

# **Minutes of the William Herschel Society Annual General Meeting**

## **Held at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution**

### **16 Queen Square, Bath on 3 March 2018 at 1130am**

**Present:** Chairman Charles Draper, Treasurer Fred Schlesinger, Vice-President Prof Francis Ring, Committee members Michael Tabb, Tony Symes, Jim Foreman, Simon and Rachel Holbeche, member Mike Perkins, BPT Curator Dr Amy Frost, Herschel Museum Manager Joe Middleton, and Brian Robertson (Minutes)

#### **1. Chairman's Opening Remarks**

A warm welcome to those who braved the severe winter weather to be here. The weather also affected our Annual Lecture last night by Vice-President Prof Mike Edmunds which had to be postponed. (*Sec's note, now on 18 May*) Our President Dr Allan Chapman wrote to offer his sincere regrets that train disruption made it impossible to travel from Oxford. However Dr Chapman has sent an Address which I will be delighted to read out at the end of the meeting. Also, the Herschel-Shorland family regret they are unable to travel from Norwich. Will's planned talk on the Herschel Archives will have to wait for another occasion. Those present introduced themselves.

**2. Apologies:** President Dr Allan and Rachel Chapman, Vice-President Prof Mike Edmunds, Dr Ian Macgregor, Dr Matthew Spring, Dr Peter Ford MBE, Will Herschel-Shorland and family.

#### **3. Minutes of the AGM held on 4 March 2017, Matters Arising**

These Minutes were published in the Autumn 2017 issue of the *Journal*, and on our website [www.williamherchel.org.uk](http://www.williamherchel.org.uk). There being no objections or matters arising, the Minutes were **approved**.

#### **4. Chairman's Report for 2017**

The Chairman advised that his second Report, and others presented at this meeting, are on our website. He would not therefore read it out as copies are available today but will summarise and update it. Together with Annexes A and B describing the activities of the lecture season and Bath Astronomers, 2017 has seen some exciting new developments.

The lecture programme managed by Tony Symes has broadened its scope and content, for example the lecture on Lexell in September from an approach by a European cultural organisation. Simon Holbeche had joined the Committee and has taken charge of Bath Astronomers with great energy and imagination. He has initiated a new range of activities including telescope workshops, school outreach programmes, a stronger social media presence, children's workshops and new recruitment tools.

Dr Matthew Spring since joining the Committee has provided much needed expertise on Herschel's musical repertoire and has organised concerts in conjunction with Bath Spa University and the Museum's Jubilate programme.

We have made good progress on establishing the Caroline Herschel Prize Lectureship for promising young female astronomers. We have received support from the Royal Astronomical Society which is a big boost and we expect to award the first Prize Lectureship this year. Prof Mike Edmunds has played a key role in its development, as had the awarding committee of leading female astronomers, chaired by Professor Carole Mundell. The prize is supported by a very generous donation from Dr Fran Bagenal of the University of Colorado. Mr Joseph Heaven's helpful social media activities had also played a key role.

In April an environmental group in Freshford near Bath approached us to seek cooperation in setting up a Dark Skies initiative in the Bath Area. This would have human and wildlife benefits as well as astronomical. Simon and I were very busy organising a “*Starlit Skies*” conference here in September. This attracted broad participation and a list of useful initiatives, including an educational film that would be made later in the month. But we now need to translate more of these aspirations into practical work. We need a champion to take this forward, after member Michael Tabb’s retirement as our Dark Skies Commission representative.

We were pleased to provide support to a small local dance company which performed a programme based on William and Caroline’s lives.

Our bi-annual *Journal* edited by Editor Francis Ring and produced by Fred Schlesinger continues to provide useful and well-regarded content. Jim Foreman manages our website and social media system with aplomb and skill. Facebook has 36 members and Twitter has 177 followers. I am grateful to all the Committee members for their efforts. We are now changing some roles and I will address these later under Elections in the Agenda.

There were questions from the floor about the Caroline Prize lectureship; the chairman has as yet no idea how many applications we will receive.. Further activities include the 2020 RAS meeting in Bath, and the revival of the Federation of Astronomical Societies, gaining a new lease of life, offering help with our endeavours.

In accordance with the Constitution the Chairman’s Report, proposed by Prof Ring, was **approved**.

## **5. Annual Accounts**

Mr Schlesinger presented the issued audited accounts, with explanatory Notes. As usual, we show comparisons with last year’s income and expenditure. He advised Jim Foreman that the website cost shown was for two years. The biggest improvement in our assets is the donation of £10,000 from Dr Fran Bagenal at the University of Colorado to support the Caroline Herschel Prize Lectureship.

Proposed by Prof Ring, the accounts were **approved**.

## **6. Museum Report**

The Report was presented by Museum Manager Joe Middleton. With the supervision of, and management by Bath Preservation Trust. There have been some changes in the Museum. Debbie James had retired after 20 years in which she transformed the Museum, acquired many valuable items for display, organised exhibitions and events, education programmes with Polly Andrews, built the cinema vault and Caroline Gallery and greatly raised the Museum’s profile and accessibility. Many UK, European and overseas Groups and Universities now visit annually.

Musical and Dance concerts have been widely appreciated, with emphasis on Herschel’s works. The *Jubilate* exhibition of 18<sup>th</sup> Century music in Bath and the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of William Herschel’s first year in the city was very successful with good positive feedback. The building’s interior and flat have been extensively refurbished. Society contributions have been very helpful. The first 2018 Exhibition will be *Wonder Women of Space*, linked to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Suffragette movement. Visitor numbers, sales and revenue are up about 16% from 2016.

Amy Frost, Lead Curator of the BPT, expanded on Mr Middleton’s report, stating that BPT are advancing unifying themes for Bath Museums, starting with the successful *Jubilate* exhibition and programme, and the female suffrage anniversary themed items in 2018. Some of the Museum’s objects on loan from the Science Museum would be returned, and others obtained for new purposes. In 2019 the theme would be photography, including infrared

history and early photography. Prof Ring mentioned the forthcoming RPS activities planned in Bristol, Bath and Lacock. There are close Herschel connections with Lacock photographic developments. He also said that the IoP in 2000 had awarded the Museum a plaque honouring William and Caroline Herschel, but the local Council had refused permission for it to be displayed on the street side of the house; there now seemed good grounds for trying again. Prints from an engraving plate of William Herschel are running low and need to be produced preferably on contemporary paper.

The Chairman welcomed the developments being implemented by BPT in the Museum and links with the Society which promised well for the future.

## **7. Election of Office Holders**

The Chairman advised there are changes to the Committee structure this year which he will explain after the elections themselves. Four Committee members are standing down: Dr Peter Ford after many years of great service mostly as chairman, Prof Stephen Lillicrap whose contributions have always been valuable, William Gaskell and Dr Ian McGregor. He offered his thanks to them all.

Standing again, with himself as chairman, are Francis Ring, Fred Schlesinger, Steve Davies, Michael Tabb, Tony Symes, Matthew Spring, Simon Holbeche, Jim Foreman and Brian Robertson. There is one new member, Rachel Holbeche as Treasurer. **All were elected to the Committee without objection.**

The Chairman advised that Rachel Holbeche had agreed to serve as Treasurer, with husband Simon as Membership officer, following Fred Schlesinger's wish to resign after many years of performing both roles with distinction. Simon Holbeche gave a description of a new secure computer-based membership system, called *membermojo*, which provides improved management of the database and communication of our approximately 241 members. Online recruitment is a new feature. Simon had also coordinated and produced very helpful new publicity leaflets.

The Chairman also advised that we are appointing three new Trustees as recommended by the Charity Commission: himself, Rachel Holbeche, and Jim Foreman. Our previous sole Trustee Brian Robertson is standing down. After many distinguished years as *Journal* editor, Francis Ring was standing down. Tony Symes has accepted this task and handover is in hand. Fred Schlesinger will continue to manage production and distribution.

## **8. AOB**

a. Member Mike Perkins, while thanking Francis Ring for the *Journal*, wanted to know more about dark matter. He then agreed with the Chairman that this was not an AGM matter and was advised to seek responses after a relevant future lecture.

b. HS of Japan Report: Brian Robertson summarised the Report, (which like all others presented today, are on our website). Secretary Dr Sadaharu Uehara expresses his pleasure with their association with the Society and on the distribution of the *Journal*. In Japan many exhibitions of local astronomical history have been arranged, in particular by ex-secretary Tsunoda. Translation of ancient and medieval Western books continues. The HS of Japan hopes to attend future AGMs here as was often by Seiji Kimura.

Prof Ring mentioned the cloisonné plates made by Miss Iisawa and presented to the Museum by Mr Kimura. Michael Tabb mentioned efforts to source speculum mirrors like those made by William.

c. Michael Tabb is assisting an American University who wish to build a replica of one of William's telescopes.

d. The Chairman said he and Simon had attended an Astrofest Conference in Kensington with many interesting speakers.

The Meeting closed at 12.35.

The Chairman then read out a witty message from President Dr Allan Chapman, in the form of an Address:

‘I greatly regret that the screaming Fiends of Ice and Snow have made it impossible for me to get to the AGM. And while Hannibal succeeded in crossing the Alps with elephants, he did not have our snow-locked railway system to convey him. Otherwise he could have ended up left stranded in southern Gaul. Perhaps I should have tried to cross the Cotswolds on an elephant!

But I truly regard it as a great honour to be Sir Patrick Moore’s successor as President of the William Herschel Society. He did so much to get the Society started, and in my own limited way, I do my best for the Society in terms of historical astronomical outreach based on the Herschel family achievement.

It is, therefore, a great disappointment to both Rachel and me that the Ice Fiends have made our visit for the Annual Lecture and the AGM impossible. Yet as the Herschels knew only too well, nature is full of wonderful forces. We may study some of them, such as the galaxies, with a sense of detached awe, although others, nearer to home, can frustrate and make us furious.

Indeed, we are greatly looking forward to hearing our friend Professor Mike Edmund’s 2018 Herschel Lecture, and learning more about the curious stars called ‘Quasars’ (Quasi-Stellar Objects) with their large Red Shifts and powerful energy emissions. But we will have to wait another occasion for that.

And while William, Caroline and John Herschel lived long before the discovery of Quasars, it was they who first came to realise, from decades of patient observation, that the ‘deep sky’ universe was a strange and wonderful place, perhaps evolving over aeons of time, generating and recycling its matter, and full of strange cosmic ‘beasts’. For it was not for nothing that Sir William, Knight Guelph, saw his work of patiently harvesting the wonders of the deep sky as similar to that of a naturalist who might discover new fauna in a hitherto unknown place.

I see the Herschels as true founders of instrument-based modern cosmology. For up to the 1780s, astronomers had really been celestial geometers, concerned with measuring stellar, lunar and planetary coordinates with an increasingly-sophisticated array of graduated instruments, and analysing them in accordance with Newtonian gravitational criteria. But William, Caroline and John Herschel took astronomy down a different path: a path which emphasised the need for big-aperture space-penetrating telescopes with which to observe and collect the specimens in the cosmic garden.

In many respects, that is what the Hubble Space Telescope, our great terrestrial observatories and space probes continue to do today. And as I remind people on my latest book ‘Comets, Cosmology and the Big Bang’, due out in autumn 2018, this new approach to astronomical research began first of all in the back garden of 19 New King Street, Bath, and continued at Herschel House, Slough.

So once again let me pass on my apologies for an unavoidable absence, and please keep up the sterling work of the Herschel Society. Rachel and I look forward to seeing you all soon,

when Ice Fiends relax their grip, and the sweet airs of summer waft across Bath and Wiltshire.’  
(applause)

This address, and Minutes of this AGM, will appear in a forthcoming *Journal*.

The Chairman thanked those attending today in very bad weather and invited them to join him in a cold buffet, at a modest charge of £10 a head.

Charles Draper, Chairman

Brian Robertson, Secretary