

## Chairman's Report 2016

Friday evenings at the NLO seem to be getting more popular than ever with our members. Between them, Kate Kay and Sandy Moreton have arranged an excellent variety of 7.30pm and 8.30pm talks this year. Many thanks to those members who now regularly come forward and offer talks, the more the merrier, as we obviously have some very knowledgeable and talented members in our ranks. We now have 20 Astroscouts attending with their parents, which means that the committee room is too small to accommodate them. Kathleen has now split the group in two, 9 of which are learning GCSE Astronomy and are accommodated in the entrance foyer. They will be sitting the exam next May, so best of luck to them all. I am sure that many will go on to gain astrophysics degrees as have a few NLO members before. It is a shame that many of our Friday evenings have been plagued with cloudy weather this year, however I think we have had a few more clearer evenings on our public open nights.

During the course of the year to date we have held 32 open days as well as hosting 13 school and 18 private group visits. In addition, we have held three major open days. During our Family Day for British Science Week on March 19<sup>th</sup>, we were very fortunate in having three enthusiastic PhD students from University of Southampton "Accelerate Team" come to talk to us about particle physics and the Large Hadron Collider in a fun and entertaining way. Our regular story teller, Mike O'Leary came to tell stories under the stars and students from Colyton grammar came up with some exciting new hands on demonstrations. Now in its eleventh year, our annual South West Astronomy Fair on Aug 13<sup>th</sup> drew a crowd of around 280. The day's activities included planetarium shows, trade stands in the marquee and excellent talks from Prof. Mitch Berger (Exeter Uni.) on "Solar Magnetic Storms", Nick James (BAA) on "Great Comets", Andy Green (RAS) on the "Aurorae" and Bill Leatherbarrow (BAA) on "Our Volcanic Moon". We were also kept busy during the increasingly popular Sidmouth Science Festival Week 9<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> Oct. with wide ranging scientific topics and some of the events held at the NLO. Our Dr Keith Orrell gave a well attended talk about "Nature's Numbers – Mathematics Behind Living Species". On Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October we hosted an Ada Lovelace talk by Dr Jacqueline Christmas on "Reflective Transformation Imaging" which reveals hitherto unknown information revealed in ancient papyrus texts and cuneiform clay tablets, by means of photography of these objects from many differing angles. Our "Need for Speed" day at our Family Fun Day on 19<sup>th</sup> Oct was well attended by 374 families, helped by the pleasant sunny weather. This presented an opportunity to view solar activity with the John Pope Solar telescope. The jet car racing was also very popular again. Many thanks to our presenters who gave talks on the day. Rolf Williams came with his rocketry displays and Science Boffins presenter Rebecca helped the audience construct their own stomp rockets. Thanks of course also, to all our helpers who made this day a success.

NLO members, John Bardsley, Bill Hitchings & Pete Youd have spent the last year restoring a wonderful 19<sup>th</sup> century Orrery to full working order. It was donated by Howard Anderson, a member of the British Sundial Society. We hope to have it on permanent display in the small room adjacent to the committee room. It reminds us of a time when the universe was considered to be much smaller and believed to run like clockwork in the Newtonian sense!

On the educational side we have held several courses: "Introduction to Astronomy", "Moving on in Astronomy" and an "Intermediate Astro-Imaging" courses. We shall probably develop and repeat these formats next year. Please make a note in your diaries of a major international collaboration of solar scientists who will be gathering at Exeter University from July 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> 2017. IAU Symposium 335 will be meeting to discuss "Space Weather of the Heliosphere: Processes and Forecasts". The NLO has been invited to host an afternoon event for the delegates on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> July, your help and assistance at this event will be much appreciated.

Further details are here: <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/iaus335/>

As we conclude another busy stargazing year at the NLO, it just remains for me to say a big thank you to all who help out with our programme of open days, and for all your support in the past year. Whether it is at front of house, showing folk around, dome presenting, repairing old telescopes, writing software, or unblocking the drains, all of your varied skills help keep the wheels of the NLO running smoothly.

David Strange  
NLO Chairman