

Minutes of the William Herschel Society Annual General Meeting
Held at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution
16 Queen Square, Bath on 2nd March 2019 at 11.30am

Present: President Dr Allan Chapman, Vice President Mike Edmunds, Chairman Charles Draper, Treasurer Rachel Holbeche, Membership and Observing Simon Holbeche, Editor and Meetings Convenor Tony Symes. Committee Non-Office: Fred Schlesinger, Michael Tabb, BPT Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Museums Claire Dixon and Herschel Museum Administrator Joe Middleton. Members William Herschel-Shorland, Cassie Herschel-Shorland, Amanda Croft, Prof Stephen Lillicrap, Robert Fosbury, Phil Pocock, Dennis Lewes, Mike Perkins, Deepali Gaskell, Rachel Chapman, Amy Frost and Jim Foreman, Minutes Secretary.

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

Charles welcomed those present and commented that we were meeting under better circumstances this year than the previous year which was subjected to bad weather brought by the "Beast from the East". He added that he was delighted to see our President and his wife, Allan and Rachel Chapman, Vice President Mike Edmunds and members of the Herschel family. There followed introductions by those present.

2. Apologies

Vice President Prof Francis Ring, Dr Matthew Spring, Dr Peter Ford MBE, Adam Perkins, Dr Roger Moses, Dr Iain Macgregor, John Garrett, Patricia Denes, David Cohen, Patricia and Chuck McPartin, Gilbert Howe, Geraint Day and Joseph Jaworski.

3. Minutes of the AGM of 3 March 2018, Matters Arising

These Minutes were published in the Autumn 2018 issue of the Journal and on our website www.williamherschel.org.uk. There being no objections or matters arising, the Minutes were approved.

4. Chairman's Report for 2018

The Chairman advised that his report and others were on the website and some copies were available at the meeting and would therefore not read it out but will highlight the main issues.

The lecture programme works well and we have broadened our approach regarding sourcing lecturers. We work closely with the Herschel Museum and BPT in that regard and thanks to Tony Symes for his work building the programme.

Bath Astronomers concentrate on observing rather than the Herschel aspects of the Society and this keeps Simon Holbeche very busy and very evident enthusiasm.

For the last couple of years Matthew Spring of Bath Spa University has been working on musical aspects and we now had a jointly funded project to catalogue Herschel's music.

We work closely with the Herschel Museum and collaborate on events and matters of common interest. This year has also seen promising preparations for the production of two further speculum mirrors for the Museum's 7ft telescope.

The first year of the Caroline Herschel Prize Lectureship in collaboration with the RAS has proved very successful with many applications and the success of Dr Sarah

Rugheimer. The second year is now underway and the winner will be announced in July.

The Starlit Skies initiative is well underway and the very first conference was held in this room. A film has been produced that will help people understand the importance of Starlit Skies. More people are getting interested in the subject and how it impacts on wildlife and human health. We have a good relationship with Bath University and hope to engage with the University on how to improve the lighting at the Claverton Down campus. It is helpful that the new Vice Chancellor is also an astronomer. It is worth noting that Dorothy House at their Winsley H/Q, have carried out good work on their car park lighting which has won an award from the Commission for Dark Skies. These are good examples of how the issue is going up the agenda.

There are several publicly available sources of documents produced by or relating to the Herschel family, including the Royal Society and the RAS and a new page of our website provides links to these.

The Journal continues to thrive and membership arrangements have improved thanks to the work of Simon Holbeche. Thanks also to Jim Foreman for his work with our website and social media.

There were questions and comments from the floor. On the Starlit Skies initiative, interest in the matter of a representative to replace Michael Tabb as the local representative of the Commission for Dark Skies (as he was no longer able to carry out the role) and the suggestion for a public lecture on Dark Skies. A member explained how she got interested in the Bath/Herschel connection. Points were made on membership, levels and further initiatives, targets and incentives to become a member. The Chairman emphasised that members receive a copy of the Journal which contains a lot of information of interest although it was a major expense for the Society. A member expressed his thanks for the work of Francis Ring regarding the Speculum/Journal which was echoed by the AGM. Finally, the Report was endorsed by the AGM.

5. Annual Accounts

The Treasurer presented the Statement of Receipts and Payments for the Year Ending 31st December 2018 and the Income/Expenditure comparison for 2018 and 2017 and its accompanying notes. There was a question from the floor on how losses are dealt with and the Treasurer replied that such was covered by reserves. The Report was endorsed by the AGM.

6. Herschel Museum of Astronomy Report and discussion of future developments

Claire Dixon, BPT Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Museums and Dr Amy Frost, Senior Curator, gave a joint presentation.

Starting in 2017, the purpose was to create a programme across all four Bath Museums: No 1 Royal Crescent, Museum of Bath Architecture, Beckford's Tower and the Herschel Museum of Astronomy.

Building on the success of last year....., this year, "Capturing the Image".

No 1 Royal Crescent, "Image Control: The Power of Perception Then and Now. How the portrait was used to convey messages

The Museum of Bath Architecture, "Architectural Photographer of the Year". The Museum Administrator has launched a competition for entries to be judged by both a professional panel and members of the public.

Beckford's Tower, "Pictures and Postcards: Beckford's Souvenirs". How he captures his travels.

Herschel Museum of Astronomy, 'Invisible Light: William Herschel and Infrared'. The focus next year will be on John Herschel. Joe Middleton, the Museum Administrator, had been approached by a student, Rebecca Gallo, who wished to know if there was a model she could make that the Museum would like. It was agreed that a model of the Herschel Space Observatory would be appreciated (several illustrations of the model were presented).

A recent acquisition by the Museum was a European Space Agency collection of commemorative stamps marking the Giotto mission to Comet Halley, in 1986.

The Herschel Museum is a Accredited Museum with the Arts Council of England.

BPT gets involved with local schools and for example there is a "Starseekers" project at the Herschel Museum involving the use of telescopes. Families also get involved in astronomy related activities.

Dr Bob Fosbury is due to give a free talk for families with children on "Infrared radiation: seeing father and deeper" on April 11th and May 28th.

To celebrate UNESCO World Heritage Day on April 18th 2019, the theme will be "Bath's architectural achievements and engineering landmarks: past, present and future" with BPT's contribution being a stone carving opportunity plus walks with Amy Frost, Sacha Hunter and Jo Robinson.

BPT Programme Post 2019: 2020-Musical Bath, 2021-Conservation in Action, 2022-The Enlightenment, 2023-The Grand Tour and 2024-BPT Turns 90.

Herschel Museum of Astronomy Post 2019: 2020-Herschel's Music will be a focus in the house and in the gallery we celebrate 200 years of RAS with a focus on founder John Herschel. 2021-Conservation in Action will focus on collection care, 2022-The Enlightenment will have a science focus and acknowledge 200 years since William Herschel's death, 2023-The Grand Tour-Exploring Space travel and 2024-BPT Turns 90 will be a chance to celebrate the Museum's work and collections.

Larger 5 Year Project Plans: Beckford's Tower Project, MoBA Redevelopment, No.1 Space Review and Herschel Museum Re-presentation.

There followed comments and questions from the floor. A member remarked that the professional approach to maintaining the Museum was to be commended. In response Claire commented that it was important to keep the uniqueness of the house and stay true to how it would have been represented as the Herschel home. In this respect, the contribution of the Advisory Group was recognised. It was also important to make good use of the website and other digital platforms. A member commented that the uniqueness of House made it a "Mecca" for astronomers as Uranus was the only new planet to be discovered in recent history. Will Herschel-Shorland commented that the passion and enthusiasm exhibited was shared by the Herschel family and had their implicit support. It was recognised that the relationship with the Society was very important.

7. Election of Officers

The Chairman advised that the current Committee was standing with the exception of Brian Robertson who was standing down after twenty years of valued service:

Chairman, Charles Draper; Francis Ring, Museum Advisor; Rachel Holbeche, Treasurer; Simon Holbeche, Observing Group and Membership Secretary; Anthony Symes, Editor and Meetings Convenor; Dr Matthew Spring, Music; Albert Schlesinger; Michael Tabb and Jim Foreman, Secretary, webmaster and communications. The election of the foregoing was agreed by the AGM.

8. Any other business including Japan Society Report

The Chairman referred to the Report and expressed his thanks on behalf of the Society for their continued welcome collaboration. He summarised the main points. A Society member contributed to the newsletter of the History of Science Society of Japan with an article introducing the Herschel Museum of Astronomy in Japanese in an attractive manner for Japanese who had never been there. She gave talks in Japan on “scientific ladies” that included Caroline Herschel and Mary Summerville at a series of public lectures. A Society member is exploring the history of Uranus in Japan for the earliest acceptance of the discovery news and the first observations of the planet in Japan.

Closing remarks by President, Dr Allan Chapman

Dr Chapman opened by saying it was a great pleasure to be here and it was a great honour to serve you and referred warmly to the Vice Presidents of the Society. He commented how pervasive Herschelliana are and how they get into things and added what a superb talk had been given on the Museum by its staff members. Three weeks today he would be bringing a group from Oxford University to admire the architecture of Bath and would encourage a visit to the Museum during free time.

Dr Chapman also referred to the portrait of William Herschel that appeared on the banner that was on display in the room and asked what does this tell us about the man? This could be a portrait of a bishop or nobleman, he suggested. Who would have imagined that Herschel, from playing an oboe in a barracks in Hanover, would rise to the very high position that he attained? Eighteenth-century England had become the most open society in Europe – the most open in history – and was an enterprise-driven society. The young Herschel recognised that one of the biggest money-generators of the day was music, especially commercial music, and that not only could his talent as an oboe player and keyboard player be profitable, but his charm and social ease might enable him to become a successful impresario, or music promoter.

By the second half of the 18th century, so many of the great and the good were buried under the floor of Bath Abbey, and the area was so badly drained, that the magnificent Church sometimes smelled unpleasantly in warm weather. On the other hand the Octagon Chapel was a new church and on high ground. This is what attracted Herschel to Bath and he became the organist at the new and fashionable Octagon Chapel.

While promoting his musical career, William Herschel was also undertaking serious astronomical research, and when, on 13th March 1781, he first observed what would turn out to be a new planet, Uranus, Herschel found himself world famous overnight. The superb self-made reflecting telescope, with its exquisite optics and fittings, with which he made his discovery, instantly set a new standard in optical excellence, and Herschel suddenly found that he could make better telescope mirrors than anybody else in Europe, and quickly became a serious telescope-maker. Replicas of his Uranus-discovering telescope sold for around £110 apiece, while he would charge £3500 for larger instruments, and notably sold telescopes to two European monarchs for around that sum. And to give a standard of comparison, many a country clergyman would earn little more than £110 per annum, and Herschel’s surviving notebooks show

that he sold several dozen fine instruments over the years. He was clearly a savvy man of business and a serious operator in late Georgian society. He was a superb networker and mixed with the great and the good of Bath, London, and Europe. This otherwise obscure individual from Germany also met with His Majesty King George III, and impressed him.

Sister Caroline had been condemned to a lifetime of domestic drudgery back in Hanover, until the already prosperous William rescued her in 1772 and brought her to Bath. Caroline would turn out to be a fine observer and calculator, who would discover five comets in her own right, as well as moving, to some extent, in aristocratic and Royal circles.

After William married Mary Pitt in 1788, their son John followed in his father's footsteps, and came to move in the highest social and intellectual circles, becoming friends with Sir Humphry Davy (himself a self-made Cornish carpenter's son), Fox Talbot, Brunel, and many others. And while infant mortality was commonplace, Sir John and Lady Margaret Herschel's eleven children all survived.

William, Caroline and John Herschel profoundly influenced thinking on science from 1760 to 1870 and they were into everything: deep space cosmology, telescope design, and optics. Their discoveries also added a new dimension to the prevailing culture of the 'Romantic Age', for what could be more awe-inspiring than the vast, complex, and seemingly boundless cosmos revealed by the great telescopes standing in the Herschel's country garden? The flowers of the heavens, being observed amidst the garden flowers of Bath, Datchet, and Slough.