

Draft 26/Oct/2020

History Timeline of WHS and relationship with the Herschel Museum and BPT

1977

November - Inaugural meeting of the William Herschel Society (WHS) with the primary aim of purchasing 19 New King St (the House). The House was structurally sound, but in very poor condition, needing rewiring, replumbing, roof renovation, damp course, restoration of front and back elevations. The Hilliards and Frank Brown offered loans for the purchase as the Society had no funds.

1978

January - Statement of concern by Leslie Hilliard as Treasurer to the WHS Committee. The November meeting had agreed to purchase the House for £12,000, and accept loans to cover the price. Conversion and restoration would cost another £12,000. No donations had been received and the Society had no legal basis of limiting the liability of its members for actions taken.

January - Meeting of WHS Committee. (Patrick Moore referred to as Chairman, but not present; Dr Elizabeth Hilliard was de facto Society Chairman thereafter). Leslie Hilliard was also present, as was a City Council Official. The meeting discussed a proposed contract for the purchase of 19 New King St (the House) , the absence of donations to fund the purchase, and the need to set up a charitable trust to enable funds to be raised. A draft deed for the William Herschel Trust was circulated (with Frank Brown, Caroline Herschel, the Hilliards, Patrick Moore and Philippa Savery as proposed Trustees), as the vehicle for receiving donations, establishing the Museum, and other related educational objects.

Feb – Committee and the Hilliards agree basis on which the Hilliards should sign the contract to purchase the House for £12,000.

March – Hilliards complete purchase of House but WHS Committee postpone signing of agreement until formal constitution agreed.

September – Committee extends time limit for purchase of the House from the Hilliards and agrees to lease the 3 lower floors as best alternative if required.

December – Charitable status of WHS approved. Michael Tabb joins the Committee.

1979

January – Hilliards paying for repair work at the House, including reroofing, and creating self-contained flats on the second and third floors. Whole House rewired and replumbed. Much support received from local contractors for this work.

June – Two top flats ready for letting

July – Expenditure on House totalling £27,000 to date with only small portion met by the WHS.

1980

3 lower floors prepared as the Museum. Loans of antique furniture and exhibits agreed. Much help received from Carole Stott at the National Maritime Museum with exhibits and displays, as well as from the Herschel family.

November – Agreement (content unknown) made between the WHS and National Maritime Museum.

1981

March 13 – Opening of Museum by Mayor of Bath. First Annual Lecture given by Patrick Moore. Museum open 2 afternoons per week for half the year.

Michael Tabb's replica 7ft telescope was structurally complete for the opening. The initial glass objective mirror (made by John Wall of the RGO) arrived later.

1982

1983

March - Donations from other than Hilliards now total £6,800. Local Authority Grant of £6,200 also received. Hilliards unfunded repair/maintenance costs now £9,000 (?). Unlikely that the Society can raise the funds to purchase the House. Visitor numbers small -1346 in 1981 and 812 in 1982.

June – Restoration of the House complete. Separate Society funds established for: Society administration, paid for by annual subscriptions (minimum £2); Lectures with support from donors such as IBM; and the Restoration and Museum Funds by donations. Society paying no rent for their 3 floors, and receiving the rent from the 2 flats, thanks to the Hilliards. Also reliant on volunteer stewards when the Museum is open.

1984

March – Discussion of a proposal of turning the House into a museum of amateur astronomy. Francis Ring reported on failed efforts to get sponsorship from major companies. An autumn fund raising lecture series was proposed.

June- Newsletter explains that the Society was not raising enough funds to pay for the upkeep of the Museum. Visitor numbers about 800 per annum. The owners (the Hilliards) had stated that free use of the space could not be expected to continue, and the Museum could have to close in October. Grants were being sought from the Royal Society and major companies.

Oct – Committee agreed that Museum should join SW Museums Council. Francis Ring had approached the National Maritime Museum for support.

Nov - The Royal Society had agreed a grant of £1500 p.a. for the next 3 years. Patrick Moore had written a New Scientist Article and to Society Members seeking financial help, and 100+ donations had been received. The Society now had the funds to support the Museum through 1985, but still needed to more funding to secure the longer term.

1985

Jan – Possibility of setting up a Trust, to include the House, being investigated, with the assistance of the National Maritime Museum (NMM). British Aerospace had agreed to support the lecture programme in 1984 and 1985.

March – NMM hosts a meeting with the RS, RAS, Royal Photographic Society, and WHS about the proposed Trust. The intention was to set the Trust up soon to run the Museum, and to transfer ownership of the House to the Trust if it proved successful.

October - First issue of the 4- monthly Bulletin with broader content than the previous Newsletter.

November – Bath Astronomical Society provides instruments and volunteers for observing events at the Museum during National Astronomy week.

1986

Jan – Voyager fly-past of Uranus leads to surge of interest in Herschel and the Museum.

Feb – Formation of the Herschel House Trust was proceeding. The National Maritime Museum had agreed to take part, and RS, RAS, and WHS were expected to join. NMM also helped improve the layout of the museum.

June – British National Space Centre offers £500 sponsorship of autumn lecture programme. RS agrees to join the Trust. Consideration of Prince Andrew as a possible Patron.

1987

June – Leslie Hillyard retires as Society Treasurer.

November. Plans for the Trust now well advanced. Agreed that greater part of Society Reserves (£10k) should transfer to it on formation.

1988

Jan – Herschel House Trust now formed, with RS, RAS, and NMM as Trustees. The Society would continue to be active on research, publications, and history.

March - Elizabeth Hillyard resigns as Society Chairman, succeeded, by Francis Ring.

June – Garden of Museum under care of Avon Historic Gardens Trust.

November – Celebration of William's 250th Anniversary, including a concert of his music by a group of William's descendants,(with nearly 100 descendants attending) a Mayor's civic reception in the Pump room, and the dedication of the new statues of William and Caroline in the Garden.

1989

June - Mrs Mary Brown takes over as Museum Administrator.

July – WHS Membership charge increased to £5 (UK) and £7 (Overseas).

November 25 – Celebration of Scientific and Musical Genius of William with lectures at the Min and an organ recital of his music by Alexa, Countess of Munster, a Herschel descendant.

1990

November – The Herschel House Trust Committee had agreed that the Society was now operating almost entirely as an operating group to support Mrs Brown at the Museum. Financial reserves were diminishing, and the support from the NMM was likely to end in 1992.

1991

1992

March – Bath Preservation Trust (BPT) now leading restoration of the Museum garden. Negotiations for the Trust to take ownership of the House were almost complete. NMM had now withdrawn, but the University of Bath had joined. Thanks to major donations by the Hilliards of the House itself and an additional major donation, its future was now secure.

May – Celebration at the RS in London of 200th anniversary of John Herschel's birth, with lectures and a reception.

June – Transfer of ownership of the House from the Hilliards to the HHT.

1993

March – The Herschel House Trust was now fully operational, and responsible for the future of the House. The Trustees were the RS, RAS, and U of Bath, Francis Ring (in a personal capacity since the WHS could not itself be a Trustee). The WHS would nonetheless act as the liaison between the Trust and the Museum. Rosemary Harden, a Bath Council Officer, was the curatorial advisor.

1994

August – Letter from Rumbelows to Mr W Herschel of 19 New King St pointing out that his TV insurance was about to run out!

September – Still working up the document confirming the changed Trustees, (ie U of Bath of NMM)

1995

March – Currently trying to register the Museum with the Museums and Galleries Commission. But the constitution of the HHT was very similar to that of the WHS, which was originally set up for the same purpose, and this was now causing a problem with the registration process. AGM voted to endorse a change of WHS Constitution Objects to make it clear that its Museum role was now support to the HHT in its responsibilities for the Museum.

July – Museum Manager (Rosemary Harden) suggests a link up with a larger organisation such as the BPT or NT as their greater resources were needed to do justice to the Museum.

August – At request of the Charity Commission, an Extraordinary General Meeting was held to endorse the WHS constitution changes.

September – Discussions had been held with Mr Michael Briggs, Chairman of the BPT Trustees, Stephen Bird, Bath Museums Director, and Professor Peter Fowler, HHT Chairman, that BPT should become another HHT Trustee with special responsibility for managing the Museum. The BPT and HHT Trustees would both consider this. The HHT Trust would be maintained as it was important to maintain the role of the Royal Societies. But the BPT could benefit the Museum by providing curatorial expertise, publicity, and management. Elizabeth Hilliard had expressed her support for the concept – Beckford's Tower, which she and Leslie had also purchased and set up as a museum, worked well in BPT hands.

1996

Jan – BPT agrees to become an additional HHT Trustee. A new Museum Administrative Committee was formed to bring in finance, historic building restoration and museum marketing expertise.

Sept – Discussion of clarification of BPT's role as an HHT Trustee. They might become the Administrative, but not Managing, Trustee.

November – The HHT Trust Deed was being amended to include BPT, and each Trustee body was being asked to clarify its perceived role. For the WHS this should include research, publication, expertise and public awareness. For the Royal Societies, this was research information and archives. The Society suggested that BPT could be specified as the Trustee to administer the Herschel House and Museum, or the Museum administrative Trustee.

November – Meeting at the Museum on Light pollution involving Michael Tabb and Nigel Pollard.

1997

March – Responsibility for running the Museum now with the BPT Museum Executive Committee.

August – Discussions with the owners of the dilapidated workshop at the bottom of the Museum garden over possible purchase for use perhaps as a planetarium, lecture room, or visitor centre. It was not clear how keen the owners were to sell. Purchase would require fundraising.

WHS Annual Subscription increased to £7.50 UK, and £10 overseas.

1998

July – Discussion of a shared computer at the Museum for use also by the Society.

August – Major report by Debbie James, new Curator, on music, fund raising (including letter campaign supported by Patrick Moore) volunteers, publicity, education, exhibitions, lottery grants, registration, and employment terms.

Museum receives full registration by the Museums and Galleries Commission. Now clearly benefitting from drawing on BPT experience with the other 3 museums.

1999

Sept - Launch of Dr Rodney Hillier's short course on astronomy; weekly lectures at BRLSI. First joint venture between BRLSI and WHS.

Grant of £50,000 to the Museum by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation secured by Debbie James for major redecoration and showcases.

2000

Feb – Start of Herschel Astronomy Group, a joint WHS/BRLSI forum meeting fortnightly on Saturdays for informal discussion, talks, and perhaps music, coordinated by Dick Phillips

March – bicentenary of William's discovery of Infra-Red radiation marked by an international conference in Bath Guildhall, a lecture and a travelling exhibition, including a period at the Museum.

The Caroline Herschel Memoir was reprinted to mark the 250th anniversary of her birth.

May – Herschel Astronomy Group visit to Rutherford Labs at Harwell. Further meetings in the autumn with lectures by members and visitors.

August – First issue of the Journal called the Speculum (a reference to the tin/copper alloy used by William for his telescope mirrors) in place of the Bulletin, with the intention of 3 issues a year on the Herschels and modern astronomy.

Oct onwards – another short astronomy course by Rodney Hillier.

2001

March – re-examination under way of the role of the Society in the light of the current status of the Museum as managed by the HHT.

June – Proposed revised WHS Constitution sent to Charity Commission.

September – Charity Commission had rejected proposed changes to Constitution arising from the Review, partly because it did not regard the 1995 changes as valid (because the approval process had been incorrect).

2002

March – Opening of Star Vault in the Museum. First WHS Website established.

Subscription rates revised to £8.50 for UK members, or £10 for 2 in one mailing, (with a £1 discount incentive for payment forms easier to administer) £7.50 Europe and £10 Rest of World.

November – Charity Commission approves a revised draft constitution for public consultation.

2003

Jan – Proposals from Treasurer for the Society to plan more systematically.

March – Dr Allan Chapman elected as a Society Vice-President. Revised Constitution adopted.

Replica furnace installed in the Museum Workshop.

June – Revised Constitution registered with the Charity Commission.

Speculum not published in 2003 because of production difficulties; Society looking at ways to get more support for Dick Phillips the Editor.

2004

March – Yojiro Ogane of Japan presents the Society with a speculum mirror that he had made for the 7 ft Replica telescope, and which Michael Tabb subsequently incorporated into his Replica telescope. Annual Lecture held in the Assembly Rooms for the first time, previous ones having been in the Pump Room or Guildhall.

2005

June – Proposal (based on a suggestion from Dr Peter Ford) that Peter Wallis should put together a new book on Science in Bath, as an update from “Bath – Some Encounters with Science” by Williams and Stoddart. This would be a joint venture between BRLSI and WHS.

2006

March - Professor David Hughes gave the annual lecture 25 years after the opening of the Museum. He was accompanied by his wife Carole, who, as Carole Stott had been Curator of the Old Royal Observatory at Greenwich, and had been of great assistance in setting up the Herschel Museum on a low budget. Both had been very supportive of the Society, and were presented with specially commissioned Cloisonne plates depicting William and Caroline. Presentations of the commemorative doorway model of the Museum were made to other key guests.

November - Dick Phillips was organising out of town telescope parties as part of his Herschel Group activities. The Rodney Hillier winter lecture series was now an annual fixture. Bob Royce in the USA had offered to catalogue all of William Herschel's music; Francis would write to him encouraging this.

2007

February – Museum name changed from the William Herschel Museum to the Herschel Museum of Astronomy. This was intended to encourage non-specialist visitors who might not have heard of Herschel but did have an interest in astronomy. The Museum was also working with Hayesfield school on several education projects.

March – WHS Subscription rates raised to £10 for UK Members and Europe Members, and £13 for the Rest of the World.

April – BRLSI were expressing some doubts about the financial viability of the Bath Science Book project. The Society agreed to fund it if necessary, as it was confident of sales recouping the costs.

June – The Herschel House Trust was appointing a new Chairman; it was acknowledged that it was important that he had good links to each member organisation. There was also a need to clarify the relationship between the Trust and the Museum Executive, which had tended to meet together in recent years.

The Committee discussed the idea of changing the Society's name in parallel with the Museum name change, but a such a Society already existed in Slough, and the change would require registration with the Charity Commission.

August – The new Chairman of the HHT was Edward Bayntun Howard, and Lisa White the new Chair of the Museum Executive, succeeding Archdeacon Derek Hayward. The Trust would meet about once a year, and the Museum Executive separately and much more frequently.

October – Further discussion of the Bath Science book project. One issue was the level of readership being aimed at. The original book was meant for younger readers up to first year undergraduate, whereas some of the material for the new book was aimed at a typical BRSI audience. Some disparity in approach would need to be accepted.

2008

March – Francis Ring stood down as Chairman after 20 years, with Dr Peter Ford elected as his successor. Francis Ring would in turn take on responsibility for the editorship of *Speculum*, assisted by other committee members, and particularly Fred Schlesinger on proof reading and despatch. Jocelyn Bell-Burnell was by now another Vice-President of the Society.

December – The launch of “Innovations and Discoveries, Bath and the Rise of Science” at BRLSI had gone well. There would be a second publicity event at the Museum in December. Sales were going well.

2009

2010

March - John Herschel-Shorland spoke at the AGM about the manuscript by his mother (Eileen Shorland) on John Herschel (The Forgotten Philosopher) and also about a further Herschel Chronicle by Diana Sophia Hardcastle, a daughter of John Herschel.

Dick Phillips had formed a group called Bath Astronomers, (formerly the Bath Astronomical Society) with half a dozen members at present. It was agreed to incorporate them into the Society as an observing arm. The intention was to meet for discussions quarterly, preferably at the Museum.

April – There were some concerns about editorial control of the updating of the Herschel Chronicles for the new edition.

June – report by Brian Robertson on his visit by invitation to John Herschel-Shorland’s home in Harleston Norfolk, including a look at the two manuscripts discussed at the AGM, and other items in the family collection.

July – Dick Phillips wished to step down from convening the Herschel Group at BRLSI.

September – The Herschel Chronicles reprint was now available.

October – Plans were in hand for a major garden-level extension to the Museum to facilitate exhibitions. Lottery funding had not been obtained, but it was hoped to raise the funding through other routes.

2011

March – Agreed that Bath Astronomers and the Herschel Group should be incorporated into the Society, and that the Society should itself join the Federation of Astronomical Societies to thereby obtain Public Liability Insurance for public observing events. Charles Draper joins committee as observing member.

Dec – Opening of the Caroline Herschel Gallery at the Museum

2012

Jan – WHS agreed to support recording of Herschel Trio Sonatas by a RCM Group

June – Rodney Hillier and Tony Symes now planning the lecture programme following the death of Dick Phillips.

2013

March – Allan Chapman elected as new President following the death of Patrick Moore. Jim Foreman takes over responsibility for WHS website.

Sept – Francis stepped down as HHT Chairman.

October – Observing activities now include observing sessions at the Museum using the replica telescope, and childrens' workshops using remote telescopes as part of BRLSI workshops.

2014

Jan – Brian May had become the Museum Patron.

March – The Society donated the bulk of a recent substantial bequest to the Museum to assist it with current building works. Jim Foreman became Minutes Secretary in addition to his website role. It was agreed that future committee meetings would be held at the Herschel Museum.

June – It was clear following a management review of the Museum that its operating structure needed to be changed, and that the BPT was the best organisation to run this Museum. The BPT Trustees had themselves met, and agreed to this on condition that BPT became the sole Trustee, with the other Trustees having an advisory role. The plan was to revise the Trust Deed, so that the HHT would remain in being, with BPT as the sole Trustee. This was the model already used for Beckford's Tower. The other HHT Trustees were likely to agree; so should the Society.

September – The Society accepted an invitation to co-host a conference with the Society for the History of Astronomy in Spring 2016. Roger Moses had agreed to coordinate WHS aspects.

2015

March – Under the new governance arrangements, BPT were the sole HHT Trustee, but there was an Advisory Committee, with the other Trustees, including the WHS, as Members.

July – Francis Ring was keen to stand down as Speculum Editor; Geoffrey Briggs had agreed to help in the meantime.

Sept – Peter Ford intended to stand down as Chairman at the 2016 AGM.

November – Andy Ashwin of Bath Astronomers, who had designed their website, had offered to design a new website for the WHS.

2016

March – Agreement on some changes to the way the Society would do things after the upcoming change of Chairman, including renaming our regular publication as the “Journal of the William Herschel Society”.

April AGM. Charles Draper elected as Chairman in succession to Peter Ford. Future AGMs would be held on a Saturday in early March, with the William Herschel Lecture the previous evening.

June – Dr Matthew Spring of Bath Spa University joined the Committee as the Music member. The new website was up and operating well. Work would be put in hand to update the Constitution to reflect the new relationship with the Museum and BPT.

September – The Society had made a substantial contribution towards the cost of the Museum’s new carpet.

November. Plans were in hand with the Museum and Bath Spa University for a programme of concerts in 2017 of Herschel’s music.

2017

March AGM – A proposal to change the Society’s name to “William and Caroline” etc had been proposed by a member but rejected for several reasons. It was good to do more to promote Caroline, however, and the intention was to develop a prize in her name for promising young female astronomers. Minor changes to the Constitution were agreed. Professors Mike Edmunds and Francis Ring were elected as Vice-Presidents. Simon Holbeche of Bath Astronomers had joined the Committee as Observing Member in place of Charles Draper, with lots of ideas on how to develop the role.

May – The Society was supporting (financially and practically) an appealing dance work devised and performed locally called “Lina” based on William and Caroline’s lives. The Society had also agreed to take part in a new local dark skies group with local naturalists. The Caroline Herschel Prize proposal had now evolved (with much help from Mike Edmunds) into a Prize lectureship. The Society had been offered a major donation to support it.

July – Tony Symes agreed to assist Francis Ring in producing the Journal.

September – With Debbie James’ impending retirement, Dr Amy Frost would become Curator for all 4 BPT Museums with some additional support, and Joe Middleton would have additional responsibilities as Museum Administrator. There would also be additional BPT oversight arrangements.

November – The Starlit Skies conference had been successful.

Fred Schlesinger intended to stand down as Treasurer and Membership officer. Brian Robertson was currently the sole Society Trustee, and wished to stand down from that role. In future there would be 3 Trustees – The Chairman, Secretary, and the new Treasurer once appointed.

2018.

January – Rachel Holbeche had joined the Committee as proposed Treasurer after the AGM, with Simon Holbeche taking on the additional role of Membership Secretary. A formal scheme of delegation for expenditure approvals had been agreed. New publicity brochures were in preparation. After a discussion and vote, it was agreed to use the John Russell portrait of William in publicity from now on.

Tony Symes had assisted in preparing the upcoming Journal, and would lead on the next with the assistance of Francis and Fred.

Claire Dixon was now in place in BPT as Hd of Museums.

March – Bad weather led to a truncated AGM. The Caroline Herschel Prize Lectureship was now being planned in Association with the RAS. The first competition would be launched shortly, with Professor Carole Mundell as Chair of the selection Committee, The Prize Lecture would be held at the University in November as the new purpose for that annual event.

July – Following a visit to the RAS, there was an intention to set up a single web-page for guidance on sources of Herschel material.

Will and Cassie Herschel-Shorland had given a very useful presentation to the Society and Museum staff on the family archive and the issues it posed.

A very good educational film on Starlit skies had been produced and was now being publicised.

The Herschel Museum Advisory Committee had had a useful first meeting under Claire Dixon's Chairmanship.

Sept – Michael Tabb had found (via a chance visit to the Museum) a very good US amateur source for new speculum mirrors for the 7 ft telescope and proposals to manufacture them at cost had been agreed. A proposal by Matthew Spring for the Society to part fund a Herschel Music catalogue with the University of Bath Spa had been agreed.

November – Simon Holbeech had organised many successful observing events, but BRLSI had unfortunately cancelled their Young Scientist programme which, with his help, had also been very productive.

2019

Jan – 2018 had been the best ever year for the Museum with 10,700 visitors and shop sales of £55,000.

The society agreed to fund up to £1000 to purchase scans of Herschel's music to enable Matthew to compile the catalogue of his music.

March – The coordinated and forward-looking approach BPT was taking to its museums, while engaging with specific stakeholders for each, the Herschel being the exemplar, was working very well. Brian Robertson stood down from the Committee, with thanks for his many years of service.

July – The second Starlit Skies conference had been well attended. Discussions with the RAS had begun on our involvement with RAS 200 and the associated National Astronomy Meeting 2020 being organised by the University of Bath in July.

September – Dr Bob Fosbury joined the Committee.

October – Bath Astronomers was setting itself up as an independent organisation, rather than a virtual one as part of the WHS. This was necessary to secure the commitment and support needed for it to operate successfully. It would continue to be the WHS's observing partner, and Simon Holbeech would continue to be the observing member on the committee.

November – The Museum had won several local awards for successful small museums. There had been useful developments on Dark Skies, with the regional CPRE planning an awareness campaign with the Society's help next year, and a useful dialogue beginning with the relevant BathNES Cabinet member. It was agreed to develop proposals to change the Society's name to the Herschel Society, and to raise membership fees in a way that reflected the substantial costs of the printed Journal. Proposals would be developed for the 2020 AGM.