

BAA Spring Meeting 2026: Speaker Biographies

Paul G. Abel

Friday 22nd May:

Prof Suzie Imber:

Suzie Imber is a Professor of Planetary Science at the University of Leicester. She specialises in understanding the impact of the Sun and the solar wind on the magnetised planets, a research area known as Space Weather. Suzie is a Co-Investigator on the X-ray spectrometer on board the joint ESA/JAXA BepiColombo spacecraft which launched in October 2018 and will arrive at Mercury later this year. She will use this data to characterise the unique X-ray aurora recently discovered at Mercury.

Saturday 23rd May:

Pete Lawrence:

Pete Lawrence has presented an observing section on the long running BBC Sky at Night television programme since 2004. He compiles and writes the monthly Sky Guide for the Sky at Night Magazine and writes the Night Sky column for the Daily Telegraph. His duties also include consulting for the BBC on various astronomical programmes.

Pete is highly regarded in the world of astrophotography specialising in capturing time specific events. Many of his images have been published in books, magazines and online across the world. In 2014 he was awarded the Davies Medal for a significant contribution in the digital field of imaging science by the Royal Photographic Society.

As well as having several decades experience as an astronomical observer, Pete also holds a degree in Physics with Astrophysics from the University of Leicester. As part of his astronomical duties he also acts as an expert guide on specialist trips including those in search of the elusive northern lights and total solar eclipses.

Nick James:

Nick has been interested in astronomy for as long as he can remember, certainly since the age of 8. He has been a member of the British Astronomical Association since he was 12 and is now the Director of its Comet Section. Nick is also Assistant Editor of The Astronomer Magazine. He has written many articles for magazines and books, and co-authored "Observing Comets" which was published in 2003 as part of Sir Patrick Moore's Practical Astronomy series.

Professionally, Nick is a chartered engineer in the space industry, leading a team responsible for implementing highly sensitive and accurate systems for receiving and processing signals from deep-space spacecraft.

Gary Poyner:

Amateur astronomer for over 60 years and VS observer for 51 years. Past Director of the BAAVSS and currently Assistant Director. Observatory in north Birmingham from where I have made over 370,000 visual Variable Star observations - mainly of Cataclysmic stars. I have used a host of telescopes over the years, and currently observe visually with a 22cm Newtonian and a 51cm Newtonian. I also use remote telescopes around the world for Variable Star photometry.

Dr Chrysa Avdellidou:

Chrysa Avdellidou is a Lecturer in Planetary Science at the School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Leicester. She studied Physics in Greece before she moved to the UK to pursue a PhD in experimental impact processes for applications in planetary science. She was a Research Fellow at the European Space Agency where she worked on ground-based observations of meteoroid impacts on the Moon and she developed methods to derive the mass and size of small impactors.

Then she moved to Nice Observatory in France where she worked on asteroid physical properties including rotation periods, masses and spectroscopy in an effort to link them to known meteorites. She has been a collaborator at the NASA OSIRIS-REx space mission to asteroid Bennu. She is ESA Participating Scientist at the Japanese Martian Moon eXploration mission to the Martian Moon Phobos. She is member of the Science Team of the ESA cubesat LUMIO which will conduct an observational survey for meteoroid impact flashes on the lunar farside.

Dr Tony Cook:

Tony is the director of the BAA Lunar Section and a research lecturer in the Physics Department at Aberystwyth University, Wales. He is a Co-I on the Italian/ESA lunar mission LUMIO, mission, due to launch in 2028 and image impact flashes on the Moon. He has been a researcher at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, University College London, the DLR Institute of Planetary Exploration in Berlin, the National Air and Space Museum in DC, and a lecturer in Computer Science at Nottingham University. His main hobbies apart from Astronomy are: stereo photography and video & the copying and archival of old astronomy related cine, audio and video cassettes that he has been recording from 1973 onwards.

Ann Bonnell (Leicester Astronomical Society):

Dr Ann Bonnell is President of Leicester Astronomical Society and has been interested in astronomy since primary school. When she declared in a pre-O level interview with her headmistress that she wanted to be an astronomer, she was advised to 'keep it as a hobby, dear'. Ann ventured into chemistry and has worked in research institutes, universities and further education colleges. She spent 6 months in the Chemistry Department of Wuhan University in China in the 1980s - long before anyone in the UK had even heard of Wuhan! Upon reflection, the 'keep it as a hobby, dear' advice was probably good. Ann has retained a very broad interest in many areas of astronomy which might not have otherwise been the case. Ann has given talks to many local societies in the UK, often via Zoom these days and runs astronomy evening classes.

Sandra Brantingham:

I have been interested in astronomy from an early age, something encouraged by my parents, youth groups and the ATC. Joining the RAF as a photographer also helped, and when I went aircrew, seeing different skies around the world really brought on my enjoyment of the subject, although the intensity of the life made serious observations difficult. I joined Sigma, the Moray Astronomy club and was its secretary for several years, during which time I met Richard Pearce, who was the aurora director of the SPA. He indicated that he wished to retire from the post, and since I was interested, I was appointed Aurora & NLC director of the SPA on the 26 I took over as Aurora and NLC director of the BAA in May 2016 from Ken Kennedy, who is now my deputy.

Mike Foulkes:

Mike is the director of the British Astronomical Association's (BAA) Saturn, Uranus and Neptune Section. He is keen observer of the Moon and planets. Professionally, he has worked in the spacecraft industry.

James Dawson:

James is an amateur astronomer and serves as Observatory Director at the Nottingham Astronomical Society. He is also the Librarian for the Society for the History of Astronomy, which maintains a small library in Birmingham. His interests focus on the Solar System—particularly the Moon—as well as astronomical techniques and equipment. He is an active member of several sections of the British Astronomical Association and manages the online content for its Lunar Section. Outside his professional career as an anaesthetist, astronomy provides a welcome relief.

Peter Tickner:

Peter has been a keen amateur astrophotographer for the last 25 years. Peter is particularly interested in imaging the planets and other solar system objects. He has a permanent wooden observatory in his back garden in urban Berkshire which houses his 450 mm f/15 Dall-Kirkham used for planetary imaging. He has a second smaller mount in the observatory on which he uses a range of refractors from 80 mm up to 130 mm for solar and other imaging. Peter is an active member of Reading Astronomical Society and is their spokesperson on local radio, as well as being responsible for organising meetings for those new to astronomy at their dark site location.