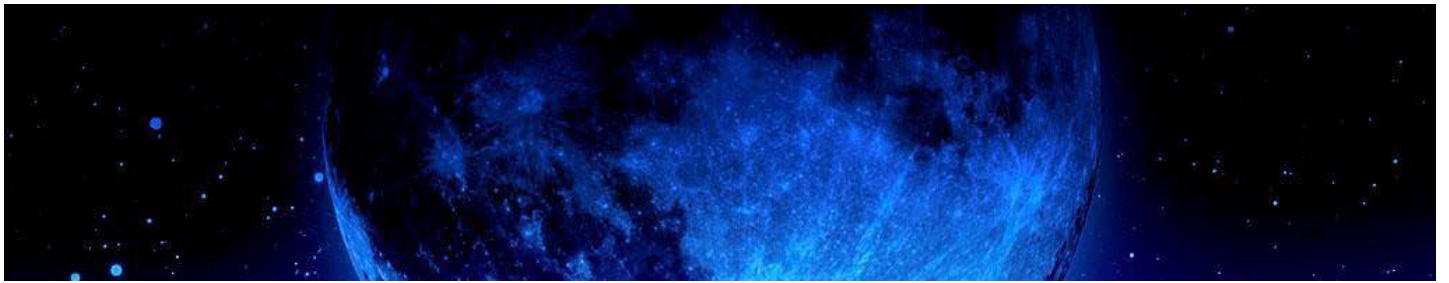




Lewes Astronomical Society

Newsletter
May 2026



Welcome to our May Newsletter

Welcome to the May 2026 edition of the LAS newsletter. We are a friendly and inclusive not-for-profit society for anyone with an interest in astronomy and space science. Our membership spans all levels of experience from complete beginners to professional astronomers, all united by a shared curiosity about our Universe.

We meet on the first Wednesday of most months at the Subud Centre in Lewes, where our programme of talks covers a diverse range of topics related to astronomy. You can find more details on our website at www.lewesas.org.uk

You don't need to be a member to attend our events. Visitors can pay £4 for admission to our talks. However, to learn about the benefits of membership, please visit our website or contact **Judith Pyett**, our Membership Secretary, at membership@lewesas.org.uk.

We Want Your Help!

In just four years, our society has grown to become one of the largest astronomical societies in the UK. This success is thanks to the support and enthusiasm of our members, several hundred more subscribers on our mailing list, with an amazing group of volunteers and a proactive team on the committee.

We aim to provide a varied programme of technical, educational, and social events suitable for our members as well as the wider community.

Our committee consists entirely of LAS members working together voluntarily, often behind the scenes. The work is satisfying and occasionally challenging.

We encourage everyone to think about joining our committee. We're now accepting nominations for people to join our committee, including managing or supporting existing roles. Elections will be held at our AGM on 3rd June. If you want to join our committee and help shape the future of our society, contact our Secretary, **Jane Penny**, at secretary@lewesas.org.uk. You don't need to be an expert in astronomy!

LAS Volunteers Group

If you're willing to help us occasionally, but you don't want to serve on our committee, we would invite you to join our volunteers group. Please contact Dr **Kate Land** at kate.land@lewesas.org.uk for more information.

Very few of the people who run the LAS knew each other before the society launched in September 2022. Since then, we've forged new friendships through working with each other, either on the committee or as volunteers, thanks to the society. So don't be shy, give it a try!



Artemis II

Last month saw what was arguably the most significant development in manned spaceflight when four astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch, and Jeremy Hansen took a journey further away from our home planet than ever before.

This new record was set on 6th April when the **Artemis II** crew reached a maximum distance of 252,756 miles (406,771 km) from the Earth. This milestone surpassed the previous record set 56 years ago by the crew of the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission in 1970.

Watch out for a detailed article about Artemis II in our June newsletter.

April Stargazing Evening

At last, we enjoyed a stargazing evening this year with almost perfect weather conditions. The event was held on Saturday 25th April at Barcombe Village Hall, between 9pm and 11pm. This free event attracted 18 people, and we want to thank everyone who attended, both members and non-members.

Our stargazing evenings are arranged on an ad-hoc basis, so please check our mailshots, social media, and website for details of all our upcoming events.

Outreach Events Update

Last month, committee member **Paul Whitmarsh** made a return visit to Claydon House residential care home in Lewes, where he gave a talk about the April night sky to a room full of fascinated residents. His talk used many of his own astronomy images as he took the audience on a tour of the solar system and beyond.

There were many questions, particularly about the habitability of other planets and moons – and whether there had been life on Mars.

We are grateful to Claydon House for inviting us back, enabling us to reach out to a group of people who otherwise would not get to enjoy the wonders of astronomy.



This photo shows Paul Whitmarsh presenting a talk to the residents at Claydon House in April 2026.



Southover Primary School

This month, we will be supporting STEM Week at Southover Primary School with LAS Outreach Officer Dr **Kate Land** giving cosmology talks to Years 5 and 6 about how astronomy allows us to time-travel around the Universe. **Robert Massey** will be running a comet-making demo for Years 3 and 4 - quite a messy and wonderful affair!



This photo shows Kate Land talking about Exoplanets at South Malling Primary School in February 2026.

We will also be supporting their Summer Fair on Saturday 20th June, using our Solar Telescope – this event is open to the public.

We are always looking for volunteers to help with outreach events. Please connect with us at a meeting, or send an email to outreach@lewesas.org.uk

Solar Observing

The society is privileged to own a Hydrogen-Alpha Solar Telescope, courtesy of a Lewes Town Council Community Grant. We aim to run ad-hoc solar observing events in the town, as and when the clouds allow!

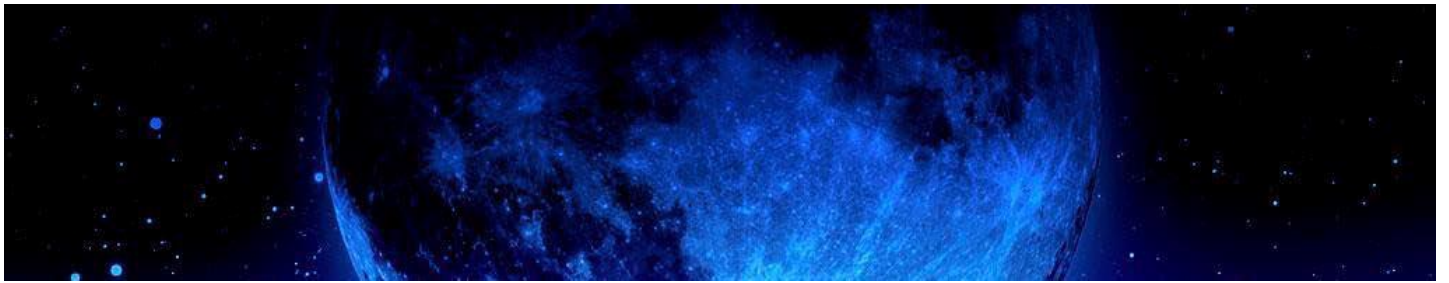
Look out for these pop-up Solar Observing events, which we advertise via our Facebook page, and our WhatsApp members group.

We enjoyed a busy morning on Saturday 2nd May on Cliffe Bridge, Lewes. The good weather allowed about 100 passers-by between 10:30am and midday to view the Sun through the solar telescope, most of whom were awestruck at seeing the solar flares, prominences and sunspots.

Our next solar observing event is penciled in for Saturday 23rd May, on Cliffe Bridge in Lewes from 10:30am.



This photo shows the large crowd gathered around our solar scope on Saturday 2nd May on Cliffe Bridge.



April Meeting

On Wednesday 1st April, LAS member **Richard Butchers** gave a talk about the famous rocket scientist *Wernher von Braun* at the Subud Centre in Lewes.

Wernher von Braun (1912–1977) was the German man mainly responsible for the V-2 rockets launched against the allies during the Second World War. In the final days of the war, von Braun and his group of rocket scientists surrendered to the American army. Subsequently, he became the leading figure behind the NASA rockets that eventually took mankind to the Moon.

Von Braun had been a Nazi Party and SS member who utilised slave labour from concentration camps, making his legacy controversial.

Richard's talk was both fascinating and insightful, with numerous photographs that are rarely seen nowadays, including some showing von Braun together with Hitler.



May Meeting

On Wednesday 6th May LAS committee member **Behnood Bandi** is giving a talk on *Mapping the Universe: A Journey Through the Past, Present, and Future of Sky Surveys* at the Subud Centre in Lewes, BN7 2DS.



Behnood is a postgraduate researcher at the University of Sussex, and co-leader of the [4MOST Science Communication Working Group](#). He will take us on a journey through the story of sky surveys and see how they shape modern astronomy. He will explain how these ambitious surveys are helping scientists unlock some of the biggest mysteries of the Universe, from dark matter to the evolution of galaxies.

Complimentary refreshments will be available. Everyone is welcome, non-members £4. Doors open at 7pm. The talk begins at 7:30pm.

All the municipal car parks in Lewes are free after 5pm. The Brook Street car park is about 3 minutes walk from the venue.



Night Sky Guide for May 2026



The chart shows how the night sky will appear at 11pm at the start of May, 10pm mid-month, and 9pm at the end of May. The position and phase of the Moon are shown for the 19th, 24th, and 28th May. The centre of the chart represents the point directly overhead, known as the Zenith, and the edge around the chart represents the horizon with the directions for North, East, South and West indicated.



High overhead is the constellation of Ursa Major, the Great Bear. This constellation contains an asterism (a smaller group of stars) commonly known as *The Plough*. Follow the curve of the bear's tail (or the Plough's handle) to the bright orange star Arcturus in Boötes, then continue the arc to the brilliant white star Spica in Virgo. Tracing the curve back upward brings you to Denebola, which is the second-brightest star in Leo, the Lion. In the centre of this imaginary circle lie the fainter constellations Coma Berenices and Canes Venatici.

At around 11:05pm on the 3rd of May, the Moon rises in the southeast about five minutes ahead of the red star Antares in Scorpius. During the night, the Moon will appear to move below and to the east of Antares. This is because the stars move from east to west due to Earth's rotation, but the Moon's orbital motion causes it to shift slowly eastward relative to the background stars.

On the night of the 18th of May, just after sunset, look in the western sky for brilliant Venus close to a very slender crescent Moon, only two days past new. The pair will come within about 2 degrees of each other before setting at around 11:40pm.

Because the Moon is such a thin crescent, sunlight reflected from the Earth will faintly light the Moon's night side. This effect is known as Earthshine.

Mars and Saturn return to the morning sky this month. About 30 minutes before sunrise on the 13th or 14th, look to the east for the waning crescent Moon joining the two planets in the twilight.

May's meteor shower is the Eta Aquariids, peaking on the night of 5th to 6th May. The radiant rises in the early hours, though some meteors can be seen even while it is below the horizon. The 81% illuminated waning gibbous Moon will wash out many fainter meteors, but this shower often produces bright meteors, meaning a few should still be visible each hour despite the moonlight.

*Star chart by Sarah Carson
Text by Paul Whitmarsh*

Pre-AGM Survey

Our AGM is on 3rd June. You are cordially invited to participate in our survey – a link will be emailed to everyone soon. It will only take a few minutes to give your feedback, anonymously if you wish, and the results will be published at our AGM.



Summer Solstice Walk 21st June

Once again, we are holding a free and informal gathering on the Lewes downland to celebrate the Summer Solstice on Sunday 21st June. Weather permitting, we will have the opportunity to enjoy the breathtaking view of the Ouse Valley looking west as the sun goes down. This is a free event for everyone and open to all, so bring along your friends and family. This is a dog-friendly event. See our [Summer Solstice 2026 Sunset webpage](#).



We will meet at the Phoenix Causeway car park in central Lewes, BN7 2JW, near the Dorset Inn. Setting off at 8pm, we'll walk into the scenic Malling Down Nature Reserve and climb Malling Hill to watch the sunset at about 9:23pm before returning to the Phoenix Causeway car park.

Harvey's Brewery Tour 1st July

Join us for our annual tour of Harvey's Brewery in Lewes. Tours normally cost £18 per person, but we have arranged discounted prices of £15 for non-members and just £12 for our members. Strictly adults only. No high-heel shoes.

This popular social event takes place from 6:15pm on Wednesday 1st July. Our private tour usually lasts longer than the normal 90-minute tour, thanks to the enthusiasm of our group – especially when it comes to tasting a wide variety of beers to conclude the evening. See www.lewesas.org.uk/harveysbrewery26 for full details.

Tickets are on sale now, subject to availability. Please send an email to events@lewesas.org.uk to book your tickets which, unsurprisingly, are selling fast. Cheers to that!

