



Lewes Astronomical Society

**Newsletter
October 2026**

LAS Newsletter: October 2026

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1 Introduction

Welcome to the October 2026 issue of the LAS Newsletter, and thanks to all the members who have contributed to this issue in various ways.

2 Recent events

2.1 Subud Centre meeting (2nd September)

Greg Smye-Rumsby presented a comprehensive demolition of Flat Earth conspiracy theories, an incoherent jumble of ridiculous ideas that are easily refuted in numerous ways, and have been known to be false by some educated people for at least about two millennia.

2.2 Northern hemisphere autumnal equinox (23rd September)

Although this was not mentioned in the September Newsletter, 23rd September saw the occurrence of the *autumnal equinox* in the northern hemisphere, and the *spring equinox* in the southern hemisphere. See [this Wikipedia article](#) for a detailed account), but informally stated, an equinox occurs when, as seen from some point on the Earth's equator, the centre of the Sun is directly overhead, and the rotational axis of the Earth is at right angles to the line from the centre of the Earth to the centre of the Sun. By extension, the day on which an equinox occurs is also sometimes called an equinox.

On an equinox day, for all points on the Earth's surface, the Sun (to a high degree of accuracy) rises due east and sets due west, and there are approximately 12 hours of daytime and 12 hours of nighttime, across the globe; the word "equinox" derives from the Latin for "equal night". However, daytime is actually longer than nighttime on an equinox day, for two main reasons (see [this article](#) and [this YouTube video](#)):

- The Sun is not a point, but a disk, and daylight begins when its top edge (not its centre) is at the horizon, and ends when its top edge is at the horizon, adding a bit more daylight to an equinox day.
- Under most conditions, refraction of light by the Earth's atmosphere bends sunlight around the horizon, so that visible sunrise is a bit earlier, and visible sunset a bit later, than would otherwise be the case.

There is another day, called the *equilux* (meaning "equal light"), for which the difference between daytime and nighttime length is minimized. In either hemisphere, the equilux is a few days after the autumnal equinox (because days are shorter just after it), and a few days before the spring equinox (because days are shorter just before it). The calendar day of the equilux depends on latitude, and is also affected by leap years.

3 Upcoming events

See <https://www.lewesas.org.uk/events> for details and updates on upcoming LAS events (weather-dependent events may be cancelled). For upcoming celestial events and objects of interest (apart from those mentioned in [sections 3.2, 3.3](#) and [6.1](#)), it is worth checking your complimentary LAS-member copy of Nigel Henbest's Stargazing Guide 2026 at the start of each month, when you can also listen to the monthly lookahead Sky Tour podcast (see the first bullet point in [section 4.2](#)).

3.1 Subud Centre meeting (7th October)

In the second LAS lecture since the summer break, Ian Whiteley FRAS will talk at the [Subud Centre](#) (Talbot Terrace, Lewes, BN7 2DS; what3words: [///tripled.collide.flattens](#)) on "Stars & Stoolball; A Short History of Herstmonceux Observatory" (non-members £4; doors open at 7pm; talk starts at 7:30pm). As well as being currently LAS Publicity Officer, Ian is a long-time volunteer at the [Observatory Science Centre \(OSC\) and Museum](#) at Herstmonceux: see the [Friends of Herstmonceux Observatory](#) page on Facebook, and the OSC's [Rescue a Railing](#) fundraising campaign.

3.2 Peak of Orionids meteor shower (21st/22nd October)

The annual Orionids meteor shower (see this [NASA webpage](#)) peaks over the night of 21st/22nd October, with its meteors easier to spot after the Moon has set at about 02:49 BST. As its name indicates, this shower's radiant (the point that its meteor trails seem to point back to) is in the constellation Orion. The source of the debris stream that produces this shower is [Halley's comet](#), named after the 2nd [Astronomer Royal](#), Edmond Halley, who was the first person to realize that comets can return periodically, having computed the orbit of Halley's comet from observations in his lifetime, and compared them with historical records of comets. See [this online biography](#) of Halley, and listen to [Chapter 8](#) from the free online LibriVox audio recording of the book [Great Astronomers](#) by Robert Stawell Ball (1840–1913).

Halley's comet has an orbital period of about 76 years, and is thought to be the comet depicted in the [Bayeux Tapestry](#), currently on display in a [special exhibition](#) at the British Museum in London. You can scan the Tapestry on [this webpage](#). Scroll down that page and click on a frame below the subtitle "A panorama with high resolution images", and a big image of the Tapestry will appear, with a horizontal sequence of dots below the image, explicitly numbered only for 5, 10, 15 and so on; click on dot 32, and the comet will be near the centre of the view, on the top edge of the Tapestry.

3.3 Lunar occultation of the Pleiades (27th/28th October)

An *appulse* is an event in which two celestial objects appear to overlap (an *occultation*) or to be close (a *conjunction*) in terms of their positions in the sky (even though usually far apart physically). Appulses make a nice subject for astrophotography, and can sometimes help observers to find a faint object close to a brighter one (e.g. Neptune close to Jupiter). Given the Moon's large angular size and its motion across the stellar background, lunar appulses are common. A photogenic example will be an appulse of the Moon with the **Pleiades** star cluster over the night of 27th/28th October (weather permitting), with an partial occultation stage for a while either side of midnight, preceded and followed by close conjunction stages, as the Moon moves slowly but steadily across the stellar background.

3.4 LAS visit to the Science Museum, London (29th October)

This visit relates to Isaac Roberts (1829–1904), a Welsh amateur astronomer (engineer and businessman by profession) and pioneer of long-exposure tracking-telescope photography of faint nebulae and star clusters. See [this Wikipedia page](#) and [this biography](#). Roberts set up an **observatory** at Crowborough in Sussex, with a 20-in reflector (now at the Science Museum) and 7-in refractor, both on the same motorized equatorial mount, but with independently adjustable declination axes.

4 This month's topic links

This section lists a small selection of interesting links from various sources.

4.1 Links from the WhatsApp feed

The following is a small sample (posters of the links credited in brackets):

- **Tiny telescope** (Chris K.): more of a light-thimble than a light-bucket, but it beats most telescopes for portability and compactness.
- **Artemis 2 flightpath earring** (Taylor H.): from the Instagram feed of **Liz Fox Roseberry**.
- **"A Mirror in the Sky"**: (Dr Sylvia H.): lecture by Professor Chris Lintott on the **Hubble Space Telescope**, viewable on the **YouTube channel** of **Gresham College**, London (or directly from their **website archive**).
- **New Scientist Live 2026** (Steve W.): a programme of STEM talks and experiences, 10–12th October, organized by **New Scientist** magazine and held at the **Excel London** venue in East London and online.

4.2 Other links

A few other interesting links, not from the LAS WhatsApp feed:

- **Sky Tour Astronomy Podcast**: from **Sky & Telescope** (produced by the **American Astronomical Society**), a brief start-of-the-month podcast with supporting graphics, presented by J. Kelly Beatty on their **YouTube channel**; also available in an audio-only form on various podcast apps.
- **The Planetary Society**: website of a non-profit organization (founded in 1980 by Carl Sagan, Bruce Murray, and Louis Friedman) that promotes space exploration, with a strong emphasis on STEM outreach and education, and space policy advocacy. They have a weekly audio podcast (**Planetary Radio**) and a free quarterly magazine (**the Planetary Report** – readable online or downloadable in PDF format).
- **Photo shortlist selection**: from the “ZWO Astronomy Photographer of the Year 2026” competition.
- **Telescope Advisor**: independent website with advice on and reviews of telescopes.

5 Monthly person: Robert H. Goddard (1882–1945)

Robert H. Goddard was an American scientist and engineer, now often seen as one of the twentieth century’s greatest pioneers of rocketry, who helped to lay the foundations for spaceflight. Born on 5th October 1882 in Worcester, Massachusetts, he died on 10th August 1945 in Baltimore, Maryland. His ideas were initially met with some scepticism, particularly in his own country, but were eventually vindicated.

Goddard had numerous patents and inventions; in particular, he was the first to build and launch a successful liquid-fuelled rocket, a key innovation that ultimately led to the powerful rockets that launched the first Soviet cosmonauts and American astronauts into space. See these links:

- **“Dr. Robert H. Goddard”**: detailed online NASA article about Goddard.
- **“The Story of Robert Goddard”**: short video clip from the YouTube channel **NASA Goddard** of NASA’s **Goddard Space Flight Center**.
- **“Robert Goddard: Mr. Rocket Science”**: historical documentary (about 30 minutes) from the YouTube channel **Lucasfilm**.
- **Biography of Goddard**: from the website **britannica.com**.
- **Questioning a pioneer’s legacy**: article from the **Smithsonian Magazine**, which argues that Goddard’s work, although brilliant, had less impact on the development of rocketry than is often supposed.

6 The night sky in October 2026

Thanks to Paul Whitmarsh for the guide, and to Sarah Carson for the chart.

6.1 Lookahead guide

The chart in [section 6.2](#) shows how the night sky will appear at 11pm at the start of October, 10pm in mid-month, and 8pm at the end of October. The position and phase of the Moon are shown for the 18th, 24th, and 28th. Saturn is well placed in the evening sky, with Neptune nearby and visible through binoculars or a small telescope. Mars and Jupiter an hour or two after midnight.

The meridian is an imaginary line in the sky that runs from due north to due south, passing straight overhead. the southern meridian is the section of that line due south.

Near the southern meridian you'll find the constellation of Pegasus. The large "empty" square of stars is often used as a test of eyesight and sky darkness. Under truly dark skies the square is far from empty, observers report seeing 30–50 faint stars within it. How many can you spot?

Pegasus is a winged horse traditionally depicted upside down in the sky, with his fore legs coming from the top right of the square, and his neck and head from the bottom right. If you follow the bright star depicting the tip of Pegasus's nose and move about a quarter of the way towards Delphinus, binoculars will reveal a faint, hazy patch. This is M15, a beautiful globular cluster containing hundreds of thousands of ancient stars. Stars that are much more closely packed than they are in our part of the galaxy. Imagine standing on a planet orbiting such a star; what would the night sky be like?

The top-left star of the Great Square was once shared between Pegasus and Andromeda, but in 1928 the International Astronomical Union formalised the constellation boundaries and assigned the star, Alpha Andromedae, to Andromeda.

Andromeda contains another classic test of sky darkness. From Alpha Andromedae, look east to a close pair of stars, then continue in the same direction to a second, slightly wider pair. From the brighter of these two, move upward by a similar distance and you'll find a faint smudge. In binoculars it is unmistakable, and under dark skies it can be seen with the naked eye. This is the Andromeda Galaxy (see [section 7.8](#) for an image of it), a vast city of stars about 2.5 million light years away, one of the most distant objects visible without optical aid.

While observing the Andromeda Galaxy consider that it and the Milky Way are on a collision course and will merge in about 5 billion years.

6.2 Star chart

Refer back to the lookahead guide in [section 6.1](#) as required.



7 LAS image gallery

7.1 Total solar eclipse from Spain (Freddie New)



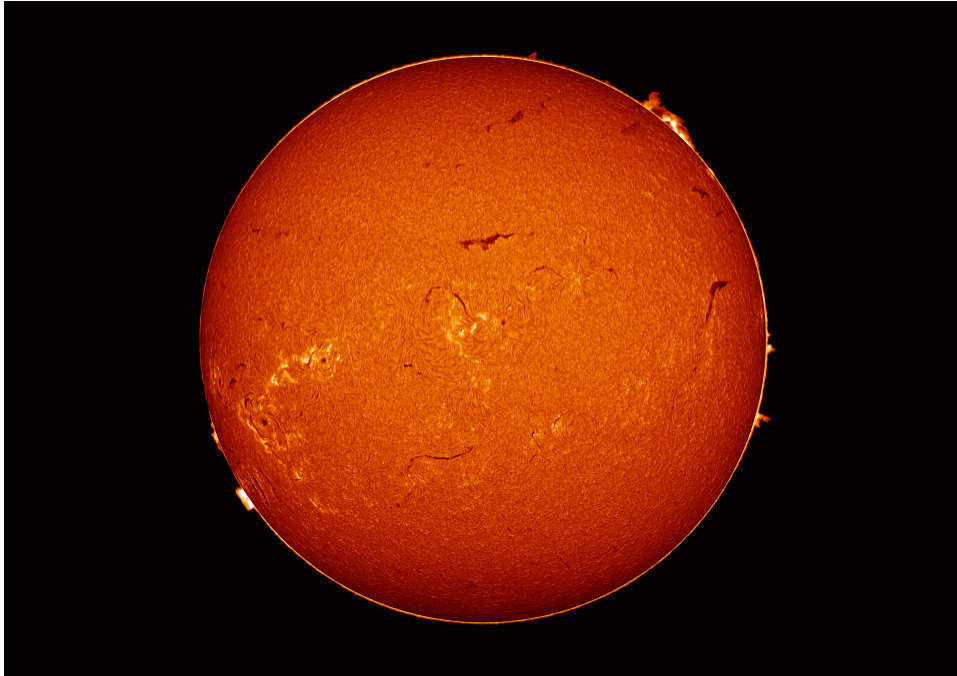
A beautiful image of the 12th August total eclipse of the Sun, taken by Freddie New, the husband of Kate Land (a former LAS Committee member who organized the very successful Lewes Space Day event earlier in 2026, and who remains an LAS member).

7.2 End of total solar eclipse from Spain (Chloe New)



Taken by Kate Land's daughter Chloe, this image captures the moment when the bright photosphere of the Sun re-emerged with a sudden dazzling flash from behind the obstructing Moon. Kate and her family were well-placed to see totality, at [this location](#) on an east-coast beach just north of València.

7.3 Spectroheliograph image of the Sun (Roy Marriott)



A **spectroheliograph** is a device that captures images of the Sun at a specific wavelength of light; different wavelengths accentuate different aspects of solar structure and activity. Spectroheliographs were independently invented by **George Ellery Hale** and **Henri Alexandre Deslandres**, and further developed by **Robert R. McMath** into a device that could record moving image-sequences.

7.4 Sundog (Robert Massey)



A **sundog** is an atmospheric phenomenon caused by the refraction of sunlight through plate-shaped ice crystals, usually those in high-level cirrus clouds.

7.5 Thompson 26-inch refractor (Becky B. of Coopersfield Space)



By objective lens size, the **Thompson 26-inch refractor** at the **Observatory Science Centre (OSC)** in East Sussex still ranks 2nd in the UK and 12th in the world. Both the 26-inch and the **Thompson 30-inch reflector** are named after their donor, Sir Henry Thompson. They were **once co-mounted** in the **South Building** of the **Royal Observatory, Greenwich**. At the OSC, the 26-inch is in **Dome E**, and the 30-inch in **Dome A** (videos from the **OSC YouTube channel**).

7.6 Perseid meteor (Regina Manso de Zuniga)



A brief moment of wonder: the fleeting flash of a shooting star (zoom in above the centre of the image to see it), during the [Perseids meteor shower](#).

7.7 Rosette Nebula (Gerard Fox)



See [this article](#) from [constellation-guide.com](#) and [this NASA webpage](#).

7.8 Andromeda Galaxy, M31 (Paul Whitmarsh)



See the discussion of M31 in [section 6.1](#), and [this NASA webpage](#).