The Society for the History of Astronomy
2026 Annual General Meeting & Autumn Conference
Saturday, November 7th
The Lyttelton Theatre, Birmingham & Midlands Institute (BMI)





The AGM and Conference begins in the Lyttelton Theatre, BMI
Images Credit: Gerard Gilligan.

Almost fifty members of the Society for the History of Astronomy (SHA) travelled from all corners of the British Isles, to enjoy this year's society AGM and end of year conference. Members from as far away as Glasgow, and Cornwall assembled at the BMI in Birmingham City Centre for a review of the year and a special series of presentations in memory of Dr Allan Chapman, the first President of the SHA who sadly pass away earlier in the year.

The day's events were opened with the AGM by the SHA Chair, Ms Carolyn Kennett assisted by Mike Leggett, SHA general secretary. Carolyn reviewed the year, the sad passing of Dr Chapman, who was the inspiration that resulted in the establishment of the SHA in 2002. Election of Officers for the coming year was also held, With Professor Michael Edmunds being formally installed as the new Honorary President of the Society. One of many highlights of the past 12 months was the June trip to Ireland to visit places of astronomical interest. For example, Birr Castle and Gardens. From the point of view of both finances and membership it was reported that the SHA was in good order despite external financial pressures, with plans during the coming year of a joint Conference with colleagues from the historical section, Societé Astronomique de France, to held in the Cambridge in April next year.

Following the Conclusion of the Main AGM, the yearly SHA awards for 2026 were made:

- For his amazing work and efforts in the co-ordination and organisation of meetings and events during 2025-26, *The Peter Hingley Award* went to Mike Frost, presented by the SHA Chair Carolyn Kennett. (Image attached – Credit: SHA Vice-President Louise Devoy)

- For his continued excellent support and contributions to the SHA Survey, *The Roger Jones Award* went to Bill Barton. Award presented by Kevin Johnson, The SHA Survey Coordinator.
(Image Attached – Credit Mike Frost)





Mike Frost receives the 2026 Peter Hingley Award from Chair Carolyn Kennett.

Kevin Johnson Co-ordinator of the SHA Survey Presents the 2026 Roger Jones Award to Bill Barton

Image Credit: Louise Devoy & Mike Frost

- *The Madeline Cox Award f*or the best received articles in the Publications *Antiquarian Astronomer* (AA) and the SHA *Bulletin* went to Paul Haley, for his series of papers in the AA on Maria Michell and her successors. Sadly, Paul was unable to attend the meeting to accept his ward in person.

Following a short break for additional tea/coffee and light refreshments, Carolyn Kennett introduced Mr Gubir Singh, a former Chair of the Salford Astronomical Society, with a presentation entitled: *"Allan Chapman, a friend, a mentor, and a paradox: The man of faith who taught me science"* This was Gubir's personal reflections on Allan's influence on his own life and academic career, in connections with those of Allan his faith, plus his early days as a member of Salford AS. The society that Allan Chapman is most closely associated with in the Northwest.

Following an excellent buffet lunch, with more tea/coffee, the conference delegates sat down to hear. A presentation from Ross Code, currently a Visitor Assistant at the Royal Observatory Greenwich (RGO), but is now assigned to the National Maritime Museum, while the RGO undergoes major refurbishment and expansion works, to be completed in 2028. Ross recounted many stories and tails that where not suitable for the visiting tourist to the RGO. There were stories of interesting individuals, murders, deaths, affairs, and relationships, with observational astronomy included!
The third presentation of the day was given by Bill Barton, a very accomplished local historian to Ipswich and beyond. A founder member of the SHA, Bill has continued to be a great supporter of the SHA survey, as seen by his award presented earlier in the day. Bill gave a detailed story of astronomy in colonial India, in particular the history of *"The Astronomical Society of India"*, the original organisation, a history of its activities, observational programs, observatories, and meetings from 1910 – 1922. The current Astronomical society of India was founded in 1972, aimed at the professional astronomy community, and modern research fields.

Following yet more tea/coffee, as would be required by Dr Chapman before, during and after a meeting, delegate also visited the SHA library, the second-hand books sales, Carolyn welcomed our keynote speaker for the conference was Dr George Seabroke, a principal Research fellow at the Mullard Space Science Laboratory, University of London. Dr. Seabroke related the modern observations and research he is involved in using the ESA orbital observatory spacecraft "Gaia", and the historical observations of mapping, recording stars by Francis Baily (1777 – 1844) in two-star catalogues of 1826, and in 1845. Baily of "Baily's Beads" fame, having personal connections to Dr Seabroke's modern day research work, growing up in Newbury, Berkshire, playing for Francis Baily Primary School football team, and Dr Seabroke living close to Baily's London address. When not using the Radial Velocity Spectrometer on board the Gaia observatory, George has been researching his own family history, and his three times grandfather George Mitchell Seabroke (1848 – 1918)

G.M.Seabroke took an interest in astronomy while a pupil at Rugby School. Together with the school's Mathematics and Science Master, James Wilson (later Canon of Worcester), he observed double stars at the Temple Observatory. He remained at the observatory, conducting observations and promoting the study of astronomy to the schoolboys of Rugby School. The Observatory boasted an 8¼ inch (210mm) aperture refracting telescope built in 1859 by Alvan Clark of America. The present-day family are in the possession of a 3.5-inch Dollond Telescope, dating from the 1820's.

George M. Seabroke was one of the founders of the British Astronomical Association in 1890 and served as its Double Star Section Director from 1892 to 1915, its Saturn Section Director from 1899 to 1911, and its national president from 1900 to 1902. He also served as BAA Midland Branch President from 1902 to 1903.

2026 is the bicentenary celebration of Baily's 1826-star catalogue and can be visualised for the first time with data from the Gala mission, which is a modern-day successor to Baily's star mapping and award-winning published works. The latest Gaia catalogue i to be published two hundred years later in December this year.

Following several questions, Carolyn brought, what had been a very entertaining, and informative conference to an end. With much appreciation to all administrative and catering staff at the BMI, SHA Council members, in particular, James Dawson and Mike Frost. Sincere thanks to all our speakers, and their presentations, but above all to the many SHA members who attended. Wishing everyone a safe journey home in the fog!

The SHA will meet again with our fellow French historians in Cambridge, at the Institute of Astronomy in April 2027.



Speakers for 2026 AGM Conference November 7th.
L to R: Bill Barton, Dr George Seabroke, Ross Code, Carolyn Kennett (Chair) & Gurbir Singh

Report text complied by Gerard Gilligan
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Images: Gerard Gilligan, Lousie Devoy & Mike Frost.