illuminated model of the Moon, and set up a constellation globe. Badges, stickers, books and magazines were also available for visitors to enjoy.

Every 45 minutes, visitors were treated to a live demonstration of a comet being created. This involved combining water, frozen carbon dioxide (dry ice), carbon (charcoal), ammonia and “organic compounds” represented by soy sauce. Once mixed and compressed, the ingredients froze into a “dirty snowball”, just like the nucleus of a real comet.

Several brave volunteers wore badges reading “Ask Me Anything About Space”, both children and adults took full advantage of the offer!

We want to thank all the LAS members who volunteered on our stand (led by Kate Land) or popped by to say hello.

All in all, it was an extremely successful day, with 1512 visitors passing through the doors.





Finally, some photographs taken by Richie Jarvis

