

A visit to the Herschel Museum of Astronomy in Bath by members of Cardiff Astronomical Society.

On 20th April 2024 a visit to the Herschel Museum in the City of Bath, organised by the CAS Social Secretary, took place.

17 members of the society gathered at Cardiff Railway station and took the train to Bath.

Weather was good and we had a pleasant, and short, walk to the museum in New King Street.

The Museum had been closed for the day to accommodate our visit which began with an introduction to the building and the lives of the members of the Herschel family who had lived in the house. William Herschel had initially lived Hanover and was a musician who joined the Hanoverian Guards. Following some defeats he left the guards to come to England and became known as William, and not his birth name of Wilhelm. Apparently, he ignored the niceties of obtaining a proper discharge from the guards and was listed as a deserter in 1757 until pardoned by George III in 1782.



He was a distinguished musician who played the Oboe, Violin and Harpsichord. He was also a composer, he wrote many symphonies and concertos, as well as other compositions. The Museum building is set out over three floors. Upper floors are dedicated to both his work as an astronomer and his work as a composer. In the basement there is a workshop where the Herschels built the mirrors for their telescopes. A story is told that William polished a mirror non-stop for 18 hours, Caroline spoon fed him to allow him to continue without a break.





Caroline was an astronomer in her own right and became the first woman to achieve many accolades. In 1787 the king gave her an annual pension of £50 in her capacity as her brother's assistant, and she thus became the world's first professional female astronomer. The Royal Astronomical Society elected her an honorary member in 1835 and along with Mary Somerville; they were the first female members. On

her own, she detected three nebulae in 1783, and in 1786 she became the first woman to discover a comet; over the next 11 years she spotted seven other comets. The open clusters NGC 2360 (Caroline's Cluster) and NGC 7789 (Caroline's Rose) are unofficially named in her honour.

The museum houses her memoirs which were purchased by the museum for £108,000

Caroline died aged 97, not a bad age for someone who suffered from stunted growth due to contracting Typhus aged 10.

Although born in Hannover in Germany, William Herschel lived most of his life in the town of Slough, then in Buckinghamshire (now in Berkshire). He died in the town and was buried under the tower of the Church of St Laurence, Upton-cum-Chalvey, near Slough. His time spent in Bath however was the time when he made his most famous contribution to astronomy, the discovery of Uranus.

There is a memorial stone in garden of the house to commemorate the event.





The discovery of Uranus brought William to the attention of the King (George III) and he made him "The King's Astronomer" He was elected to the Royal Society and money was made available to build more telescopes.

In addition to the discovery of Uranus, and amongst much other work related to astronomy, William also discovered Infra-Red radiation in sunlight.

For those that are interested to learn more about the Herschel's remarkable lives there is a Herschel Society whose aim is to " ..spread knowledge of the life, work, and times of Herschel and his family, and to encourage greater understanding today of the subjects he studied."

<http://herschelsociety.org.uk/>

Everyone commented on what an excellent day out it had been and congratulated Tiffany on her organising skills. If you haven't been to the museum, then a visit to it is highly recommended.

<https://herschelmuseum.org.uk/visiting/>

Mike Bradley

Treasurer CAS



CAS Members and Museum staff at Herschel Museum 20th April 2024