



*Astronomy, and the musical family  
that did so much to pioneer it.*

## Action Record of the Herschel Society AGM held by Zoom at 4pm GMT on 12 March 2022

Those present by Zoom – about 23 members, including Mike Edmunds, Rachel and Simon Holbeche, Mark Whalley, Bob Fosbury, Jonathan Hall, Tony Symes, Roger Moses, Ai Iijima, Wolfgang Steinicke, Cassie and Will Herschel-Shorland, Chuck and Pat McPartlin (plus cat!), Alex Voice, David Shuker, Deepali Gaskell, Woody Sullivan, P Leggett, and Charles Draper (Chair)

Charles welcomed those present to our second Zoom AGM. He hoped in future years it would be practical to conduct them on a blended basis allowing for attendance in person or on-line to gain the advantages of both.

Charles summarised the Agenda as circulated. The actions from last year's AGM were mainly about Herschel 200, and so would be addressed later.

Charles summarised his Chairman's report. We had been involved in two aspects of the successful virtual NAM in Bath. There had been two issues of our Journal with the new logo. The Lecture programme on a flexible blended basis had been well received. Our membership numbers were declining gradually. It would be sensible to see in 2023 if the anniversary events changed the trend. But the bigger threat to the future of the Society was the difficulty we faced in filling support roles on the Committee. He was grateful for the work of all committee members in the past year. Simon and Rachel Holbeche had done a great job in modernising and then fulfilling the Membership and Treasurer roles over the past 4 years, but were now standing down from them because of their other commitments. Charles's request to the Society membership for volunteers to take on these roles had not resulted in any offers. As a stop gap, he and Tony Symes proposed to take them on for 2022. This would mean that all the administrative roles of the Society would be undertaken by just two people, which was clearly not sustainable. We needed to identify longer term replacements. While it would be convenient for them to be based in or near Bath, this was not essential; the roles could be undertaken on-line.

The meeting agreed to adopt the Report.

Rachel Holbeche (Treasurer) summarised the financial report. After a few questions it was agreed that the report should be adopted.

Simon Holbeche reported on the wide range of activities of Bath Astronomers, our partner organisation, of which he was the Chair.

Claire Dixon, Head of Museums at the BPT, reported on how the BPT and Herschel Museum had managed their way through the past year, as described in her presentation slides, which you can find on our website.



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There was then a wide- ranging discussion, summarised at Annex A, about plans for Herschel 200.

Charles then invited the meeting to agree that the proposed Committee set out in Annex D of his report be elected for 2022. This was agreed.

Under AOB, Tony Symes raised the question whether anyone knew which of Herschel's 7ft telescopes was the one used for the discovery of Uranus in 1781. One of our lecturers had been told that it was the example in the Adler Museum in Chicago. After some discussion it was agreed that there was no known answer to this question, though much speculation. Roger Moses suggested that a tree ring analysis of the wood of a given telescope might enable that at least to be dated.

Finally, Charles said that Allan Chapman, our President, had been unable to attend the meeting in this format, but had sent a message, which Charles read out, as follows:

*"Greetings to all my friends at the Herschel Society. Apologies for not being at the Zoom meeting, but being more 'face to face' and a 'digital Neanderthal', I thought a written message, read out to you by Charles, was more in keeping with my capacities.*

*August 25th, 2022, will mark the 200th anniversary of the death of Sir William Herschel. It is probably true to say that he and his sister Caroline did more than any other individuals to fundamentally transform the direction of astronomical science.*

*For up to the 1780s, astronomy had been essentially classical Greek: or primarily concerned with the measurement of stellar and planetary positions against a fixed starry background. Right Ascension and Declination measurements of increasing accuracy were seen as the primary goal. These meticulous geometrical studies had been essential to the achievement of Ptolemy, Copernicus, and Newton. And at astronomy's heart lay increasingly accurate angular measurement.*

*But the Herschels changed that, for they were the first 'deep space' astronomers, who systematically combed the sky with large-aperture reflecting telescopes, recording the positions of those 'nebulae' and star clusters which the contemporary cometary astronomer Charles Messier dismissed as 'nuisances'.*

*The questions posed by the Herschels' researches into 'the Construction of the Heavens', or the 'length, breadth, and depth' or 'latitude, longitude, and profundity' of space would drive astronomy into wholly new realms over the next two centuries. For this new direction of astronomy would lead to the transformation of instrumentation, with the development of increasingly large aperture telescopes, photography, spectroscopy, and so on, turning Herschel's misty nebulae into an infinity of galaxies, and posing all manner of questions regarding the nature of 'energy', and, with the HST and James Webb space telescopes, probing forever deeper back in time to the origins of everything.*



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*And this transformation would begin in the garden of 19 New King Street, Bath, and move from there to the Herschel gardens of Datchet and Slough.*

*With warmest regards, and I look forward to our live meeting at the end of September.*

*Blessings, peace, health, and joy to you all."*

Charles commented that this seemed a fitting sentiment on which to close the meeting.

CD 13/03/2022

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#### ANNEX A – HERSCHEL 200 Update Discussion.

Charles explained that planning for Herschel 200 had proceeded quickly and well after the very helpful discussion at the previous AGM. A subcommittee under his Chairmanship with Mike Edmunds, Will Herschel-Shorland, Claire Dixon, Bob Fosbury and Matthew Spring as members had been formed, and through an evolutionary approach developed the programme now represented as plan Version 11. It was a mixture of firm plans by the Society and others around the weekend of 30 September/2 October, with a variety of other projects and aspirations, including details of plans by others to mark the anniversary. We had deliberately cast the net widely, which had proved beneficial in its own right as we had opened up many new channels of communication with other interested parties. We had worked closely with the Museum. The main points that came out of the discussion were:

The 20 ft virtual 3D model project had all kinds of potential. The next meeting with the students (which Claire and her Museum colleagues would join) was on 21 March, and they would produce the results of their work in May. But the staff might develop it beyond that. We expected the model to be rotatable so it could be seen from all viewpoints, but it would be good if it could demonstrate the telescope's movement, and maybe William's sweeping techniques. Could it even show William himself? Both types of viewing position? Light paths? Views through it? The student team had been advised not to go down the VR route at this stage, but could it be developed that way in the future?

- Wolfgang had done quite a lot of research into the telescope's structure for his book; he would welcome sight of the model before it was complete as he might be able to help at that stage



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- Chuck commented that there were paper modelling outfits who could take a 3D virtual model and use that to create a paper kit for modellers. This could be a potential retail item for the Museum. **Chuck would send Charles a link to one such website**
- The original tube of the 20ft (as modified by John) had been in a display at the NASA Museum in Washington DC for many years, but the Museum was being updated, and the telescope was not expected to feature in the future version. They may want to return it to the RGO. **Chuck would send Charles details of the relevant curator who used to be a member of their society.**

The Gaia project and in particular its third main data release later this year was a very important link to Herschel, which Michael Perryman's conference lecture would explore.

We had now added in a showing of George Sibley's film "William Herschel and the Universe", introduced by the Director, a week before the main conference.

The Herschel Museum was working closely with the Slough Museum and the Church on that part of their programme.

Woody's recent AAS Webinar on Herschel had proved popular and successful. The recording should be available in a week or so. **Woody would send Charles a link so he could pass it on to Society members.**

David Shuker commented that 2022 should see all, or almost all, of Herschel's music, including all the organ music, become available in printed form, thanks to several recent efforts, including Alex Voice's. (Charles said that he would be adding Alex's work into the programme's list of anniversary-linked publications.) David added that a very talented Russian violinist had performances of some of the violin caprices on his website, which showed they are remarkable works. **He would send Charles a link.** David added that he himself had and Sophia Russell were planning a series of "An evening with William and Caroline Herschel" events later this year as a music plus narration performance to e.g. the RGO and music clubs.

Woody said that the 19 June seminar in York would also have an evening of Herschel's music as part of their event.

Finally, many thanks were offered to Charles and the team for all the work put into the Herschel 200 project.