



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

Actions from Herschel Society AGM on Saturday 15 March 2025

Charles then introduced the main paper for discussion on Where Next with the Herschels' Stories. The main points arising in discussion were:

- We should put more emphasis on William's discovery of Infra-Red in 1800. This was the wavelength to which the human body had a transparency window the importance of which for human health was increasingly apparent.
- John as an exemplar polymath worked very differently from modern science which had become very siloed. But this was beginning to change, one example being the way observational practices from astrophysics were being applied in biology, and particularly quantum aspects. Much of the underlying science on the interaction of light and matter was similar, and could benefit from similar approaches to mathematical modelling.
- A one-day conference on the contributions by John Herschel, and Fox Talbot (at Lacock) to the development of photography was an obvious possibility. Photography was a wide field, however, so we should think carefully about scope. Kelly Wilder should be a good source of advice.
- We could also look (light-heartedly) at an event based on the Herschels and Extra-Terrestrials, taking in William's view (common at the time) that life on other celestial bodies was common, and the Moon-Men hoax perpetrated on John by an American Newspaper while he was in south Africa.
- John and William both undertook extensive travels, recorded in their diaries, where they connected with the Good and the Great. This could be the basis of a traveller/diarist themed event.
- International collaboration was another theme that linked the two.
- William and John were both self-directed scientists in most of what they did, which offers interesting comparisons with citizen science today.
- The story of John at the Mint needed to be told.
- John's motivations for going to South Africa were interesting. It of course meant that he could complete William's Astronomical surveys, but it was also a good way of escaping from much interpersonal conflict with strong characters back home.
- We should continue to think about working with the Museum in our future plans for the benefit of both of us.
- What was the Museum doing with their Caroline manuscript? The content was well known and long published, but the MS itself might offer new insights. Was it being looked at in that way?
- The story of John's wife Margaret and their daughters was worth examining further in the context of Victorian Society.



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

- Two of the Herschel sons lived and worked for much of their lives in India. There were also other family connections on Margaret 's side. The Herschels in India might be an interesting theme.
- John Herschel had close links with other astronomers in the Bucks/Berks area including John Lee at Hartwell House that could be worth looking at.
- The death of William's wife Mary in January 1832 offered another upcoming anniversary that could help stimulate interest in her story.
- The many possible avenues for further exploration of the Herschels' stories posed obvious identity issues for the Society. Those who joined in the first place because of an interest in astronomy might be less interested in the many other scientific topics pursued by John, or the social and societal issues raised by other aspects of their stories. But they could equally attract new audiences, as already seen with Caroline's story as an exemplar of pioneering women.

Charles concluded the discussion by thanking those present and added that the Committee would consider next steps.

A few points arose under AOB:

- Wolfgang thought it should be possible to develop his Analysis of Caroline's Visitors Book published in a professional Journal into a form, with more pictures perhaps, that could be sold in the Museum. He would discuss this with Patrizia.
- Many of the Webb Society's publications related to the Herschels. Should we try to develop links with them?
- We had been pleased to receive and read the Japan Society Report. This is attached at annex B.
- We had held the AGM on a Saturday for many years. It used to be linked to the William Herschel Lecture on the same evening, but the Lecture was now on the Friday. There was merit in doing both on the same day. Should we move the AGM to Friday as well? There were no strong views on the day.