

Society for the History of Astronomy SPRING CONFERENCE
Friday, April 24th, 2026
Report and text by David Sellers

The SHA Spring Conference for 2026 was a great success, with a higher number in attendance than last year, despite the unfortunate need to shift it from the usual Saturday to a Friday. Members and guests assembled at the Birmingham and Midland Institute (BMI) were treated to a wide range of entertaining and enthralling presentations.



Image Credit: Mike Frost

Speakers at the Spring Conference (l. to r.: Martin Mobberley, Vladimir Brljak, Roger Hutchins, Mary McIntyre, and Wendy Bevan-Mogg

Mary McIntyre spoke first on Astronomical and Atmospheric Events Depicted in the ‘Augsburg Wunderzeichenbuch’ (The Book of Miracles). This is a 16th Century illuminated manuscript, produced in Germany. It consists of 123 hand painted folios depicting various ‘miraculous’ events, many of which, Mary showed, depict perfectly ordinary astronomical events like eclipses, meteor showers, comets and atmospheric optics, painted in a dramatic yet charming style.

Next, we had Martin Mobberley and his presentation on Eccentric BAA characters of the 20th Century. The BAA had numerous eccentrics and even barking mad members during the 20th Century. Martin raised lots of laughs (and eyebrows!) with his summary of the most amusing characters.

After an excellent buffet lunch, Wendy Bevan Mogg’s fascinating talk on Nevil Maskelyne (no, not that one!) – Astronomer and Magician introduced us to the little-known Nevil Maskelyne (1863-1924), who was instrumental in capturing the first moving picture films ever made of a solar eclipse. As well as being a pioneering cinematographer, he was also

an inventor, wireless telegraphy engineer, anti-spiritualist, and a renowned stage magician.



Roger Hutchins gave a much-awaited Appreciation of Allan Chapman. This had been originally billed as a celebration as our honorary President approached his 80th Birthday. Sadly, Allan unexpectedly died before it could be delivered. A video has been made of Roger's presentation, so members who could not be present will be able to watch it.

The final talk of the day, in memory of Michael Hoskin, was delivered by Vladimir Brljak, of Durham University, on 'Oh, how strange! the heavens are black': From a Bright to a Dark Universe in the Western Cosmological Tradition. Drawing on textual and visual evidence from antiquity to the present, the lecture opened our eyes to an unfamiliar perspective, tracing a shift from a bright blue to a black universe and its cultural impact.

**Image Credit: David Stumpp
- Christ Church Oxford 2014
Dr Allan Chapman (1946 - 2026)**

With much appreciation and thanks to all our guest speakers, Mike Frost SHA meeting secretary, and staff at the BMI Birmingham.