Minutes of the William Herschel Society Annual General Meeting  
Held in the Bath Royal Scientific and Literary Institution  
16 Queen Square, Bath on 4 March 2017 at 10:30am

Present: President Dr Allan Chapman and Mrs Chapman, Chairman Charles Draper,  
Treasurer Fred Schlesinger, Editor Prof Francis Ring, Prof Mike Edmunds, Committee  
members Tony Symes, Michael Tabb, William Gaskell, Dr Ian Mcgregor, Jim Foreman. Mr  
William Herschel-Shorland and family, Brian Robertson (Minutes) and other members of the  
Society.

1. Apologies: Dr Peter Ford MBE

2. Chairman’s Opening Remarks
The Chairman welcomed members to the AGM, especially Dr and Mrs Chapman and the  
Herschel-Shorland family. He explained that all the papers for the AGM had been published  
on our website and a number of additional copies were available today. The Minutes of the  
2016 AGM had been published in the Autumn 2016 Journal. Today’s meeting was being  
recorded to help ensure all important matters were faithfully minuted. This included proposed  
changes to our Constitution and a Motion for debate. He commented that this year he had  
visited the annual European AstroFest in Kensington, with impressive speakers, but none  
more applauded than our President. Dr Chapman said that in his address he would among  
other things be discussing Herschel’s social life. He noted that Messier’s catalogue of 103  
known nebulae would become over 2000 thanks to William Herschel.

3. Minutes of the 2016 AGM, Matters Arising
The 2016 Minutes were approved. There were no matters arising. Actions from that Meeting  
would be addressed in today’s business.

4. Chairman’s Report
The Chairman summarised his Report which had been published on the website, including  
details of the Lecture Programme, very well organised by Tony Symes, and the Observing  
Group which he continued to convene, but where much of the activity was now led by his  
colleague Simon Holbeche; his educational sessions were attracting many young people.  
Several new strands to our activities were now under way, for example Herschel’s music with  
new Committee Member Dr Matthew Spring of Bath Spa University, and closer links with  
the University of Bath via Dr Steve Davies. He had also now had a useful discussion with the  
new Head of Astronomy and Physics Prof Carole Mundell, who had given the previous  
night’s lecture. One outcome was that we may need to be more flexible with the dates of our  
monthly lectures at BRLSI to improve our ability to link in with the University’s visiting  
speakers.

Our website had been redesigned without fee by Bath Astronomer colleague Mr Andy  
Ashwin and was well managed by Committee member Jim Foreman, who had recently added  
Facebook and Twitter accounts (129 followers so far) which were already attracting wider  
interest. The Chairman had also been interviewed twice by BBC Bristol on astronomical  
matters, and had taken part in a short video clip, originally for the Advent Calendar of their  
Facebook page.

The bi-annual Journal edited and produced by Francis Ring and Fred Schlesinger attracted  
praise for its content and quality. Mr Geoffrey Briggs had also made many contributions but
had decided to step down from the Committee. William Gaskell had recorded many of our BRLSI monthly lectures for publication in the *Journal*.

He explained that the business of the meeting would include minor but essential revisions to our 2003 Constitution, and would be discussed under item 7 of the Agenda. We continued to make grants to the Museum to assist acquisitions, publications and refurbishments. Music programmes were planned later this year in cooperation between Dr Spring and the Museum, as part of the celebrations of the 250th anniversary year of the Royal Crescent.

He offered his thanks to the Committee and the Herschel Shorland family for all their help in the past year.

5. Annual Accounts

Mr Schlesinger presented his audited accounts, explaining the figures and notes. The deficit was due to donations to the Museum, but we were still solvent with ample reserves. Some redundant assets such as old publications had been written off with the Committee’s approval.

The Treasurer advised we were supporting forthcoming Dance Shows here in Bath celebrating ‘Lina’ i.e. Caroline Herschel, and the Chairman would be providing an introduction on the first day; Tony Symes on the second. Prof Ring asked whether it was time to review subscription rates; the Chairman advised we had looked at this and decided on no action at present, but the matter was for the Treasurer to advise on. The Treasurer confirmed he had addressed this two years ago. We were largely breaking even each year apart from donations to the Museum. The accounts were approved.

6. Museum Report

Francis Ring summarised the report provided by Debbie James, Curator. An exhibition called ‘Science and Spirituality’ in association with the Benedictine Downside Abbey had been successful. The entrance hall had been refurbished, with a specially-made carpet to which the Society had contributed. The Museum had acquired a rare pair of 18th Century pocket globes by Dudley Adams, now on display. The major 2017 exhibition would be *Royal Crescent 250* in conjunction with BPT’s other Museums. It was also the anniversary of William Herschel becoming Director of Music. There would be a ‘Jubilate’ exhibition celebrating late 18thC music, particularly Herschel’s contributions, as part of a joint programme with Bath Spa.

Francis Ring commended the performance and health of the Museum under the new management of the BPT, which had professional skills and staff in a wide portfolio. The Museum Advisory Group on which the Chairman serves was working well. The Chairman expressed gratitude to Prof Ring who for many years shouldered the responsibilities of Museum management before the transfer to the BPT.

7. Proposed Changes to the WHS Constitution

The Chairman said the need for revisions to the 2003 Constitution included the change of management of the Museum and some other administrative matters. As constitution changes they would require a two-thirds majority of those voting.

But he said that firstly the AGM should address the Motion received from member Mr Joseph Heaven, based in Zurich, Switzerland, who could not be here today. This proposed that the name of the Society should be changed to “The William and Caroline Herschel Society”. This matter had been discussed last autumn in Committee which had concluded that such a change would not be appropriate. Mr Heaven had now put the proposal forward as a motion for the AGM, and there had been an email correspondence with him for the last month or so about the practicalities of this. His motion had been placed on our website along
with the other AGM papers. A further summary statement and supporting statements from others had been received the previous day so the Chairman read out the opening statement to the AGM, which was as follows:

“Why I support renaming the society the William and Caroline Herschel Society

Today is an opportunity for us to celebrate a pioneering astronomer, Caroline Herschel. Happily, like the path of science, this celebration is cumulative and we can add Caroline to our Society’s name without diminishing her brother’s achievements.

Two important facts are clear from the messages of support from astronomers and astrophysicists who welcome this proposal. The first is that Caroline’s personal contribution to science is exceptional. This was recognised by her 19\textsuperscript{th} century peers, when they awarded her the gold medal of the Royal Astronomical Society and is still recognised by 21\textsuperscript{st} century scientists, when they reflect on Caroline’s achievements. The second is the value to the next generation of scientists – girls as well as boys, women as well as men – to gain a remarkable role model to excite them about the unlimited possibilities for them in expanding and sharing our collective knowledge.

In joining me to support this timely recognition – in the days before the anniversary of Caroline’s birth – our Society will encourage renewed interest in, and scholarship into, Caroline and William’s lives and work.

I thank you in advance,
Joseph”

The Chairman said that the supporting statements were from a little over 20 individuals from the world of science and astronomy. They were too long to read out, but essentially they declared their support for the motion on the same basic grounds as Mr Heaven’s motion – Caroline’s importance as an astronomer and her value as a role model today.

The Chairman said that several initiatives had already been taken to promote Caroline. The Society paid for her memoirs to be reprinted in 2000. A new Gallery in her name was added recently to the Museum, with substantial financial support from the Society. A dance show called “Lina” designed to celebrate William and Caroline’s work in music and dance was being produced here at the Mission Theatre the following week. The Society was supporting it financially, and introducing it. The Committee had also discussed the idea, which he would now like to revive, or sponsoring a Caroline Herschel Prize for promising young female astronomers, awarded annually. The money would not be great (perhaps £200), but the honour hopefully would.

So the Society already did much to promote Caroline, and planned to do more.

Secondly. The Society’s “Objects”, (in other words its purpose) already explicitly referred to William and his family. But the reason for its formation in the first place had been William’s central role in astronomy in his time. Caroline was a key supporter, and became an important astronomer in her own right. However, William’s son John was himself a major figure in 19\textsuperscript{th} Century science. If another name were to be added to William’s in the name of the Society, it was not at all clear that it should be Caroline, rather than John.

The other approach would have been to have called it “The Herschel Society”. This was not the approach taken at the time for the Society, though it was for the Museum. He would have no principled objection to this, but there were several practical issues. One was that a Herschel Astronomical Society already existed in Slough. A second was that the Society had brand recognition as it was, and had had recently improved its website etc., on that basis. And
there would be various practical issues involved in making such a change. For all these reasons, the Committee opposed the motion. He then invited the Society’s President, Dr Allan Chapman, to comment before inviting wider comments.

Debate
Dr Chapman said he opposed the motion, arguing that there seemed to be fashions for name changes which ebbed and flowed over the years according to the perceived culture at the time. He agreed that the Society was very proactive in promoting Caroline, and should do all it can in this regard, noting that the Royal Astronomical Society had a vigorous programme to encourage young women into the sciences. Dr Chapman stated that unlike many other countries we in the UK had a long tradition of amateur, privately-run societies where women could and do make important contributions. Mary Somerville was a good example. Society founder member Prof Francis Ring argued that the Herschel family was the focus of the Society and the Museum, including John and Alexander, Caroline was rightly famous for her work, due to her being trained by William in all the skills she acquired. William was the pioneer and visionary. After his death she withdrew from public life and moved back to Hanover. Another member pointed out that the proposed name was somewhat clumsy, but it could be called the “Herschel Astronomical Society”. Treasurer Fred Schlesinger stated that the “Herschel Family Society” had once been proposed. Several other members, including members of the Herschel-Shorland family, spoke on favour of keeping the current name, but one offered the name “Herschel Society”. The suggestion of offering an Annual Caroline Herschel prize was enthusiastically received.

A vote was then taken on the Motion.
For - One; Against – Thirteen; Abstain – One.
The Motion was therefore Lost.

The Chairman then said that it had been a useful and stimulating debate. (Others agreed.) He would write to Mr Heaven thanking him for stimulating it, and reporting on the outcome, and particularly on the idea for the Caroline Herschel Prize. (Note, this was subsequently done, with the alternative option of an Annual Lectureship with an Honorarium, which would be easier to administer.)

Constitution Changes
The Chairman drew attention to the document he had issued on 25 January 2017, following a review of the Constitution by the Committee.
He explained that the 2003 Constitution had become somewhat out of date, particularly as management of the Museum has passed to the Bath Preservation Trust which had experienced professional staff and a portfolio of Museums and properties in the city. The Society’s role was now mainly advisory, including membership of a Board set up to this effect.
The other proposed changes were mainly to remove superfluous powers and to reflect existing (and preferred) practices.
The Annexes to the Chairman’s 25 January 2017 document included the text of the proposed new revised Constitution, the paragraph by paragraph changes and the existing 2003 Constitution.
He explained the changes to the Objects, Powers, Membership, Subscriptions, AGM Notices, The Committee, Officers, Assets and Future Changes and asked for comments. There were
no questions or comments so a vote was taken on whether to adopt the new 2017 Constitution.

A vote was then taken on the motion to adopt the revised constitution. For - **Sixteen**; Against - **Nil**; Abstain - **Nil**. The motion was therefore carried.

The Chairman then signed the approved revised constitution.

**8. Election of Office Holders, Including Vice-Presidents.**

The Chairman advised that the existing Committee members were willing as to be re-elected, except for Mr Geoffrey Briggs, who had stepped down. Formally the role of the AGM was to elect the Committee, and for the Committee to elect its office holders, but he could confirm that the Committee envisaged that existing office holders would continue in their roles.

The Committee was re-elected by a show of hands.

The Chair explained that the Committee was proposing to elect two new Vice-Presidents, Prof Mike Edmunds of Cardiff University, and Prof Francis Ring of the University of South Wales. Prof Edmunds has long been a supporter of the Society has given many lectures and other assistance to it.

Professor Edmunds was then elected as a Society Vice-President by a show of hands.

The Chairman went on to say that Prof Ring had been a founder member involved in nearly all our activities from the start, a Trustee of the Museum, a Chairman and Journal Editor and remained a very active supporter.

Professor Ring was then elected as a Society Vice-President by a show of hands.

**9. Any Other Business and Japan Society Report**

A. The Minutes secretary summarised the annual report from the Herschel Society of Japan from Dr Sadaharu Uehara. He recounted the memorial service to their first secretary Seiji Kimura, who died last year and was well known here in Bath. His ashes had been scattered in Tokyo Bay. A successor secretary Tamao Tsunoda has been exhibiting antique astronomical artefacts such as armillaries, orreries and star maps in antique shops. There was a craze in Japan at present for such objects. The report included some photos. Dr Uehara continued to publish articles based on the work of an 18th century Japanese astronomer Tadao Shizuki, a contemporary of William Herschel, who was the first in the Orient to write about the Copernican solar system. A society member commented that she was shocked to hear of Seiji Kimura’s death. It was confirmed that a suitable appreciation had been published in the Journal.

B. Mr Will Hershel-Shorland remarked that it was interesting in view of the earlier discussions that the Japanese Society was called simply the “Herschel Society of Japan”

C. Prof Ring drew attention to a fine collection of cloisonné plates featuring the Herschels made by HSJ member Miss Iizawa and gifted to the WHS, currently stored at the Museum
which has insufficient room to display them. The Chairman said this could be addressed at the next Museum Advisory Committee meeting.

D. The Chairman said that Michael Tabb had supplied drawings of the design of the 7-foot telescope to a company near Boston USA which had been commissioned to make a replica telescope for a museum in China.

With no other comments the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 1145am.

Address by President Dr Allan Chapman

In his inimitable style Dr Chapman said he was honoured to be our President and was very pleased to be among his great Herschel Society friends again. He was 80% through writing an extension of his earlier book “Stargazers”, which is provisionally entitled “From Halley to Hubble: Comets, Cosmology, and the Big Bang”. He had devoted several chapters to William, Caroline the Comet Hunter, and John Herschel and their epic work. He had had access to the Herschels’ papers in the Royal Society and RAS Libraries.

William arrived in England as a young military musician serving in the Hanoverian Guards band. Although in the 1750s England was a stratified society, there was none the less plenty of scope for social mobility and opportunity for talented and enterprising people. William’s early years in England were spent as a jobbing musician in London. Keen to learn English and improve his position, he turned to John Locke’s monumental An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) which is hard going even today. But William had been remarkably well educated by his father Isaac in music, philosophy, and even some of the classics. He also appears to have had great charm, and soon moved up the social ladder. In the early 1760s, he was living in Yorkshire, working as a musician, concert master, and church organist. When being auditioned for a Church organist post, he impressed his listeners by putting pieces of lead on the lower octave keys to provide a foundation ‘drone’ sound upon which he could build a dignified and sonorous sound. (This was at a time when English organs did not have pedals.) He appears to have moved among the Yorkshire gentry with ease.

When he came to Bath, which he knew to be the focus of Georgian high society, he became an important member of the Bath Philosophical Society, and organist at the fashionable Octagon Chapel, as well as being a concert impresario. In 1772, he brought Caroline, who had a very good voice, to live in England. After William became famous in 1781, after discovering the new planet Georgium Sidus (Uranus), he moved to Slough at the behest of King George III, who not only loved music, but was also seriously interested in science, and even kept a fine set of astronomical and other scientific instruments at Kew. Both William and Caroline now moved into Royal circles, becoming great friends with Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, and coming to know Henry Cavendish, the great experimentalist and cousin of the Duke of Devonshire.

William, of course, presented many ground-breaking Papers to the Royal Society, laying the foundations of deep-space cosmology, and was world-renowned by the time he was 45. But as a young working musician in London, William had also been something of a Pop Musician as well, writing for a commercial market, and sometimes writing songs with amusing words and jolly tunes known as ‘catches’ (probably the origin of what we call ‘catchy’ tunes) which were popular in 18th-century dining rooms, clubs, and salons. He composed a cheerful ditty about a so-called poltergeist haunting in Cock Lane, which was all the rage in 1762. (Dr Chapman made a copy of both the words and the music.) Dr Chapman finished by singing this Cock Lane Ghost verse to the delight of the members:
'The Ghost will be heard in Cock-lane tonight, 
The Ghost, the Ghost, 
The Ghost will be heard in Cock-lane tonight, 
Our Children and Parsons and Lords to affright, 
Our Children and Parsons, our Children and Parsons, our Children and Parsons and Lords to affright.'

The Chairman expressed his heartfelt thanks for the Address which all greatly enjoyed.

Brian Robertson *Minutes Secretary* 

Charles Draper, *Chairman*