

Betelgeuse

Monthly newsletter of the East Oxford Astronomy Club
Issue 5: June 2026.



The Red Memento

photo of Mars by Sharon Sullivan

Natty Mark Samuels

Editorial

In this issue of Betelgeuse, I introduce celestial nomenclature (naming), focusing on some of the craters: on **Mars, Uranus** and **Venus**.

The first of the three pieces – Winnie and the Craters - was completed last Saturday (23/05/26); part of a series commissioned by a grandmother, for her nine year old granddaughter: it is the sixth instalment. A Stevenage resident, the grandmother, **Sharon Sullivan**, is a space enthusiast/astrophotographer; one of her photographs is the front cover image for this issue, taken in St. Ives, Cornwall.

The majority of the topographical features on Venus are named after women, such as the **Piaf, Khalo, Dickinson** and **Austen** craters. So the first of the aforementioned three pieces, celebrates **Baker, Tubman, Holiday** and **Frank**, using prose and verse. The second piece, of prose, looks at a giant of theatre and his legacy, celestially. Thirdly, a spotlight on a Martian crater, through a chant. All three are part of **Betelgeuse Theatre**, a new initiative to make astronomy more accessible and engaging, by using dramatical aids. And let me give you an update on the other BT.

On October 23rd, at **Oxford Playhouse** there'll be a performance, from an adaptation of **Greetings Humanity: The Betelgeuse Letters**. It's been commissioned by **Oxford Science Festival**. Giving thanks to **Dane Comerford**, director of the festival. The Letters are dedicated to **Francisca Okeke**, the Nigerian physicist, who will be **seventy in October**. For her contribution to ionospheric research, an asteroid was named after her.

Talking craters, if Mars is a deity of war, he may also be the god of topography. Two reasons as to citing him as contender for the crown. As well as thousands of craters, it has the biggest volcano in the solar system: **Olympus Mons**, 370 miles across. Also located on the planet, is the biggest canyon in the solar system, **Valles Marineris**; 2,500 miles wide: much grander than our most famous canyon.

Updating you, due to the lack of astronomy content on the OU Natural Sciences degree, I withdrew last month. I resume tertiary studies in September, working towards a BSc (Hons) Astronomy, through Lancashire University.

Recommended Book

Space: Pocket Eyewitness

Dorling Kindersley

Recommended YouTube video

How Does A Mars Rover Work? (Perseverance)

Jared Owen

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Winnie and the Craters

Adventures of the Astro Trio

Chant

Winnie and Nan,
Chanting of craters;
One that's named after,
Josephine Baker:
A crater on Planet Venus.

And so it went, throughout the rest of the evening and after it; whenever she felt to, or when her and Nan had a moment of special affinity, they'd chant the verse above. You see, after Nan told her of Josephine Baker, she became a heroine of hers too.

What a life! From street dancer to film actress, pilot, war heroine, adopter of children and civil rights activist. When you think of all the topographical features - such as canyons and craters – on Venus named after women, Josephine Baker had to be amongst them. France, her adopted country, gave her their highest honours. From a banana leaf skirt, to a robe of accolades. Nan explained the word accolade.

Standing in the field with Coco, the canine member of the Astro Trio, looking at the second planet from the Sun, Nan said that as well as features that carry names of celebrated women, others are called after everyday African names, such as Afua - meaning born on a Friday - from the Ashanti people. Afua is associated with fertility and peace. Nan told her that a lot of the Caribbean people they know, have ancestors from Ghana: some from the Ashanti.

Like Earth, Venus has an iron core: and a crater named after Harriet Tubman, who Nan said was "one of the bravest people ever to have walked the earth." She criss crossed America, taking the enslaved to freedom up north, or across the river into Canada. She was a heroine of the Underground Railroad; that network of safe houses and brave people, who helped the enslaved on their journeys away from shackles. There had to be a Venusian crater named after Harriet Tubman.

Talking more of the depressions on the hottest planet, there's a crater named after Billie Holiday. Nan told Winnie that "she had one of the saddest, sweetest voices to come from the human throat." Would have loved to have heard her sing live.

And there are craters and canyons named after European women too: Americans and Asians also. One European is Anne Frank. Nan said to Winnie, that she was a girl who lived in Holland during wartime, who lived part of her life in silence, in a house of quietness. Yes, she was the quiet heroine.

Named after the Roman goddess of love, Planet Venus salutes the women, known and unknown, who have strengthened us, bolstering humanity.

Chant
Winnie and Nan,
Chanting of craters;
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A crater on Planet Venus.

Shakespeare

A is for Ariel, B for Belinda, C for the one called Cupid. Cupid? What has that terrestrial icon got to do with celestial residence? You see, where as many features in the sky, such as the planets and some constellations, are named after Greek and Roman mythical figures, the moons of Uranus are named after characters from Shakespearian theatre: plus a couple from the poetry of Alexander Pope. I imagine the spirit of Puck, emanating from his namesake moon, in a highly playful mood, on a mission to do mischief to the 1986 Voyager 2; the only spacecraft to have flown by this ice planet. I see Puck, fiddling with antenna, investigating cameras, while a ruse begins to form in his rascally head.

Uranus, seventh planet from the Sun, is also the coldest: its twenty eight moons cannot warm it. As one day they say the Milky Way Galaxy will collide with our neighbouring galaxy, Andromeda; it is said that in time to come, Cupid and Belinda may collide also. Going on now, towards the end of the alphabet; R is for Rosalind, S for Stephano, T for Titania. They could nickname Uranus, Poet's Planet, as Shakespeare wrote sonnets as well as plays: renaming the Sun as The Globe.



from EuroSchool

Uranus

Boola Crater Chant

An area of Mars,
Boola, Boola.
Northern Polar Region,
Boola, Boola.
A place of frost and ice,
Boola, Boola.
An impact depression,
Boola, Boola.
From a town in Guinea,
Boola, Boola.
In western Africa,
Boola, Boola.
Chant Boola Crater,
Boola, Boola.



from *Europosters*

Mars

Beteigeuse

Community Astronomy: East Oxford

Learn about the celestial objects; how they were formed, where they reside, how they interact. The pioneering astronomers, past and present. Space programs, telescopes and observatories. Folklore of the skies and cultural astronomy.

FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH: 7-8PM

**Room P107
Leys College
Blackbird Leys Road and Cuddesdon Way
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Open to all twelve plus. Those under 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

A once monthly newsletter

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The problem is, most people believe that real science is too difficult and complicated for them to understand. But I don't think this is the case...most people can understand and appreciate the basic ideas if they are presented in a clear way without equations, which I believe is possible and which is something I have enjoyed trying to do throughout my life.

Stephen Hawking: from *Brief Answers to the Big Questions*