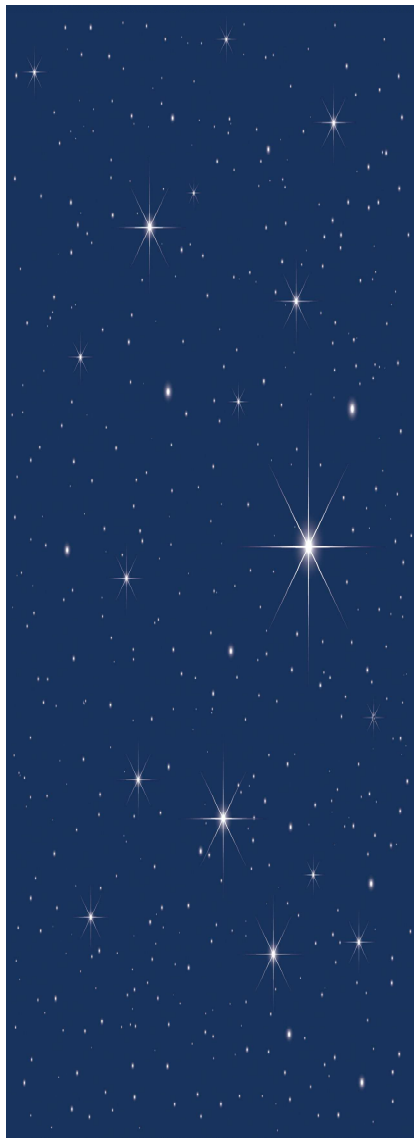


# Wiltshire Astronomical Society

## WAS News

May 2026

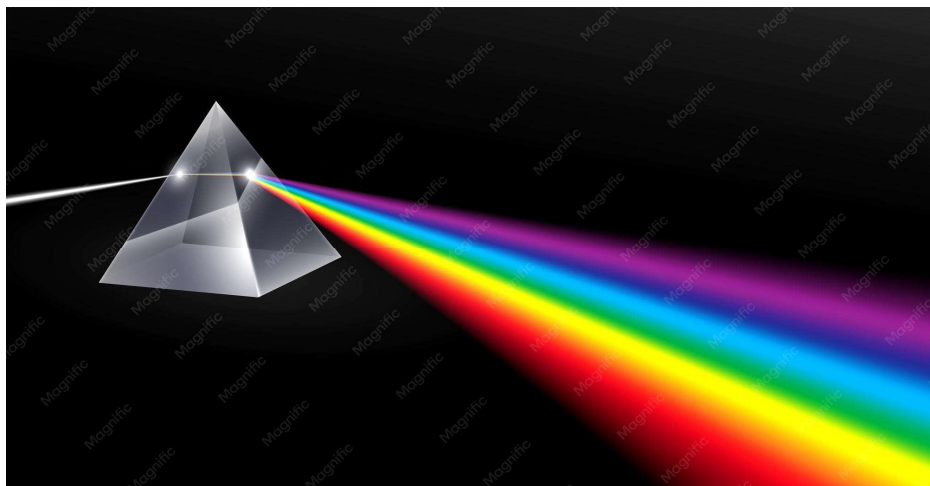


### This Month We Welcome..... Member

**Ken Whight**

**Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, How Can I Determine What You Are?**

"I was awarded a BSc in Physics with 1<sup>st</sup> class honours in 1972 from the University of East Anglia in Norwich and spent my entire career at the Philips Research Laboratories, Redhill Surrey. I retired early in 2008 when they moved the lab up to a science park in Cambridge. My early career was spent working on integrated circuit technology and then computer modelling of silicon power devices. Later in my career I worked on software development for GPS systems, spread spectrum radio systems and Liquid crystal displays. Over my career I have published papers in scientific journals, presented papers at international conferences and was the author of 16 US patents. on the less academic side my major hobby before taking up astronomy has been in folk music. I've played fiddle for a few Morris dancing sides and in barn and scottish dance bands".



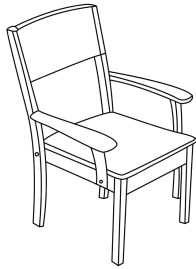
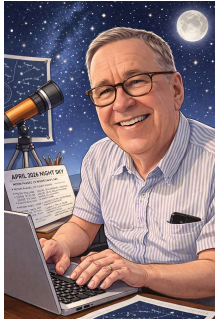
#### Inside this issue

Comments from the Chair .....	2
May Night Sky.....	3
Members Gallery.....	4
Little Red Dots.....	5
Observing Sessions Schedule.....	12
Meeting Schedule 25/26.....	13
Contact Us.....	14

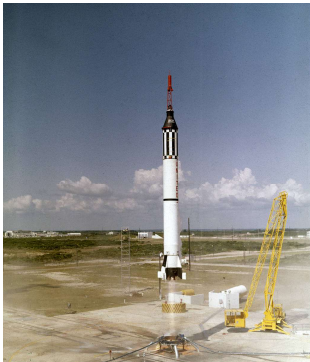
#### Special points of interest

- This months speaker (1)
- Little Red Dots (2)
- Observing Sessions Schedule (11)
- Meeting Schedule (12)

## Comments from the Chair



Mercury Redstone-3  
'Freedom 7'  
Alan B Shepard  
May 5 1961



Whilst sorting through my garage I saw my self built dobsonian telescope sitting there. I haven't used it for a number of years but decided that I should. It's a 10 inch F5 truss design (photo below). This led me to the thought of whether amateur telescope making is still as popular as before; or have cheaper off the shelf go-to scopes slowly reduced the number of people building telescopes? Have you ever made one? If so, I'd liked to know. Decades ago telescope making was a way of getting a reasonable aperture scope that did not stretch budgets. I do see in Sky and Telescope magazine a section specific to telescope making and other home built devices, so certainly in the USA there a number of enthusiasts still building devices.

Andy and I carried out an outreach at a Chippenham care home. We had an interested audience and interesting questions! One question caused Andy to steer carefully through theology and astronomy in particular how we reconcile our (astronomers) view of the Universe and those that side with the bible and other theology based views. Well done to Andy for handling that so well.

I have had a small success with the lights behind my house. The council have adjusted the most offending lamps with a promise to assess the possibility of upgrading to modern downlights (fingers crossed!)

Next month we have our AGM and at the risk of becoming boring the committee would welcome volunteers. Of course, if anybody wants to volunteer to become Chair, Speaker Secretary, or any other role please speak up!

As well as the AGM we plan to have a few short talks from members as we did last year. Sadly, we have had only one volunteer, Jon Gale. If you would like to give a short presentation, please let me know.

May brings us to our last organised observing sessions due to the lighter evenings. I take this opportunity to thank Chris Books for his sterling work organizing and being available to those that attend. As always members can always arrange ad hoc ses-

sions. When time becomes available we will try to set up a WhatsApp group. We need Sam to do this and time is not a commodity he has in large quantities! If any member has the prerequisite knowledge and skill for these IT related matters and could help out, please speak to me or Sam.

Following the success of Artemis II, I have noted that astronauts are not like the boyhood astronaut heroes from the 60's and 70's. I could not imagine the hugging between the crew members and high fives would sit comfortably with the likes of Al Shepard, John Young, Wally Schirra etc., in the days of Mercury, Gemini and Apollo. As I wrote last month, maybe I just like to hang on to the shirt tails of a bygone era. But that sentiment applies to many things in this chaotic world we now live in.

That reminds me this month's meeting date coincides with the anniversary of Al Shepard's 15m 28s sub orbital flight back in 1961 in his Mercury spacecraft Freedom 7, becoming the second man in space. He later became the oldest man to walk on the moon at age 47 (Apollo 14). Al Shepard passed away back in 1998 aged 74.

Thank you to the members that have posted images on the Members Facebook page, as usual a few are availa-



ble on Page 4.

Clear Skies! *Simon*

# THE NIGHT SKY – MAY 2026

Lighter evenings begin to eat into observing in the evening and the sky never truly darkens at the end of the month.

## Key Dates (BST)

Lunar:

Last Quarter – 8 May

New Moon – 15 May

First Quarter – 23 May

Full Moon – 30 May

## Sunset & Darkness (Southern UK)

1 May – Sunset 20:30 | Dark 23:00

15 May – Sunset 20:55 | Dark 23:45

31 May – Sunset 21:15 | No true darkness

## Planets

Mercury – Low in the west late month (21:30+)

Venus – Brilliant morning star (rising ~03:30)

Mars – Evening object, setting ~23:00 early May

Jupiter – Very low west, disappears mid-month

Saturn – Morning planet, rising earlier each day

## Deep Sky

Virgo Cluster – rich galaxy field

Whirlpool Galaxy – spiral structure visible

Sombrero Galaxy – bright core, dark lane

M3 – excellent in binoculars

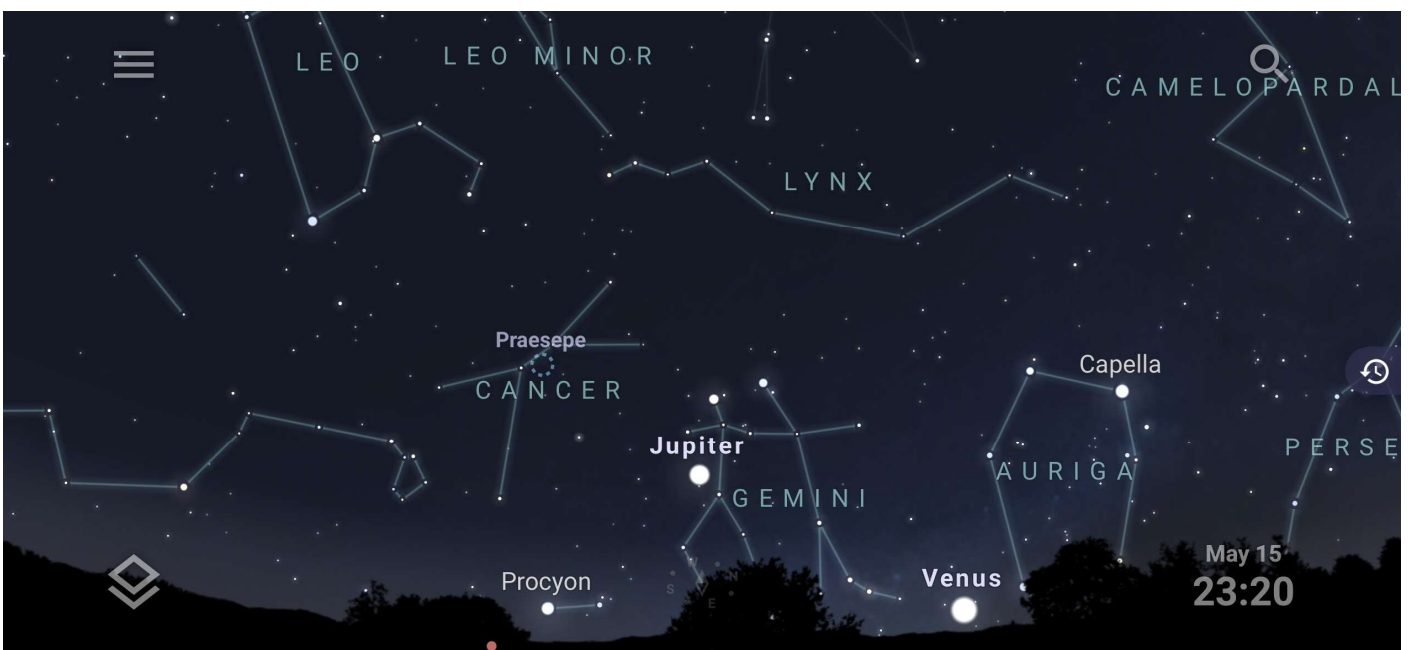
## Meteor Shower

Eta Aquariids

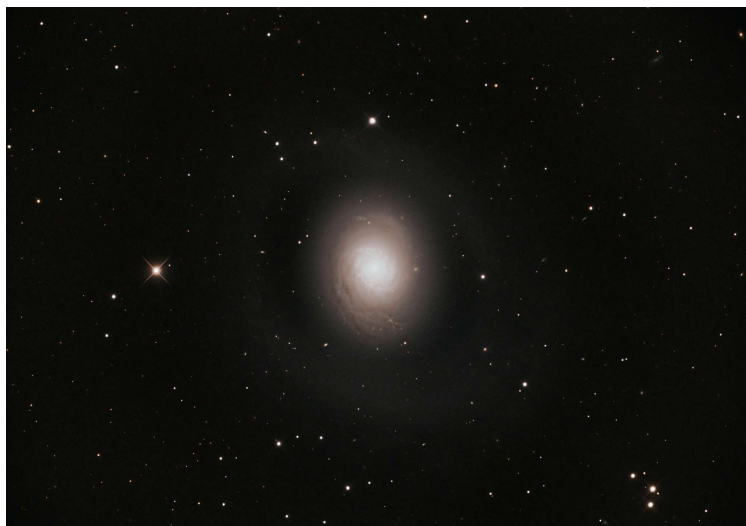
Peak: 5–6 May

Time: 03:00–04:30

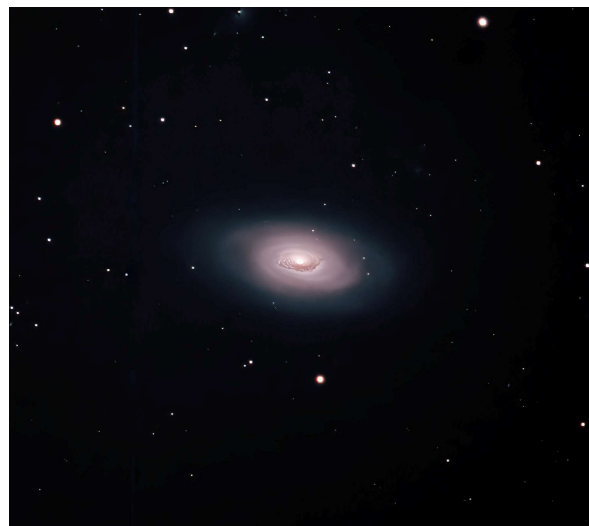
Rate: ~10/hour



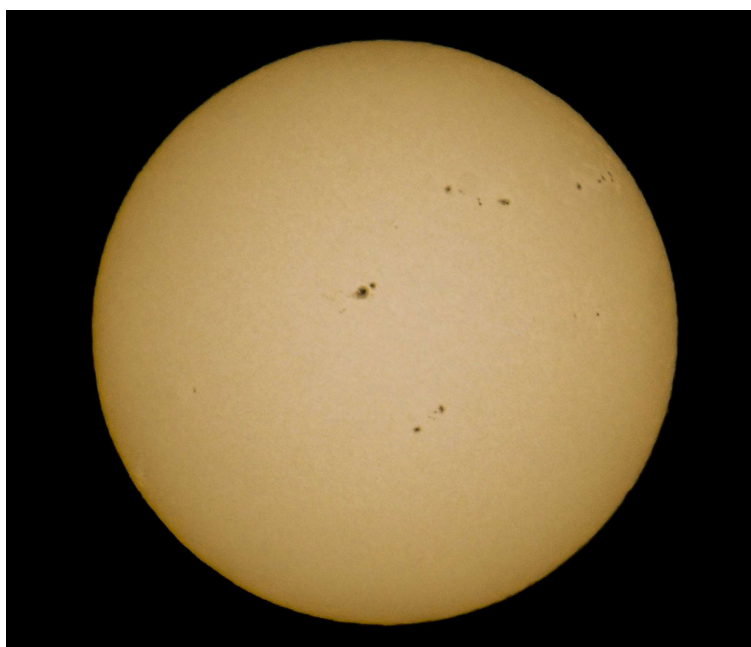
## Members Gallery



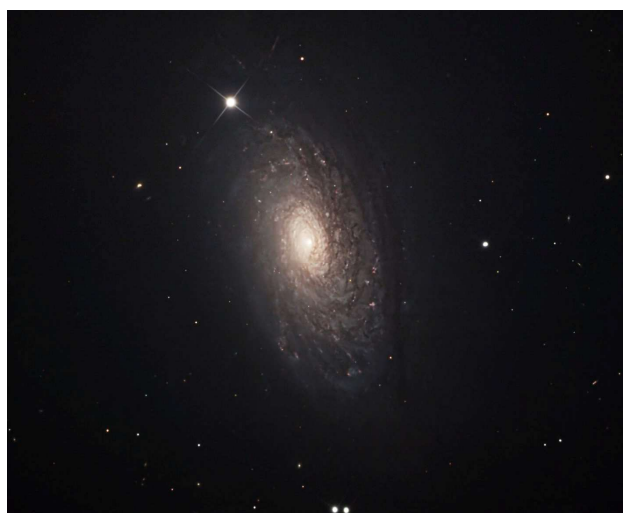
7.5 Hours on M94. The Halo around the edge is actually 2 of the galaxies spiral arms stretched out away from the core. Taken with a 250mm RC Telescope from Calne. Matthew Terrell



M64, the Black-eyed galaxy. 20x 300sec subs in LRGB. Plagued by satellites and trees last night so only a short session available. 18 April 26 Steve Allen



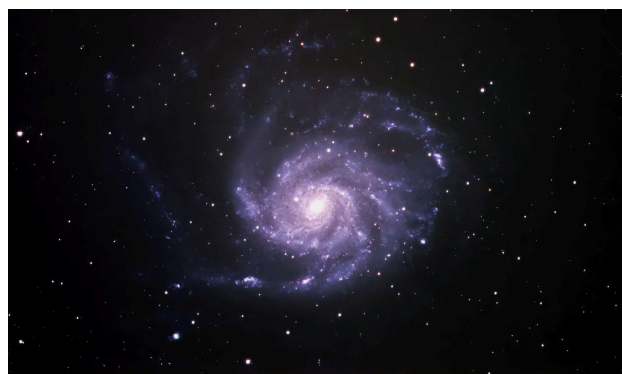
The Sun this morning, selected area from 800mm lens and ND10000 filter. 30 April 26 Andy Burns



After 18 Hrs processing in PixInsight, and over 7000 4 second exposures, M63, the Sunflower Galaxy is complete for this year. Here is the Astrobin Link. Matthew Terrell  
<https://app.astrobin.com/i/fu4t3i>



2 Hour star trail looking east. Moon light was giving some colour to the land. 8 April 26 Andy Burns



This has taken a few nights to get all the data needed to produce this image of M101, the Pinwheel galaxy. A nice example of a face-on spiral galaxy some 23 MLY away. Steve Allen

More images can be seen on the Members Facebook Pages.

---

## Astronomy News

### Cosmic Mystery: The Rise of the “Little Red Dots”

Recent observations from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) have uncovered one of the most intriguing puzzles in modern astronomy—tiny, faint objects scattered across deep images of the early universe, now nicknamed “**little red dots.**”

These objects are incredibly distant, their light taking over **12 billion years** to reach Earth. We are seeing them as they existed when the universe was very young. At first, astronomers were unsure what they were. They appeared too compact to be typical galaxies, yet too bright and structured to be individual stars.

New research now suggests something remarkable: these “little red dots” may be **young, rapidly growing black holes**, surrounded by thick clouds of gas and dust. If confirmed, they could represent a crucial missing stage in cosmic history—the moment when **supermassive black holes first formed.**

#### Why This Matters

Supermassive black holes—millions or billions of times the mass of the Sun—are known to exist surprisingly early in the universe. The mystery has always been: **how did they grow so quickly?**

The “little red dots” may provide the answer. They could show a rapid formation process in dense early environments, allowing black holes to grow far faster than previously thought.

This discovery also reshapes our understanding of how the **first galaxies formed**, suggesting that galaxy growth and black hole development were closely linked from the very beginning.

#### More Discoveries from JWST

The JWST continues to transform astronomy across multiple fields:

- A Jupiter-like exoplanet has been observed with **water-ice clouds** in its atmosphere
- New techniques using artificial intelligence are speeding up the analysis of telescope data
- Deep-field images are revealing **more early-universe structures** than expected

Each new dataset is not just adding detail—it is challenging long-held theories about the evolution of the cosmos.

While the night sky above us may seem calm and familiar, discoveries like these remind us that the universe is still full of surprises.

The faint “little red dots” may turn out to be one of the most important clues yet in understanding how everything—from galaxies to black holes—first came to be.

*Contributor: Simon Barnes*

# 2025—2026 Observing Schedule

Wiltshire Astronomical Society Planned Observing Evenings 2025-2026 Season								
Month	Day	Date	Month	Year		Event Attempt	Time	
Sep-25	Friday	19th	September	2025		1st Observing	20:30	
	What To See!	Saturn close to opposition and very bright. Rings almost Edge on.						
		Neptune almost at opposition and a good time to try to see it.						
	Friday	26th	September	2025		2nd Observing	20:30	
	What To See!	Still a good time to catch Saturn & Neptune						
Oct-25	Friday	17th	October	2025		1st Observing	20:00	
	What To See!	Orionid Meteor Shower						
	Friday	24th	October	2025		2nd Observing	20:00	
	What To See!	Orionid Meteor Shower						
Nov-25	Friday	14th	November	2025		1st Observing	19:30	
	What To See!	Leonid Meteor Shower						
		Saturns Rings almost Edge on						
	Friday	21st	November	2025		2nd Observing	19:30	
	What To See!	Saturns Rings almost Edge on						
		Uranus at Opposition just south of the Pleiades						
		Leonid Meteor Shower						
Dec-25	Friday	12th	December	2025		1st Observing	19:00	
	What To See!	Orionid Meteor Shower						
	Friday	19th	December	2025		2nd Observing	19:00	
	What To See!	Ursid Meteor Shower						
Jan-26	Friday	9th	January	2026		1st Observing	19:00	
	What To See!	Jupiter at Opposition in Gemini						
		Comet 24P/Schaumasse observable after 01:30 (10th)						
	Friday	16th	January	2026		2nd Observing	19:00	
	What To See!	Jupiter and Saturn still on display.						
Feb-26	Friday	13th	February	2026		1st Observing	19:30	
	Friday	20th	February	2026		2nd Observing	19:30	
Mar-26	Friday	13th	March	2026		1st Observing	20:00	
	Friday	20th	March	2026		2nd Observing	20:00	
Apr-26	Friday	10th	April	2026		1st Observing	20:00	
	Friday	17th	April	2026		2nd Observing	20:30	
	What To See!	Lyrid Meteor Shower						
May-26	Friday	8th	May	2026		1st Observing	21:00	
	What To See!	Eta Aquarids Meteor Shower						
	Friday	15th	May	2026		2nd Observing	21:00	

Version: 1 - Published 2025-07-30

# Wiltshire AS Meeting overview 2025/26

All meetings convene from 19.15 for a 19.30 start

MONTH	TITLE	Speaker	ACTUAL DATE
Sep-25	Adventures in Infrared	Dr Jane Clark	2nd September 2025
Oct-25	The Colourful Lives of Stars - What are stars?	Michael Barratt FRAS	7th October 2025
Nov-25	Black Holes, Dark Matter and Dark Energy	Peter Allan	4th November 2025
Dec-25	Christmas Quiz	N/A	2nd December 2025
Jan-26	Filton in Space - 65 years and Counting	Terry Ransome	6th January 2026
Feb-26	John Dartnell	Capturing Totality: Tips and Techniques	3rd February 2026
Mar-26	Observing with Binoculars	Mark Radice	3rd March 2026
Apr-26	Extinct Constellations	Nicky Fleet	7th April 2026
May-26	Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, How Can I Determine What You Are?	Ken Whight	5th May 2026
Jun-26	Members Talks & AGM	Various	2nd June 2026

# Wiltshire Astronomical Society Contact Info:

**Chair:** Simon Barnes  
**Newsletter:** Simon Barnes  
**Treasurer and Membership:** Sam Franklin  
**Speaker secretary:** **Position Vacant**  
**Observing Sessions coordinators:** Chris Brooks, Jon Gale,  
**Web & IT coordinator:** Sam Franklin  
**PR and Design:** Tracey Kelly

## Contact the Society here:

**Email:** [contact@wasnet.org.uk](mailto:contact@wasnet.org.uk)

**Website url:** <https://wasnet.org.uk/>

**Public Facebook Page** <https://www.facebook.com/Wiltshire-Astronomical-Society-154077261327030/>

**Members only Facebook group:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/wiltshire.astro.society/>

**Committee Page:** <https://wasnet.org.uk/committee/>

**Observing Sessions Location:** The observing area is located in the Picnic area to the side of the Red Lion Pub (Lacock) car park  
Postcode: SN15 2LQ

what3words = airbag.shudders.losing



**Hall Meeting Location:** Pewsham Community Centre, Lodge Road, Pewsham  
Chippenham, SN15 3SY

What3words = boat.perky.ticket

