

## Herschel Museum 2017 Report for WHS AGM, March 3rd 2018

### Jubilate Exhibition and Events

Last year's exhibition 'Jubilate' about 18<sup>th</sup> Century music in Bath and the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Williams first year living in the city as a musician, proved to be popular gaining positive feedback from visitors and reviews online who enjoyed looking at the musical side of the Herschels' lives. It was an interesting mix of original musical manuscripts (some of them were William Herschels) and instruments of the period including illuminating satirical prints of Georgian society's involvement with music.

Running alongside the exhibition was a season of events including talks, concerts and performances. These events were possible with a number of exciting collaborations with Bath Spa University (lecture, concert, costumed interpretation performance at museum), St Andrews Primary School (drama and musical performance by the students) and the Forged Line Dance Company ('Lina' stage musical including a live performance and filmed performance at the museum. Many thanks to the involvement of the WHS).

### Staff Changes

One of the big changes with regards to staff at the museum was the retirement of Debbie James curator of the Herschel for 20 years, in late October 2017. Debbie with support of the WHS, Herschel Staff and Volunteers helped transform the museum from an almost volunteer led organisation open a few days a week, to an accredited museum fully part of the Bath Preservation Trust, which is open all year round with annual exhibits and events. She helped over see many projects in renovating the museum building and facilities, including a new cinema and gallery. She also added extensively to its collection with wonderful objects acquired in 2017 like the Pocket Globes and Preston English Guittar.

With Debbie's leaving there has been a change in staffing with more involvement of Bath Preservation Staff in running the museum and programme. Dr Amy Frost, Lead Curator of the BPT with curatorial assistant Izzy Wall, will lead the curatorial duties of the exhibitions and collection. Polly Andrews Learning and Education Officer will continue in her role with the school workshops and outreach with her assistant Karen Power. Jill Hunter, BPT facilities manager, will oversee the maintenance of the building including the two flats. Joseph Middleton the current museum administrator will now be working full time. The museum, staff and programme will be overseen by BPT Director, Claire Dixon.

### Visitor Figures and Shop Sales

Both Visitor figures and shop sales in 2017 were positive and an improvement to 2016 returns. **8,768 people visited in 2017** with comparison of **7,506 people in 2016**, an increase of 16%. Because of over 1000 more people visiting the museum in 2017 the admission sales were up to approximately **£38,000** compared to **£33,000** in 2016. Shop sales were up to **£7,064.41 in 2017** compared to **£6,308.31 in 2016**.

## **Education for 2017**

The museum had another good year with education and outreach with a number of local primary schools booking both the 'Amazing Astronomy' and 'Spectacular Space' workshops including great feedback from the teachers and students. In total 150 children took part in these workshops learning about the Herschels and the solar system, including craft activities like making orreries. As mentioned above St. Andrews school had a project of learning about the Herschels and making a stage play, which was performed at the school in June.

Activities set up in half term and Heritage Open Week ('Alien Art' and 'How to write like a Georgian') were very popular with families and children, with 30 children taking part of the 'How to Write like a Georgian' afternoon workshop.

Another positive outcome with the museums outreach is that we have forged links with Slough Museum/Creative Junction group who visited in November 2017 to help research with their Heritage Lottery Funded project 'Discover the Discoverers: The Herschel Family in Slough'. We hope to collaborate in the new future on new projects raising awareness of the Herschels.

## **Group Visits in 2017**

Booked group visits were encouraging with 434 visitors in total. This included Astronomy groups for tours and talks, international universities visiting as part of their studies in 18<sup>th</sup> science, international schools and language academies and a regency re-enactment group. What is encouraging is that certain international universities and schools are now regular annual visitors.

## **Flats**

The rental of the flats still provides a needed and dependable source of income over the year. It has been consensus though that they needed to be upgraded as work on them hasn't been done in a while and one or two issues have been raised by tenants. The letting Agents also have recommended that with an upgrade we can increase the rent by 20% and this will help recover costs over a number of years. Claire Dixon (Director of BPT) and Jill Hunter (BPT facilities Manager) got permission from the BPT financial committee to go ahead with the upgrade in the top floor flat (which is vacant) in December 2017 and work began in December to get the flat ready to be put back on the rental market in February 2018.

## **Building**

There has been a minor issue with the Gallery extension in 2017 with a small amount of water finding its way from the gallery roof to the galleries smoke detector, this has been resolved.

The museum has entered a contract with ABC security who have provided updated fire extinguishers for the museums and flats, they will also provide support and maintenance of the extinguishers and we now are up to British fire standards.

## **Opening hours in 2018**

The opening hours in 2018 are being extended with the museum being open from February 10<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> (not including Christmas and Boxing Day). The weekend opening hours will change to 10am to 5pm throughout the year, while the museum will be open weekdays mostly in the afternoon 1pm to 5pm, there will be a trial in July and August to be open from 11am to 5pm to see if there is extra demand in the summer months.

## **2018 Exhibition and Events**

The museum's 2018 Exhibition will be entitled 'Wonder Women of Space' and will be part of the BPT 2018 programme on the 100th anniversary of the Suffragette movement. The exhibition will in part look at Caroline Herschel's life and work as well as focusing on contemporary Women involved in Astronomy and Science, who will form the exhibit through their work, ideas and experiences. This will also be connected with WHS lecture series as a number of the participants will be speaking about their work and discoveries.

The museum has also been discussing and researching into expanding its programme and education outreach with observing sessions with the public and schools. The museum with astronomer volunteers will trial day and night time observing sessions from the Herschel Museum garden in early March, the summer solstice in June and a lunar eclipse in July. This will be done to gauge the practicalities and public demand to see if this is something that can be permanently put on the programme.