



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

## Action Record of the Herschel Society AGM held in person at BRLSI and by Zoom at 2pm GMT on 4 March 2023

Those present in person: Mike Edmunds, Tony Symes, Bob Fosbury, Claire Dixon, Simon Holbeche, Will Herschel-Shorland, Stephen Lillicrap, Geraint Day, Dennis Lewis, Deepali Gaskell, Peter Ford, Charles Draper (Chair). (12 total)

Those present on line: Udo Reffke, David Shuker, Mike Leggett, Alan Thomas, Jim Bennett, Cassie Herschel-Shorland, Mark Whalley, Wolfgang Steinicke, Roger Moses, Nigel Wallis, Brian Robertson, Ai Iijima, Junya. (13 total – but the numbers varied during the meeting)

1. Charles welcomed those present either in person or online. This was the Society's first attempt to conduct an AGM on this blended basis. The room had been arranged specially to try to convey those online a sense of being "in the room". Our President Allan Chapman was unable to be present, but had given an address filmed by Charles which would be seen at the end. This was also a first for the Society AGMs.

2. Charles summarised his annual report for a year which was dominated by Herschel 200 events. Those organised by the Society had involved much work by many people, but they had been very successful, and, along with other events the Society had reported, had gained the Society new exposure and contacts. The Herschel lecture series had carried on parallel. The Music report gave more detail on the range of music activities over the anniversary year. Charles thanked all of those who had helped, and in particular Mike Edmunds who had opened many doors, Matthew Spring who had organised all of the musical side of our Concert, and helped many others, and Tony Symes, who had played a key role in enabling our events to happen. The meeting agreed to adopt the report.

3. Tony Symes then summarised his Treasurer's report. After a few questions the meeting agreed to adopt the report.

4. Claire Dixon then introduced the Herschel Museum Report, and answered questions. Simon Holbeche then gave an oral report on Bath Astronomers, again followed by Q&A.

5. Charles then introduced the main substantive business – Our Membership Survey. (See Annex A) After the discussion, Charles thanked everyone for their contributions, and Will Herschel-Shorland for undertaking it pro bono for the Society, and coming all the way to Bath to present and discuss the results.

6. Charles then thanked the HS Committee for their work over the past year. They were all standing for re-election, with the addition of Wolfgang Steinicke, who had been co-opted on to the Committee a few months' back to bring his great knowledge of Herschel's work into the group, pending this occasion to formally include him. The committee proposed for



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election therefore included his name. The proposed Committee for 2023 was confirmed as elected.

7. Under AOB, Charles referred to the Report from the Herschel Society of Japan, and particularly the separate report on their Herschel 200 Exhibition. This was interesting, and we hoped to publish more information about it in the next issue of the Journal.

8. Simon asked if it would be possible to re-establish contact with the American academic who had started the process of making new speculum mirrors for us through the late Michael Tabb. Charles explained that he had tried to maintain the link, without success. Simon confirmed he would be happy to act as the customer for such activities in the future if the link could be re-established. Charles said he would try again.

9. Charles then thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions, whether in person or online, and introduced the video talk by Allan Chapman on John Herschel – given from his clock-filled front room – which was much enjoyed by all.

CD  
21/03/2023



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## Annex A

### Discussion on Membership Issues

Charles said it had been clear for some time that our overall membership numbers had been declining. The Committee had agreed that we needed to improve our marketing materials and had already upgraded our social media activities, but this seemed a good time to consult our members about their motivations more generally. A survey was the obvious way of doing this, and Will Herschel-Shorland very kindly offered to use his professional skills as a market consultant to conduct it. Members were sent the survey on 28 January, and responses were sought by 13 February. Members received a summary of the results on 24 February.

Will then presented the results in full - copy attached. Charles thanked Will for both the work and presentation. Charles then said that the Committee was glad to see that survey had a very good response rate (56, or 35%), and that the main message was that the membership liked what we did. The Journal was popular, but the website was under-used. There were lots of suggestions for the future, some very useful, but others suggested that the relationship between our Society, the Museum, and Bath Astronomers was not well understood by some members.

The main questions for discussion from the survey responses seemed to be:

- (1) How should we best leverage the relationships between the Herschel Society, Herschel Museum, and Bath Astronomers for the benefit of all?
- (2) How should we improve our website?
- (3) How should we use social media to attract new members?
- (4) Should we seek to grow locally, or internationally, or both?

Charles then invited comments from those present. The main points made in discussion were:

1. Something like an "Astronomy in Bath" website that linked to all three organisations could be useful.

**Action: Simon has already set this up here. <http://astronomyinbath.uk/>**

**It would be even better with a good image of Uranus in the background.**

2. Perhaps each organisation should also have a statement explaining how the "trinity" works.

**Action: We can use Charles' table for this, or an alternative. It could also go on the Astronomy in Bath website.**

3. It would be useful to have a means of feeding ideas from Herschel society members into Herschel Museum plans.

**Action: We should do this at the stage when specific ideas are being sought. This was likely to be 2024 for the current planning round. This could be via a survey or drop-in sessions.**



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4. Each of the three organisations had a wide range of collaborative relationships with other organisations locally and further afield.

**Action: We will continue to develop them.**

5. The Herschel Society could try linking into other scientific person focused societies (eg Darwin)

**Action: Charles will look into this. The most attractive options are likely to be the obvious parallels, such as the Flamsteed Society in Greenwich.**

6. We should continue to foster our links with Slough.

**Action: The Herschel Museum will continue to lead on this through their Museum contacts.**

7. Could we learn something useful from analysing hits on our website?

**Action: Tony Symes will look into this. Claire's colleague Mary could offer advice on how.**

8. Should we link more to 19<sup>th</sup> Cent astronomy?

**Action: We are open to this in e.g. our lecture programme. It could also be other scientific developments with a John Herschel link.**

9. Should we connect more to Bristol Institutions (e.g. the University, the Astro Soc). (*Bristol is twinned with Hannover*)

**Action: The Herschel Museum can offer a useful contact through one of their Trustees.**

10. The HS website might be used more if we improved its quality.

**Action: Charles will look into this, perhaps by buying in professional help.**

11. How about reaching out to Society members overseas and encouraging them to recruit compatriots?

**Action: We would welcome any and all members recruiting others who might be interested, whether in the UK or overseas. We have an open mind about the future geographical base of our membership.**

12. Caroline Herschel's story should be a good way of getting more women and younger people interested in the Society. Tweets about her get the most views now.

**Action: Charles will think about how we can use the Prize Lectureship process to help generate new membership.**



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13. The musical aspect of the Herschels' story had great potential. However, concerts were expensive to mount, and impractical to arrange from a distance. Various musical groups and the BBC had programmed Herschel's music from time to time, and various groups had produced contemporary works relating to the Herschels' stories.

**Action: Charles and Matthew discussed this with Sarah Waltz after the AGM. There was lots of potential, but the key was likely to involve getting a suitable grant. The University of York had a good record here, and their History of Ideas focus ideal for our purpose. We could hope that a book would appear following their Conference last June. Matthew would pursue the possibilities there and elsewhere.**

13. Current HS publicity material is good and informative, but doesn't draw people in. Putting opinions out there to get dialogue going might help. Facebook is good for this kind of thing. Social media is the way to get more women and young people in. BA and BPT share a lot on Social media, and 2/3 of BA growth comes that way, but currently HS is not part of that.

**Action: Mark Whalley would discuss with Simon how best we could improve our game on this. We should also draw on the recent successes on the Museum.**

14. We could also try getting astro-podcasts as their topic of the month.

**Action: Charles would look out for opportunities.**

15. Could national astronomy organisations do more to promote what we do? The Royal Society were already planning an event built around their recent grant to digitise their John Herschel archives. The RAS and HS were already involved.

**Action: Charles is in touch with the RAS on this.**

16. The whole topic of light pollution, the impact of artificial light on our health (let alone astronomy), and the optics of the body and importance of infra-red was going to get very big in the healthcare world, and William's role as the discoverer will gain more prominence. The existing Bath and Surrounds Starlit Skies group could help take a lead local role on this, but the group needed a new leader (Charles had done so from 2017 but stood down in 2020).

**Action: Discussions are in hand on this.**