OASI News

The newsletter of the Orwell Astronomical Society (Ipswich).
Registered charity 271313.

A bright aurora observed on 02 March 2026 while cruising the Norwegian and Barents Seas. Paul Whiting.

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Society Notices

As we move into March, let's hope we are leaving the cloud and rain from the last few months behind!

Jupiter is still a magnificent sight in the evening sky. If you make any observations or take images, please send them in, so we can host them on our website, publish them in the Newsletter, or upload them to our social media pages.

It was great to see such a healthy attendance for our Lecture Meeting on February 20th, presented by Tom Boles. Our next meeting, on Friday March 20th, will be presented by renowned astrophotographer, Nik Szymanek. He will showcase the latest astro imaging techniques, with the latest software from RC Astro, including Blur XTerminator.

I hope to see you at a meeting in the coming month.

Andy Gibbs,
Chairman.

Committee & Trustees

Chairman	Andy Gibbs	Set overall agenda for OASI, chair committee meetings, press and publicity.
Secretary	Roy Gooding	Outreach meetings (jointly with Chairman), observatory decoration.
Treasurer	Paul Whiting	Finance, supervision of applications for grants. Visits by outside groups, observatory tours, public appreciation of astronomy, outreach activities.
Committee	James Appleton	Committee meeting minutes, web site.
	Robin Carpenter	Deputy OASI@Newbourne coordinator.
	Martin Cook	Membership, Tomline refractor maintenance & user testing.
	Adam Honeybell	Newsletter.
	Matt Leeks	Safety & security.
	Peter Richards	Lecture meetings.
	Mike Whybray	Astronomy workshops, Child Protection Officer, Orwell Park School astronomy.
	Paul Whiting	OASI@Newbourne coordinator.
	Andy Willshere	Librarian.
Trustees	Neil Morley	
	David Payne	
	Bill Barton	

Contact Details

Website: www.oasi.org.uk

Events: www.oasi.org.uk/Events/Events.php

Email queries: info@oasi.org.uk

Members-only message board: groups.io/g/OASI

Orwell Park Observatory (meeting nights only): tel. 07960 083714

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/445056098989371

YouTube: www.youtube.com/@orwellastronomical425

WhatsApp: email Andy Gibbs to be added to the OASI WhatsApp group.

Articles for OASI News

News, pictures, observing reports, notices of events and articles of general interest are always welcome for the Newsletter! Please send material to news@oasi.org.uk.

The closing date for material is the 15th day of the month.

The Newsletter archive is at www.oasi.org.uk/NL/NL_archive.php.

Authors: please note that the Newsletter is publicly available!

Events

Date, Time & Location	Contact	Event
Mon 16 Mar 2026 20:00 Zoom	Paul Whiting, FRAS treasurer@oasi.org.uk	Pre-recorded talk: *Massive Stars and Supernovae* by Thomas Haworth. (Zoom login details are provided by email to members.)
Wed 18 Mar 2026 20:00 Orwell Park Observatory	Martin Cook membership@oasi.org.uk	General observing for members of OASI.
Fri 20 Mar 2026 19:45 St Augustine's Church, The Lantern Room (church annex)	Pete Richards lectures@oasi.org.uk	Lecture Meeting. Nik Szymanek, *A Centaurus A Case Study*. Nik will demonstrate, using the Centaurus A galaxy as a case study, how to make amazing astro-photographs. He will also showcase powerful new imaging software which will be of particular interest to astrophotographers. There is parking at the front of the church and additional spaces just across Bucklesham Road at the Saint Augustine's Community Hub.
Mon 23 Mar 2026 19:30 Newbourne Village Hall	Paul Whiting, FRAS newbourne@oasi.org.uk	Newbourne meeting - beginners and new members welcome! 19:30 Doors open. 19:45 *Sky Notes* by Bill Barton, FRAS.
Wed 25 Mar 2026 20:00 Orwell Park Observatory	Martin Cook membership@oasi.org.uk	General observing for members of OASI.
Wed 01 Apr 2026 20:00 Orwell Park Observatory	Martin Cook membership@oasi.org.uk	General observing for members of OASI.

Mon 06 Apr 2026 19:30 Newbourne Village Hall	Paul Whiting, FRAS newbourne@oasi.org.uk	Newbourne meeting - beginners and new members welcome! 19:30 Doors open.
Wed 08 Apr 2026 20:00 Orwell Park Observatory	Martin Cook membership@oasi.org.uk	General observing for members of OASI.
Wed 15 Apr 2026 20:00 Orwell Park Observatory	Martin Cook membership@oasi.org.uk	General observing for members of OASI.
Mon 20 Apr 2026 20:00 Zoom	Paul Whiting, FRAS treasurer@oasi.org.uk	Pre-recorded talk: *At the Limits of Astrophysics* by Katy Clough. (Zoom login details are provided by email to members.)
Wed 22 Apr 2026 20:00 Orwell Park Observatory	Martin Cook membership@oasi.org.uk	General observing for members of OASI.
Fri 24 Apr 2026 19:45 St Augustine's Church, The Lantern Room (church annex)	Pete Richards lectures@oasi.org.uk	Lecture Meeting. Chris Mead, Chair & Secretary of DASH Astro, *Astronomy in Uzbekistan*. There is parking at the front of the church and additional spaces just across Bucklesham Road at the Saint Augustine's Community Hub.
Mon 27 Apr 2026 19:30 Newbourne Village Hall	Paul Whiting, FRAS newbourne@oasi.org.uk	Newbourne meeting - beginners and new members welcome! 19:30 Doors open. 19:45 *Sky Notes* by Bill Barton, FRAS.
Wed 29 Apr 2026 20:00 Orwell Park Observatory	Martin Cook membership@oasi.org.uk	General observing for members of OASI.

OASI events are free for members to attend. All members are welcome at all events.

OASI @ Orwell Park

We hold meetings at Orwell Park Observatory every Wednesday evening from 8pm.

Access is via the second gate on Church Road, Nacton. (What3Words: tour.fuse.banks.)

Access requires the combination code or a key fob to open the gate and a key fob to open the door to the observatory. Regular attendees will be provided with a key fob – ask any committee member for details. If you do not have a key fob, ring the observatory number and someone will let you in.

Attendees must follow the below route. Please keep noise to a minimum to avoid disturbing pupils and staff at Orwell Park School.

- Enter through the gate south (towards the River Orwell) of the main gate of the school. The combination code or a key fob is required to open the gate.
- Park as indicated on the above map.
- Enter the school through the double black doors as indicated on the map. A key fob is required to open the door.
- Continue straight through the next two sets of double doors.
- Turn left at the end of the short corridor then turn immediately right.
- Pass through the single door and follow the stairs immediately on the left to the observatory.

OASI @ Newbourne

Meetings at Newbourne are held in the Village Hall, Mill Lane, IP12 4NP (What3Words scars.atlas.printing.)

Visitors are welcome. Anyone visiting more than twice will be asked to become a member of OASI.

Newbourne dates for 2026		
April	06#	27(S)
May	04#	25(S, A)
June	08	22(S)
July	13	27(S, A)
August	10	24(S)
September	14	28(S, A)
October	12	26(S)
November	09	23(S, A)
December	14(Q)	

A = Astro News by Paul Whiting.
S = Sky Notes by Bill Barton
We open for Newbourne meetings at 7:30pm.

Newbourne Meetings are generally held on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month. # indicates a deviation from the usual monthly pattern.

Outreach Events

Assistance from members at outreach events is always welcome. Enthusiasm is more important than expertise!

The following outreach events are currently planned. Contact Paul Whiting for more information.

- Sunday 21 June: Kirton Playing Field, Wireless Revival.
- Monday 31 August: Bawdsey Radar Museum, solar observing.

The Night Sky in March 2026

Data from https://heavens-above.com for the location of Orwell Park Observatory, 52.0096°N, 1.2305°E. Event times are civil time.

Object	Date	Rise	Set	Mag.
Sun ☉	1	06:41	17:35	
	31	06:33	19:27	
Moon ☾	1	15:08	06:08	
	31	17:54	05:55	
Mercury ☿	1	06:47	18:44	2.4
	31	04:24	16:23	0.5
Venus ♀	1	07:01	19:01	-3.8
	31	07:19	19:20	-3.8
Mars ♂	1	05:28	17:28	1.2
	31	04:58	16:58	1.2
Jupiter ♃	1	14:27	02:29	-2.3
	31	12:31	00:33	-2.1
Saturn ♄	1	07:32	19:30	1.0
	31	05:48	17:46	0.9
Uranus ♅	1	11:03	23:02	5.7
	31	09:10	21:08	5.8
Neptune ♆	1	07:28	19:26	8.0
	31	05:34	17:32	8.0

Comet MAPS

Bill Barton

There is a comet coming. It has been named C/2026 A1 (MAPS). It was discovered on January 13, 2026 by a collaboration of French astronomers, Alain Maury, Georges Attard, Daniel Parrott and Florian Signoret working at the AMACS1 Observatory in the Atacama Desert, Chile. The name of their team, and the comet, comes from the initial letters of their family names. It is a highly unusual type of comet known as 'sungrazer'. The most recent bright 'sungrazing' comet was C/2011 W3 (Lovejoy) and before that C/1965 S1 (Ikeya-Seki) over sixty years ago in 1965. These comets, as the name suggest, pass extremely close to the Sun. This means they can be very bright, but they are also very fast moving and are around for only a few days, or possibly, even hours. As an example, a couple of hours before closest approach to the Sun, Ikeya-Seki was estimated to be as bright as a first quarter Moon (mag minus ten). The next day it had diminished to that of Venus (mag minus four). If the weather is cloudy in the first week of April we may not get a single chance to see comet MAPS.

The time of MAPS closest approach to the Sun will be at 15:17 BST on April 4, 2026. It will then be only 100,000 miles (163,000km) above the Sun's photosphere. It will have to withstand something like 41.8MW/m2 (megawatts per square metre) of energy from the Sun. This is equivalent to 16,000 boiling kitchen kettles. The comet may well end up being completely vapourised.

Want to see the comet? SOHO satellite's C2 and C3 coronagraphs may show it. If they do it might become visible on the wide field C3 images on April 3rd until April 6th, providing the comet hasn't been completely evaporated by the heat from the Sun. Look on either on the website or the smartphone app.

It might be possible to view the comet by holding your hand up to the Sun on, or around, April 4 and, while shading your eyes from the Sun, see the comet either to the right or left of your hand. Would I point a telescope at the comet while it is near the Sun? In public, no, the chance of the telescope being knocked and ending up pointing at the Sun is too great. In private, still no, the telescope will form an off-axis image of the Sun that could be focussed on the inside of the tube which could damage the tube.

Below are two tables of predictions, known as ephemerides, from Dominic Ford's 'in-the-sky' website.

Ephemeris for C/2026 A1 (MAPS)																		
				Comet									Sun					
	DATE		Time	RA J2000	Dec J2000	Rise	Culm	Set	Approx	Sun Dist	Solar		RA J2000	Dec J2000				
Year	Month	Day		h:mm:ss	deg:mm:ss				Mag.	AU	Sep (deg)		h:mm:ss	deg:mm:ss				
2026	Mar	31	01:00 BS	1:35:35	0:30:29	7:48	13:55	20:01	6	0.2988	15.2		0:36:18	3:54:36	6:31	12:58	19:26	
2026	Apr	1	01:00 BS	1:30:01	1:22:05	7:35	13:45	19:56	4.9	0.2529	12.8		0:39:57	4:17:50	6:28	12:57	19:28	
2026	Apr	2	01:00 BS	1:23:29	2:17:56	7:19	13:35	19:50	3.6	0.2026	10.2		0:43:35	4:40:59	6:26	12:57	19:29	
2026	Apr	3	01:00 BS	1:15:23	3:20:18	7:02	13:23	19:44	1.5	0.1452	7.2		0:47:14	5:04:03	6:24	12:57	19:31	
2026	Apr	4	01:00 BS	1:04:04	4:35:42	6:40	13:08	19:35	-2.7	0.0733	3.4		0:50:53	5:27:02	6:21	12:56	19:33	
2026	Apr	5	01:00 BS	1:04:58	5:24:34	6:33	13:05	19:36	-4.7	0.0541	2.6		0:54:32	5:49:55	6:19	12:56	19:34	
2026	Apr	6	01:00 BS	1:27:21	4:48:19	6:54	13:23	19:52	0.7	0.1318	7.4		0:58:11	6:12:41	6:17	12:56	19:36	
2026	Apr	7	01:00 BS	1:45:12	4:23:16	7:11	13:37	20:03	3	0.1913	11		1:01:50	6:35:22	6:14	12:56	19:38	
2026	Apr	8	01:00 BS	2:00:51	4:03:24	7:24	13:49	20:13	4.4	0.2428	14		1:05:30	6:57:56	6:12	12:55	19:40	
2026	Apr	9	01:00 BS	2:14:57	3:46:50	7:36	13:59	20:22	5.5	0.2895	16.7		1:09:10	7:20:23	6:10	12:55	19:41	
2026	Apr	10	01:00 BS	2:27:51	3:32:41	7:46	14:08	20:30	6.4	0.3327	19.1		1:12:50	7:42:43	6:08	12:55	19:43	
2026	Apr	11	01:00 BS	2:39:45	3:20:25	7:55	14:16	20:36	7.2	0.3733	21.2		1:16:30	8:04:55	6:05	12:55	19:45	
2026	Apr	12	01:00 BS	2:50:46	3:09:41	8:03	14:23	20:43	7.8	0.4118	23.1		1:20:11	8:26:59	6:03	12:54	19:46	
2026	Apr	13	01:00 BS	3:01:01	3:00:12	8:10	14:29	20:48	8.4	0.4486	24.8		1:23:52	8:48:54	6:01	12:54	19:48	
All times computed for Ipswich (latitude 52.06; longitude 1.16) and expressed in Ipswich time.																		
All positions are in J2000.0 coordinates.																		
Ephemeris computed by Dominic Ford.																		
<https://in-the-sky.org/>																		

Ephemeris for C/2026 A1 (MAPS)																	
				Comet									Sun				
	DATE		Time	RA J2000	Dec J2000	Rise	Culm	Set	Approx	Solar			RA J2000	Dec J2000	Rise	Culm	Set
Year	Month	Day		h:mm:ss	deg:mm:ss				Mag.	Sep (deg)			h:mm:ss	deg:mm:ss			
2026	Apr	4	06:00 BST	1:00:47	4:55:12	6:35	13:04	19:33	-4.6	2.3			0:51:48	5:32:46	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	07:00 BST	1:00:03	4:59:25	6:34	13:04	19:33	-5.0	2.1			0:51:57	5:33:43	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	08:00 BST	0:59:17	5:03:48	6:33	13:03	19:33	-5.6	1.9			0:52:06	5:34:41	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	09:00 BST	0:58:28	5:08:21	6:32	13:02	19:32	-6.2	1.6			0:52:15	5:35:38	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	10:00 BST	0:57:37	5:13:07	6:31	13:01	19:32	-7.0	1.3			0:52:24	5:36:35	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	11:00 BST	0:56:41	5:18:09	6:29	13:00	19:31	-7.9	1.1			0:52:33	5:37:33	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	12:00 BST	0:55:42	5:23:31	6:28	12:59	19:31	-9.1	0.8			0:52:42	5:38:30	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	13:00 BST	0:54:37	5:29:22	6:26	12:58	19:30	-10.6	0.5			0:52:51	5:39:27	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	14:00 BST	0:53:25	5:35:52	6:24	12:57	19:30	-12.9	0.1			0:53:00	5:40:24	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	15:00 BST	0:52:11	5:43:09	6:23	12:56	19:29	-16.7	0.2			0:53:09	5:41:21	6:21	12:56	19:33
2026	Apr	4	16:00 BST	0:52:27	5:46:40	6:22	12:56	19:30	-16.7	0.2			0:53:19	5:42:18	6:21	12:56	19:33
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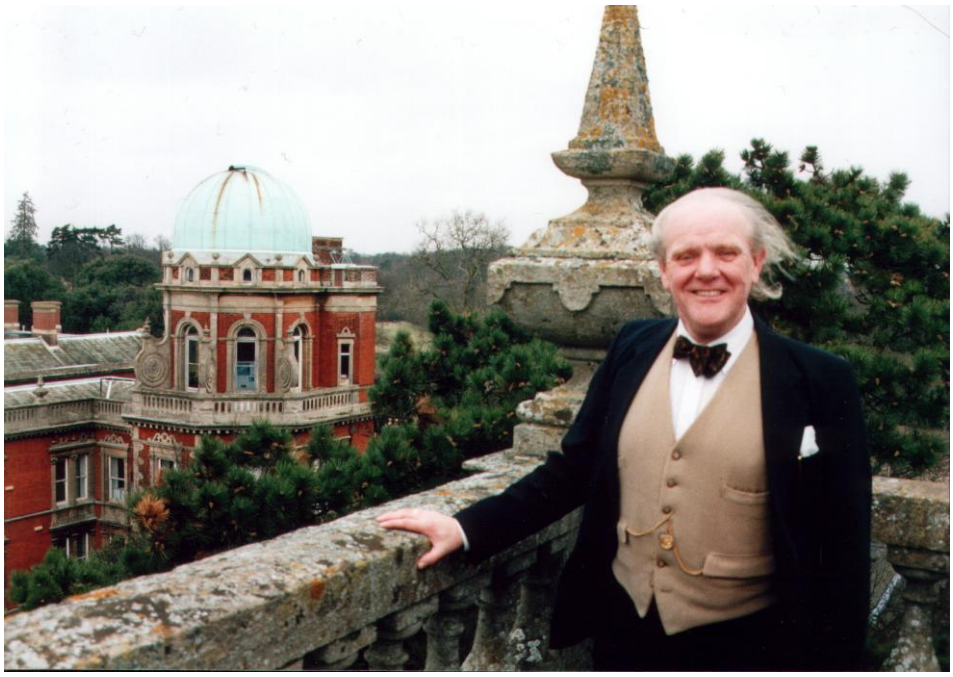
All times computed for Ipswich (latitude 52.06; longitude 1.16) and expressed in Ipswich time.																	
All positions are in J2000.0 coordinates.																	
Ephemeris computed by Dominic Ford.																	
<https://in-the-sky.org/>																	

OASI Honorary President, Dr Allan Chapman (1946-2026)

Neil Morley with contributions from: James Appleton, Andrew Gibbs, Pete Richards, Bill Barton, and Olaf Kirchner.



Allan Chapman visiting the school clock tower before his second Presidential lecture on 7/3/2003.

OASI members were greatly saddened to receive the news that Allan Chapman, Honorary President, had passed away on 21/1/26.

Allan was born in Pendlebury, Greater Manchester in 1946. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Lancaster in 1972, then undertook postgraduate work at Wadham College, Oxford, graduating D.Phil. He then went on to teach the history of science in the Faculty of Modern History, Oxford.

Allan was a renowned historian with an interest in the history of science, and of astronomy in particular. He tutored countless students at Oxford, authored many books and papers and lectured extensively on the history of science (including the 1994 Royal Society's Wilkins Lecture on Edmund Halley). He presented several television documentaries and made many appearances on The Sky at Night. He was a founder member and President of the Society for the History of Astronomy (SHA).

Allan provided enthusiastic support to many local astronomy societies, and it is in this regard that he became Honorary President of OASI. In 1999, Pete Richards, OASI lecture coordinator, met Allan at an FAS convention in Sidmouth and invited him to lecture to OASI on the life of Sir George Biddell Airy, 7th Astronomer Royal. Somewhat to Pete's surprise, Allan accepted the invitation. Subsequently, appreciating the importance of the lecture, Andrew Auster, the Headmaster of Orwell Park School kindly agreed to fund the event and to host it in the Orangery at Orwell Park, enabling a large audience to attend.

While arrangements were being made for the lecture, in early 2001, OASI Chairman, Ken Goward, FRAS, met Allan at a seminar at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich. The two discussed the history of

Orwell Park Observatory and subsequently Ken proposed to name the Orwell Park refractor in honour of its original sponsor the Tomline Refractor, and to organise a ceremony to mark the event, at which Allan would officiate. At OASI's 2001 AGM, members of OASI enthusiastically endorsed Ken's proposal. The event was held on 18 May 2001 and marked the start of a quarter century association between Allan and OASI.

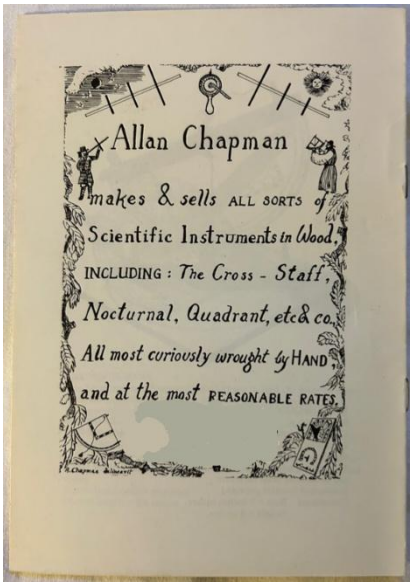
Allan unveiling the Tomline refractor plaque on 18/5/2001.

At OASI's AGM the following year, members present voted unanimously to invite Allan to become Honorary President of the Society. Allan graciously accepted the invitation; he took his duties seriously and kindly agreed to deliver lectures to members of OASI as his busy schedule allowed. He honoured his commitment handsomely and, in total, delivered seven memorable lectures:

- 18 May 2001: Sir G B Airy.
- 07 March 2003: The Victorian Amateur Tradition.
- 22 April 2005: The Great Ladies of Astronomy.
- 04 May 2007: That Clubbable Passion; the Amateur Astronomical Society.
- 23 April 2010: Thomas Harriot, Galileo and the First Telescopic Astronomers.
- 07 June 2013: Patrick Moore, A Lifetime in Astronomy.
- 29 July 2017: Sir John Herschel, Astronomer in Two Hemispheres.

Allan was a renowned lecturer, and always spoke with great panache and erudition, with great clarity, without notes or visual aids. His lectures were always well attended and well received.

Allan's characteristic appearance, his colourful bow ties and the gold watch chain across his waistcoat were in the style of an Edwardian gentleman scholar whose natural habitat could be among the Dreaming Spires. But this was deceptive: his knowledge of his subject matter, his well-honed practical skills (he created wonderful recreations of some historical astronomical instruments) and his humanity meant that he could engage effectively with audiences at all levels.



Allan Chapman, scientific instrument-maker

Perhaps Allan's greatest contribution to OASI was his support to efforts to obtain funding for the renovation of Orwell Park Observatory. When he served as OASI Chairman between 2009-13, Neil Morley worked as a member of a team to raise the profile of the observatory nationally, to support fund-raising for urgently needed repairs. Key members of the team were Allan, Peter Hingley (Librarian of the Royal Astronomical Society) and Peregrine Bryant (Conservation Architect). Several meetings took place with the school leading to an application to English Heritage to upgrade the listing of the observatory from Grade II to Grade II* with the remainder of the school remaining Grade II.

Allan and Rowland Constantine (Headmaster) at Orwell Park School on 23/4/2010

Allan contributed a statement, dated 16/3/2011, signed jointly with Peter Hingley and Robert Marriot (Instrument Section Director, British Astronomical Association), detailing the historical significance of the observatory. This was preceded with the following beautifully handwritten letter that Allan had written to Peregrine.

Dear Mr Bryant,

It was a great pleasure to meet you at Orwell Park School Suffolk last Summer and hope all can proceed well with the preservation of Colonel Tomline's observatory. I wholly concur with my friends and colleagues, Peter Hingley and Robert Marriot, that the observatory is unique, in so far as it not only survives as a private gentleman's observatory from the 19th century, but it survives with its original instruments intact and in pretty well full working order.

Without doubt, it needs a special protected status. For put quite simply, it is a unique surviving national scientific treasure.

With best wishes and regards, Yours Sincerely,Allan Chapman.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
FACULTY OF HISTORY
The Old Boys' High School, George Street, Oxford OX1 2RL

Dr Allan Chapman M.A. D.Phil. D.Sc. D.Univ. F.R.A.S.
Contact address: Wadham College, Oxford OX1 3PN
Tel. 01865 251577 Fax 01865 277937

17th March 2011

Dear Mr. Bryant,

It was a great pleasure to meet you at Orwell Park, Suffolk, last summer, and hope all can proceed well with the preservation of Colonel Tomline's Observatory. I wholly concur with my friends and colleagues, Peter Hingley and Robert Marriot, that the Observatory is unique, in so far as it not only survives as a private gentleman's Observatory from the 19th Century, but that it survives with it's original instruments intact and in pretty well full working order.

Without doubt, it needs a special protected status. For quite simply, it is a unique, surviving national scientific treasure.

With Best Wishes & Regards,

Yours sincerely,

Allan Chapman

Allan's letter headlining the historical significance of the observatory

The application led to a compromise between the school and English Heritage where the overall listing remained Grade II but the entry was changed from “Orwell Park School” to “Orwell Park School and Observatory”. Allan's letter and signed statement were subsequently included in a comprehensive pack of evidence for future fund-raising applications. The legacy of this groundwork was realised after Andy Gibbs took over as OASI Chairman. The school raised funds through the Pilgrim Trust, allowing three central window frames in the Belvedere and two window frames in the Equatorial Room (observatory dome) to be replaced during summer 2021.

In his later years, Allan suffered from heart disease, and his ability to actively support local astronomy societies was diminished. In early 2023, the Committee of OASI decided that it would be fitting for Allan to present a Presidential Lecture the following year as part of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Orwell Park Observatory. Due to the deterioration in Allan’s health and his loss of mobility, Allan agreed that Andy Gibbs could visit him at home in Oxford to record the lecture, which would be shown subsequently to members of OASI. Unfortunately, although Allan was very keen to support the celebration, it proved impossible to put the necessary arrangements in place.

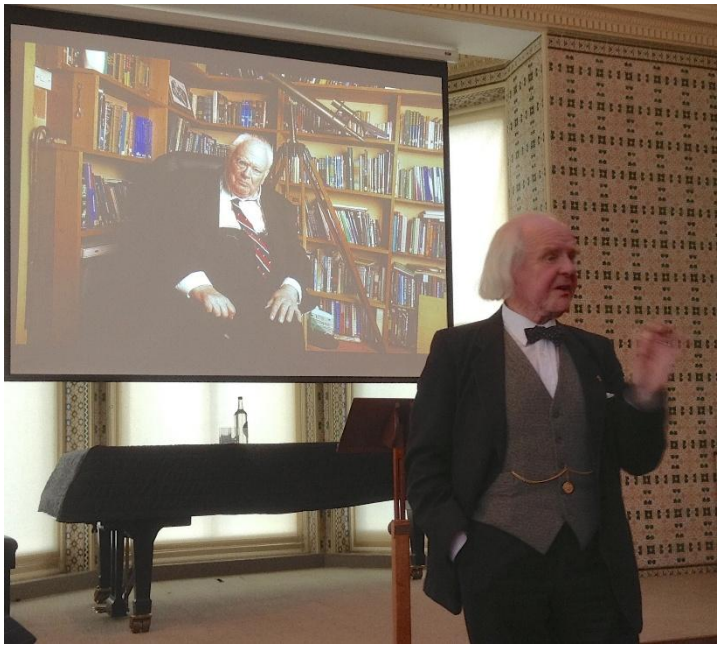
Allan died on 21 January 2026 after a cardiac arrest following a fall at home. OASI lost not just a figurehead, but a friend and supporter. His presidency embodied the best traditions of learned societies: scholarship shared freely, enthusiasm kindled generously, and history made alive. He is sadly missed. May he rest in peace.

OASI members have kindly added their personal memories of Allan below.

Andy Gibbs

My memories of Allan stretch back to before I was member of OASI. As a regular attendee of European Astrofest in London, I can recall many of Allan's legendary lectures.

I joined OASI in 2012 and, in 2013, attended a brilliant Presidential Lecture, in the Orangery at Orwell Park School, on the life of Patrick Moore.



Allan lecturing on the life of Patrick Moore in the Orangery at Orwell Park School in 2013.

In 2017, Allan presented another lecture at our Society's 50th Anniversary Convention. It was a pleasure to listen to his talk on John Herschel.

In 2019, I became Chairman of OASI and whenever I spotted Allan at Astrofest, he was always happy to spare some for time for a chat and was very keen to hear news of our Society and Orwell Park Observatory.

I attended Astrofest on 6th and 7th February 2026, a few days after Allan's sad passing. There was a moving tribute to Allan, where memories of his numerous appearances at the show were recalled. At the conclusion of the tribute, Allan's old brown teapot was brought out and everybody in the audience raised a virtual cup of tea in honour of a uniquely talented speaker and the leading authority on the history of astronomy.

Pete Richards

Allan did a lot to support efforts to obtain funding for renovation of the observatory.

Between 2001 and 2013, he delivered seven presidential lectures and also gave a talk on Sir John Herschel, Astronomer in Two Hemispheres at the OASI 50th Anniversary Convention in 2017.

The audience at the 2007 Presidential Lecture.

Allan gasping for tea after the 2010 Presidential Lecture.

Members of OASI enjoyed Allan's company at several meals in Ipswich when he visited us. It was particularly important that the venues hosting the meals could supply numerous cups of good old-fashioned tea. At a dinner with several members of OASI at the Holiday Inn in Ipswich, Allan was particularly pleased to be provided with a specially arranged bottomless* teapot.

* Shouldn't a bottomless teapot always be empty? Apparently it implies endless refills and a pot that is always full!

Bill Barton

I first encountered Allan in the mid 1990's at the Leeds Astromeet (sadly no longer being held) and I could not believe it was possible for someone to speak for a whole hour without reference to notes or even using a single 'erm' or 'err'.

A few years later, a Yahoo chat group discussing the history of astronomy started up. Members included me, Ken Goward, Stuart Williams and a few others. Allan was only peripheral to this group (because he didn't use modern technology), but he certainly encouraged us 'from the sidelines'. Maybe it was this group that inspired him to write 'The Victorian Amateur Astronomer'? The group and his book led to the formation of the Society for the History of Astronomy (SHA) in 2002.

My other memory is when I drove Ken to Birmingham for an SHA event. We started off early in the morning (but that's another story). When the day was over we ended up giving Allan a lift to New Street Station. I knew where we were going, but Allan, sat in the back wasn't so sure. As we stopped at a junction two police officers were standing nearby. Allan wound down the window and, in a loud voice, said 'Officers of the law, directions to New Street Station, if you please.' Ken and I later joked it was probably the first time in weeks they hadn't been addressed 'oi mush' or something involving an expletive!

I count myself very lucky to have some of Allan's books in my library, a couple are signed; of course, in fountain pen.

A selection of Allan's published books.

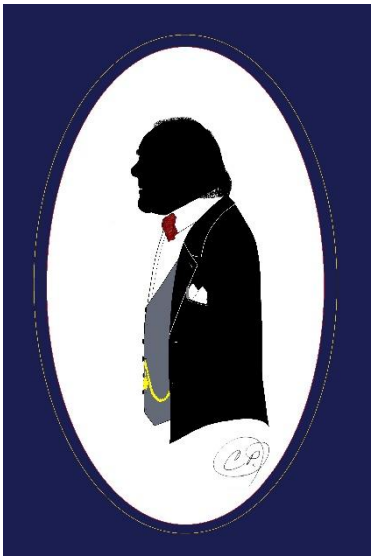
Olaf Kirchner

I vividly remember two of the talks Allan gave to the Oxford University Astronomical Society in my student days in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when he was at Wadham College.

Allan was a true eccentric, kind, friendly and always ready to share his enthusiasm for the history of science, especially the human stories that always form the basis of science. He always sported impressive ginger sideburns like a Victorian gentleman, dressed in tweeds and a deerstalker, and wore wire-rim glasses. I remember he always carried two pocket watches in his waistcoat pockets, as

wristwatches were not his thing. One of the timepieces was set on GMT and the other on Oxford local mean sidereal time, so in summer neither would actually tell the correct local time. His talks on "The Jacobean Space Programme" and "The Discovery of Neptune" were so impressive and memorable that I could re-tell the stories in detail even now!

His passing is a great loss to professional and amateur astronomy. I shall always remember him.



Caricature of Allan Chapman (source: Wikipedia).

Neil Morley

Allan was a brilliant communicator able to captivate and reach all corners of an audience. Even if a person wasn't particularly interested in astronomy, I always felt they would come away from a talk having picked up something of interest that they would remember for a very long time. Allan talked freely without relying on electronic aids like PowerPoint. Typically, he would display a handful of photographs towards the end of a talk using an old-fashioned slide projector. Allan's lectures consistently ran to time despite his reliance on two mechanical pocket watches set to different times. He was always impeccably dressed. I remember his wicked sense of humour and a twinkle in his eyes.

During my tenure as Chairman of OASI, 23/4/2010 proved to be a particularly busy day. I recall picking Allan up from Ipswich station with his good friend Peter Hingley, Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) Librarian. We were en-route to an important meeting at Orwell Park School with Peregrine Bryant (Conservation Architect), Rowland Constantine (Headmaster), Simon Dodsworth (School Bursar) and Richard Brunt (School Surveyor). Within 30 seconds, I realised that I had two very naughty schoolboys in the back of the car. The jokes being exchanged went from strength to strength to such an extent that I missed a couple of turnings!

Allan recalled an evening reception he'd attended where several eminent brain surgeons were present. They had consumed copious quantities of red wine. After a few glasses (or was it bottles?) Allan started discussing brain surgery with one of the surgeons. Apparently, brain surgery was akin to drilling a hole in someone's head, inserting a whisk and whisking the contents! It was shortly after then I recall Peter (or was it Allan?) saying "We seem to be going round in circles, I'd better shut up!" Fortunately we arrived in time for the meeting as otherwise we may have ended up in Edinburgh.

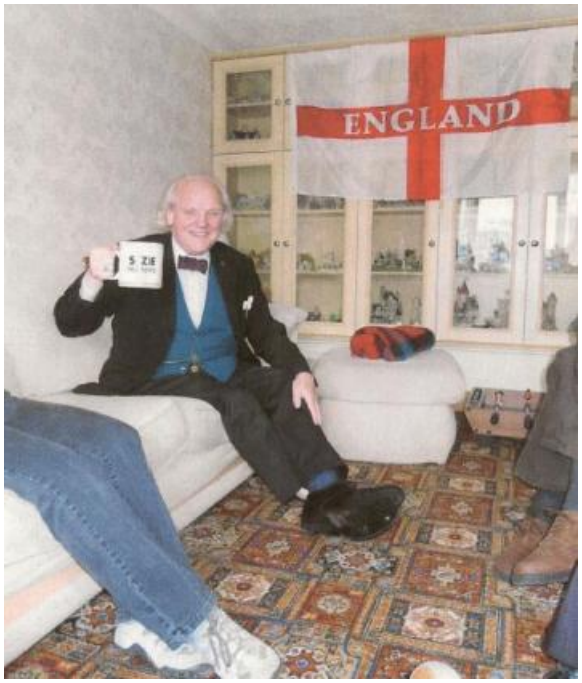
After the meeting Allan unveiled a portrait of the late Ken Goward, former Chairman of OASI, in the observatory spiral staircase. Ken's widow Lorraine and his brother were present.

Unveiling of Ken Goward's portrait in the spiral staircase on 23/4/2010 (left to right), Lorraine Goward, Allan Chapman

Later that evening, Allan delivered a lecture in the School Orangery entitled Thomas Harriot, Galileo and the First Telescopic Astronomers. The pre-lecture meal at the Courtyard Marriot was a memorable occasion where Allan and Peter continued to exchange an endless supply of jokes.

Pre-lecture meal on 23/4/2010 (clockwise from front left): Allan Chapman, Peregrine Bryant, Tina Hammond, Paul Whiting, Lynne Morley, James Appleton, Simon Dodsworth, Roy Gooding, Dave Payne, Peter Hingley.

The following day 24/4/2010, I picked Allan up from the Courtyard Marriot hotel and gave him a lift to Tuddenham Churchyard to lay a wreath on Ken Goward's grave. Lorraine, Ken's widow, Ken's brother and several OASI members including Paul Whiting, Gary Coleman, Tina Hammond and Lindsay Hammond-Smith attended. Afterwards we were invited to Ken's home where Lorraine served Allan a never-ending supply of the strongest industrial strength tea in the largest mug I had ever seen. In Allan's case, when it comes to tea, “Size Definitely Matters!” Allan referred to the vessel as a bucket and said he could almost disappear inside it!



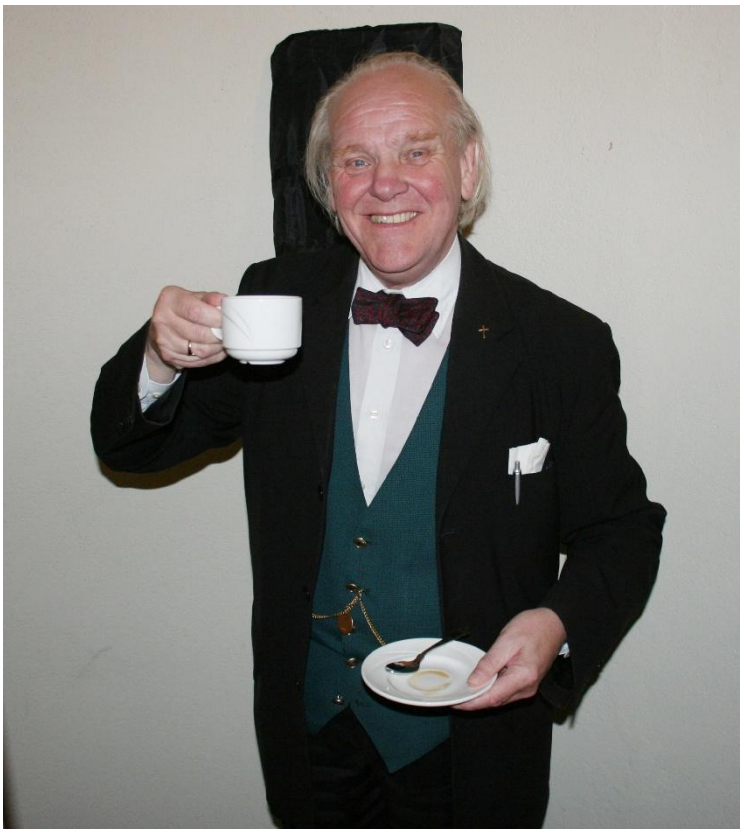
Allan after his second pint of the day!

Very sadly Allan's great friend Peter Hingley passed away on 20/6/2012. I attended the funeral service and Allan delivered a magnificent eulogy. A short extract follows:

But what if Peter went to Heaven by train: on God's Wonderful Railway, indeed? I can imagine his soul coming into Paddington, and at Platform 6⅞ths finding Daniel Gooch's Iron Duke waiting, in steam, magnificent and shining, with the stovepipe-hatted Isambard Kingdom Brunel, hand ready on the regulator, welcoming Peter onto the footplate. "Welcome aboard, Hingley old fellow! I gather from "Him Upstairs" that you know how to fire one of these beasts – there’s the shovel", says Isambard, knocking the ash from his celestial cigar.

Then they begin the slow climb out of Paddington, as all the early engines did when crawling up out of the Thames basin. But after West Drayton, they really start to pick up speed, then Brunel says, "Start shovelling harder, old fellow, for now we have the grandest incline of all ahead of us." Faster and faster they race into the sunset, then after going through Reading in a flash, the line begins to rise upwards. And upwards. And upwards. The sky turns a pure dark blue, then black. They shoot past the moon, then, an instant later, past the sun. Through the Milky Way they fly, overtaking the speed of light as though it were a snail. Past the Andromeda Galaxy - "Good Lord, it didn't look like that on the Hubble photos", exclaims Peter - and soon they are in regions unglimpsed by any telescope. Then straight ahead, in a glorious, shining light unlike anything seen before by mortal man, is the Heavenly City, with the 7-foot broad-gauge track leading straight through the gate.

On Allan's journey to the great heavenly city, Peter would be fully in charge of the footplate of the Iron Duke. Allan would be seated comfortably in a carriage at Oxford station with endless quantities of the best footplate-brewed tea ready to receive his favourite meal of fish and chips. En-route , Allan would enjoy a prime view of Asteroid (13490) Allanchapman, shaped like a giant celestial teapot and named in his honour. Following his arrival, he would meet some of the great scientific figures from history, and tell them how their discoveries shaped modern thinking.



Alan in the Equatorial Room at Orwell Park Observatory.

The Funeral of Allan Chapman

Bill Barton

I arrived at the entrance to Christ Church, Oxford in good time and on asking for directions a beadle told me to walk straight across the quad to the cathedral's West door. There was a slight delay on entering as a few last minute preparations were being undertaken, but I soon found a seat on the north side of the nave adjacent to the pulpit. The organ played three tunes by J S Bach and one by Vaughan Williams. The funeral of Allan Chapman was to be at 2pm on Tuesday 3 March, 2026.

The bell of Great Tom sounded two beats just before the coffin containing Allan's mortal remains entered, it was decorated with a large floral display. The evocative words from verses 25 and 26 of chapter 11 of St John's Gospel (I am the resurrection and the life...) were read and the coffin proceeded through the nave to be placed on two biers just below the choir.

The first hymn was Charles Wesley's 'And can it be', which was followed by spoken tributes from a retired Head Sidesman of the Cathedral, a Professor of the University and Society for the History of

Astronomy Council Member Gerard Gilligan. Further readings were Psalm 84 and from chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation.

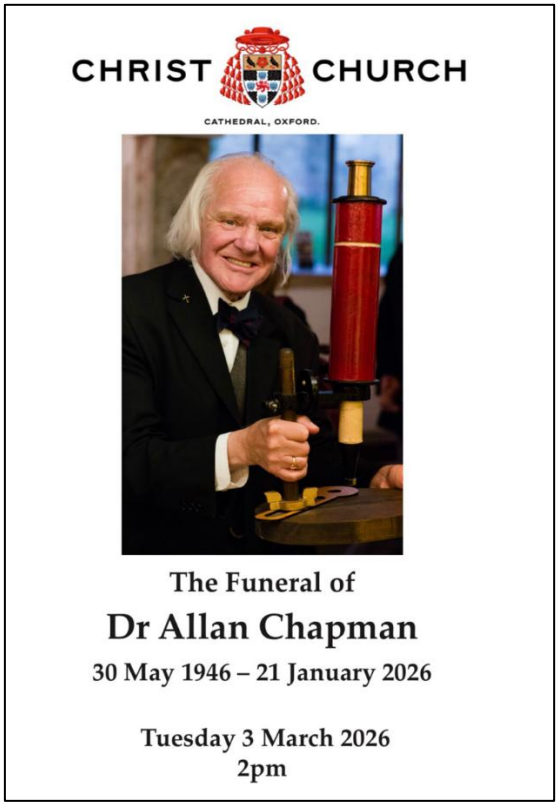
The second hymn was ‘The spacious firmament on high’. The second Bible reading was from chapter 14 of St John’s Gospel. Prayers followed including the Lord’s Prayer. The final hymn was ‘The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended’. The service ended with a commendation, a blessing, and a ‘Nunc Dimittis’ (Lord, let thy servant now depart in peace). The final committal took place at the Tom Tower. It was extremely moving to be part of such a service.

Proceedings were completed by tea (and coffee) being served in the North Transept. Those present included Allan’s family, the cathedral staff, members of the SHA, and other astronomical societies that Allan was associated with. At least two past Presidents of the Royal Astronomical Society were present. As we left we admired the architecture of Tom Quad which was originally intended to be the cloister of the cathedral which was started by Thomas Wolsey around the year 1525.

As final conclusion to the day a nearby hostelry was located and a party of six drank several toasts in Allan’s memory.

Tom Quad looking toward the bell tower.

The entrance to Christchurch Cathedral.



Front cover of the order of service

Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford, view towards altar.

Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford, view towards organ and west door.

Gerard Gilligan (of the SHA) reading his tribute [image credit: Gurbir Singh, Salford Astronomical Society]

Image credit: Gurbir Singh

Toasts to Allan; reading clockwise from the window Lee MacDonald, Kevin Johnson, Gerard Gilligan, Roger Hutchins, Clive Davenhall and Bill Barton.

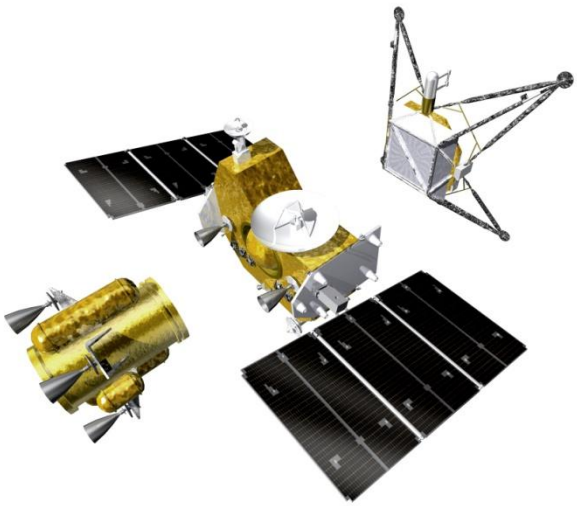
Japan's (JAXA) Martian Moons Exploration (MMX) Mission

A short article from the library.

Andy Willshere

The Martian Moons Exploration (MMX) project is to send a robotic space probe to Phobos, the largest of Mars moons, to sample the regolith structure and to return it to Earth for analysis. The size of Phobos is 17*14*11 miles in diameter and it orbits Mars three times each day. The probe will also flyby the smallest moon Deimos in an observational mode only. Launch using an H3 rocket is set for 2026 from the Tanegashima Space Centre which is situated at the easternmost of the Osumi Islands 40 km south of the Japanese island of Kyushu. The mission is expected to last 5 years. The rationale for this venture is to establish whether the moons resulted from a larger body striking Mars or are captured asteroids. This will be the first mission to observe both moons scientifically and to land on Phobos. The moons take their names from the sons of the Greek god of war, Ares. The scientific goals are therefore to identify the genesis of the Moons, what can be gleaned about early solar system structure and to observe Mars' atmosphere and dust conditions.

The total launch mass of the spacecraft is 4000 kg which includes 1900 kg of propellant. The spacecraft assemblage consists of three modules, the propulsion, exploration and return sections. The MMX rover has a mass at launch of approximately 25 kg. The landing date is scheduled for 2027 with a return launch date of 2031. The H3 rocket is developed by JAXA and Mitsubishi Heavy Industry (MHI). It is designed to use the lower cost LE-9 engine and has facility to use either two or three first stage engines and zero, two or four rocket boosters. This design allows for flexibility of payload.



Picture credit: ESA - MMX spacecraft: three modules

As well as NASA, ESA and CNES (French national space agency) are also members of the group. The French group will provide a Near IR Spectrometer (NIRS4/MacrOmega) as well as proficiency in flight dynamics to assist the spacecraft to land and orbit.

Once situated in orbit around Mars, the spacecraft will then relocate to Phobos, where if all goes well, it will land once or twice to collect samples of regolith.

There are numerous advanced instruments on board the spacecraft which will glean relevant specific scientific information.

TENGOO. (**TE**lescopic **N**adir imager for **G**e**O**m**O**rphology). This will look in great detail at the surface of the Martian moons with a resolution of approximately 40 cm. It will also look for specific landing sites.

OROCHI. (**O**ptical **R**adioOmeter composed of **C**hromatic **I**magers). A wide angle camera is used to view the landscape and regolith composition on the moon surface.

LIDAR. (**LI**ght **D**etection **A**nd **R**anging). Laser is used to detect light from the surface of the moon which enables information about the moon's surface to be obtained.

MIRS. (**M**MX Infra**R**ed **S**pectrometer). This appliance will be used to resolve the individual specifics of minerals on Phobos. It operates in the 0.9 to 3.6 microns spectral band.

MEGANE. (**M**ars-moon **E**xploration with **GA**mma rays and **Ne**utrons). This is another spectrometer looking at gamma-rays and neutrons on Phobos. These are generated by cosmic rays pounding Phobos's surface and from the rocks natural radioactivity.

CMDM. (**C**ircum – **M**artian **D**ust **M**onitor). A device to measure the amount of dust of 10 microns or more in size around the Martian moon.

MSA. (**M**ass **S**pectrum **A**nalyser). An appliance to check the ion environment around Phobos.

Finally, but by no means least, we have the Rover called IDEFIX. It is 25 kgs in weight, 52 cm long, and will land on Phobos first. When exploring Phobos, it can travel up to 100 metres with a mission time of about 100 days. When the spacecraft is between 40 metres and 100 metres above the surface of Phobos, the rover will be dropped. Upon reaching the ground it is designed to roll and then when stationary raise itself up. Phobos has a low gravity, (1/1000 th Earth) so IDEFIX will make use of this as it falls. The impact will be about 1 metre per second. MMX will be used as a relay effectively controlling the rover. Volume and weight were the major considerations in the rover's design, especially as it has to right itself on landing. Four main instruments are housed within IDEFIX. These are a NavCam for optical-stereo navigation, a Raman-spectrometer, a Mini-Rad infrared radiometer and two optical sensors that will analyse the conditions between the wheels and the surface material.

What will the rover be doing whilst on Phobos? The cameras on board will allow autonomous guidance control while travelling across the moon for its 100 days. The navigation cameras will provide stereoscopic visualizations of the area around IDEFIX. This data will be used to establish the source of colour contrast, weather effects on the strata and the size distribution of grains / particles. Much more information will be obtained when IDEFIX works in conjunction with the instruments Tengoo and Orochi on the spacecraft. At the end of its time, rover will be left on Phobos.

MMX has two contrasting mechanisms for gathering material. These are called the C-sampler and P-sampler, and by using two sampling methods the best possible specimens will be returned to Earth. The C sampler will collect 10g of sub-surface matter from Phobos down to a depth of 2 cm. The P sampler uses pressurised gas to throw up about a similar amount as the c-sampler of regolith from the surface and into a sample container in less than a second.

At the end of its mission, MMX will generate the escape ΔV to leave Phobos. This is about 10 – 20 m/s with respect to the moon's surface. This will place the craft into a pseudo – orbit. The exploration section may be jettisoned at this point and manoeuvres will then allow for the exit of Mars orbit. The return module will then cruise back towards Earth, whereby the samples once through the Earth's atmosphere will drop to the surface by parachute.

References:

Martian Moons eXploration - Wikipedia

MMX - Martian Moons eXploration

NASA Delivers Science Instrument to JAXA's Martian Moons Mission - NASA Science

ESA - MMX factsheet

Soma.larc.nasa-gov (Martian Moons Exploration (MMX) Mission.

ESA - MMX spacecraft: three modules

Aurora Expedition 01 - 02 March 2026

Norwegian Sea – 67° 50' 53.7" N 11° 47' 57.9" E

Barents Sea – 71° 08' 35.8" N 23° 18' 38.5" E

Paul Whiting

How better to see the Northern Lights than in the height of luxury that is a Saga cruise? Well, after a few days of constant cloud and bad weather, the skies did eventually clear at the same time as a reasonably active Sun.

Day 1 - 01 March 2026

After many trips to the upper decks to see nothing but cloud cover, a final check around 23:30 showed not only some clear sky but also some aurora. By the time I had rushed back to the cabin to get my camera, my friend had contacted reception to try to get the Bridge to turn the lights of on the forward decks. After initial reticence to disturb the Bridge, we succeeded in gaining darkness. No formal announcement was made, despite the Captain promising to do so at "whatever time of night". He apologised for this the next day, and chastised the night watch crew!

The aurora was nothing really spectacular, only green (oxygen interaction, around 165 kilometres up), and there was lots of cloud. The Kp index at this time was around 4, so easily visible overhead as we were just north of the arctic circle at this point (figure 1). The sea state was quite rough so although 1s exposures were achievable with a higher ISO setting (rather than the more usual 6s), when animating the images, the sky does appear grainier and jumps around a bit.

Figure 1: Faint aurora hidden by cloud

Day 2 – 02 March 2026

Skies were noticeably clearer today. Whale watching late afternoon – 2 types of whale and a large pod of dolphins were seen. Then an avian predator came to play – a Royal Naval Lynx helicopter. It approached the ship stealthily and then flew round us twice. It then hovered above the viewing deck with its side door open. I had not noticed that it was friendly at this point, and really thought those inside might be about to point guns at us! Two of the occupants were waving at us, the other, as it turned out, was drinking a mug of tea and not waving a machine gun! The Captain thought that they were part of an exercise going on in the Baltic, and they just wanted to practice stalking a surface vessel.

After nightfall, nothing could be seen from our balcony, but about 22:45 the announcement was made “aurora off the starboard bow”!

The Kp was around 6 so now being further north, aurora was all over the sky. Again, only green, but the intensity and movement were much stronger than the previous day (figure 2). The sea was also much calmer than before, so the resulting compilation animation, although not perfect, was better than the previous day.

Figure 2: examples of bright, animated aurora

There were some minor displays on subsequent days whilst steaming south on the way home, but nothing really worth filming, apart from one low down display that was impressive for illuminating the fast-moving cloud in front of it (figure 3).

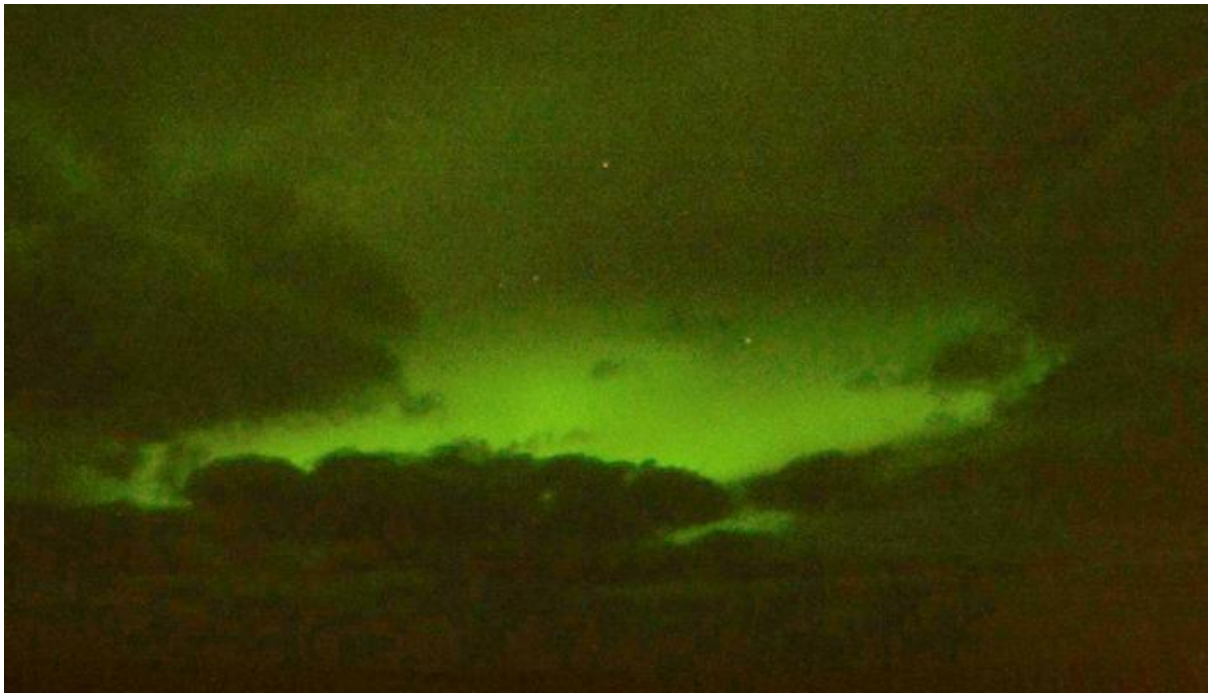
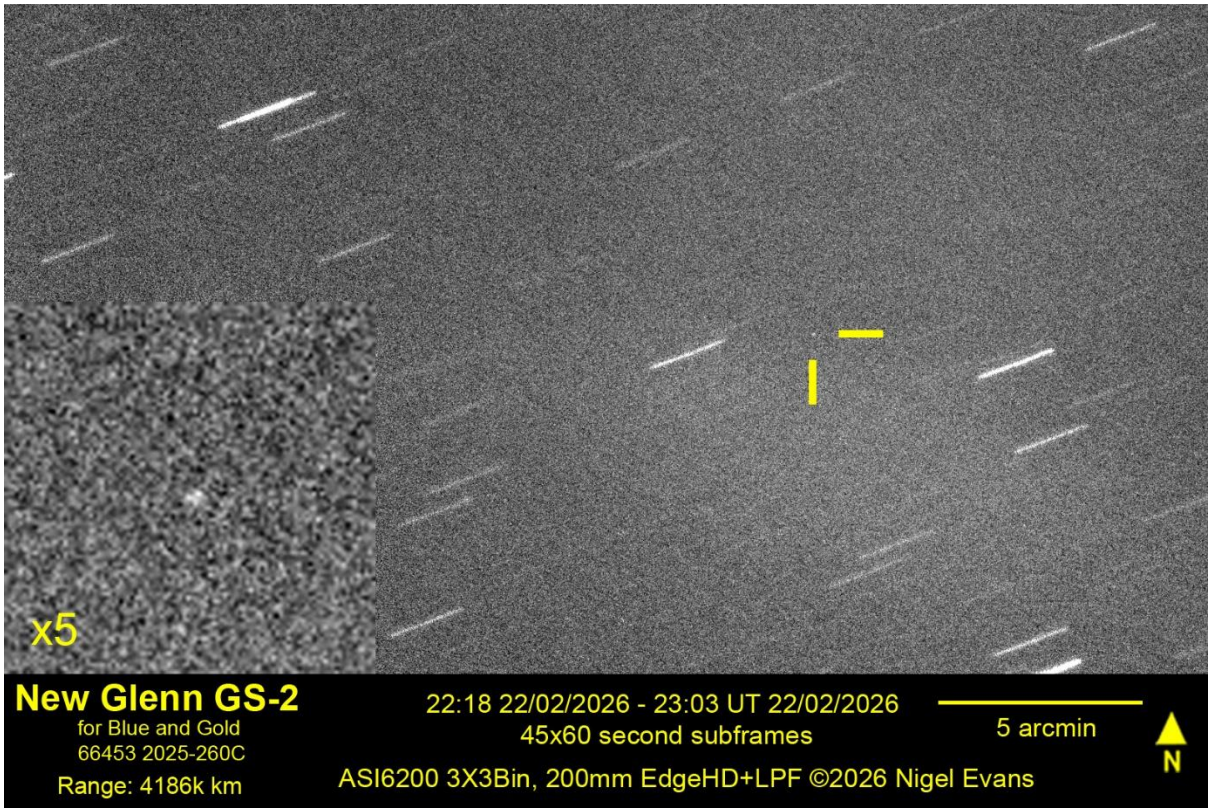


Figure 3: low down aurora, behind cloud

Members Observations

Nigel Evans

22 February 2026. The New Glenn GS-2 carrier rocket for NASA's Mars *Escapade* spacecraft. The object was 4.1 million kilometres distant and brightening as it came towards opposition in early March. Its predicted magnitude was 16.6 (prediction from projectpluto.com). Nothing was visible in a 60 second exposure. However, aligning all the frames on the predicted motion DID show a faint object in the correct position: much, much fainter than expected, around magnitude 19.6.



Andy Gibbs

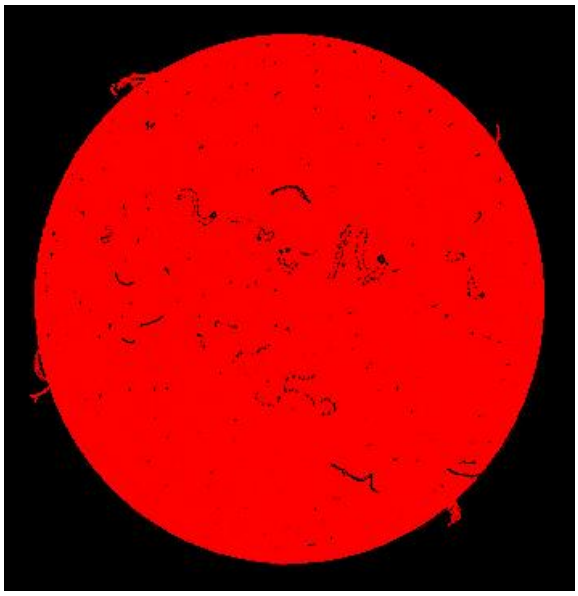
24 February 2026. Emission nebula IC 417, taken with a Seestar S50. Two hundred and four 20 second fits frames captured in EQ mode, stacked and processed in Graxpert and Affinty Photo 2. Due to a nearby bright Moon causing gradients, the image required considerable editing and cropping.

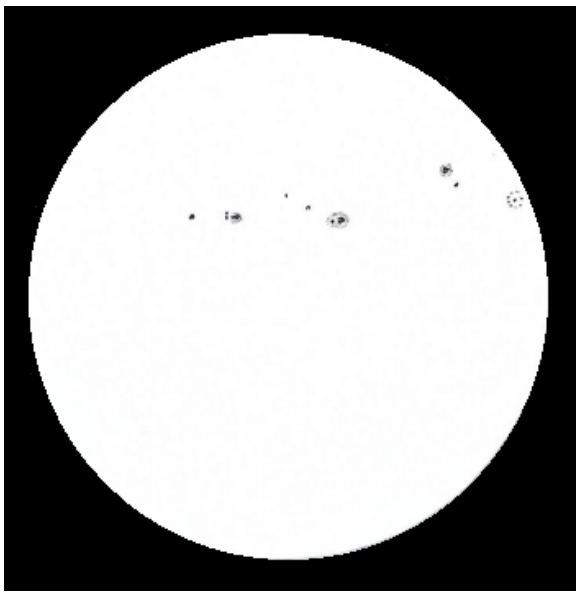
Neil Morley

Two images of the Sun.

Left: Hα (Hydrogen-Alpha) image, 05 March 2026, 15:00-1530 (UT). Equipment: Lunt LS35 Hα telescope with a 20mm Plössl eyepiece providing a magnification of 20x. Original pencil drawing scanned and post-processed using GIMP 2.6. Compare the sketch with Steve's image below.

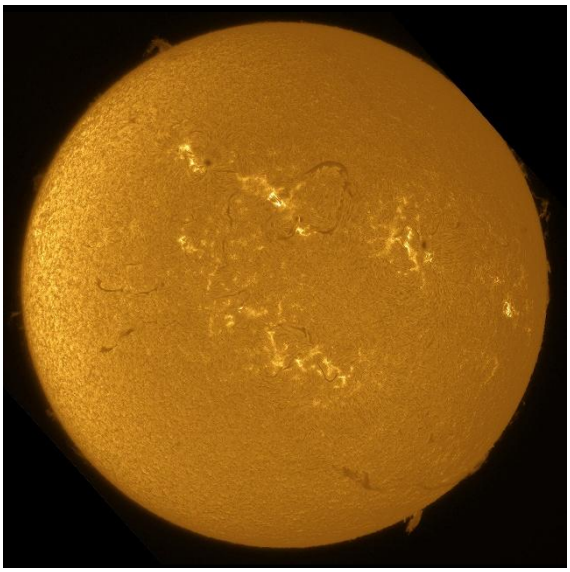
Right: white light image, 06 March 2026, 10:00-10:05 (UT). Equipment: Tasco Galaxsee 60mm refractor fitted with a Kendrick full-aperture solar filter and 25mm Keller eyepiece providing a magnification of 28x. Original pencil drawing scanned and post-processed using GIMP 2.6.





Steve McElvanney

05 March 2026. The Sun in Hα light. Compare the image with Neil's sketch above.



11 March 2026. M106 captured using a ZWO FF80 on AM3 mount with ASI2600 MC Air. Bortle 4 and no filters. Stack of 39 x 180s exposures, processed using Pixinsight and RC Astro plugins.

Note the many galaxies in the star field around M106.

-o0o-