

William Herschel

Explore his life and story

25 August 2022 was the 200th anniversary of William Herschel's death. In commemoration of that event, we have created this map to reveal the places where William Herschel travelled, worked and lived. Turn over the page to find out more about each location and places that you can visit, to follow in his footsteps and find out more.

As well as the key numbered locations, the black dots indicate the many years that William and Mary spent travelling across Great Britain, visiting Henley, Benson, Oxford, Woodstock, Halford Bridge, Warwick, Birmingham, Llanrwst, Beddgelert, Caernarfon, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Haddington, Dunbar, Berwick upon Tweed, Alnwick, Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham, Richmond, Thornhill, Chesterfield, Derby, Stratford, Bath, Bristol, Newbury, Gloucester, Exeter, South Coast, Glastonbury, Dorchester, Salisbury, Dartford, Rochester, Canterbury, Dover, Ramsgate, London, Worcester, Slough, Portsmouth, Chichester, Brighton, Gravesend, Greenwich, Hastings, Eastbourne, Lake District, Yorkshire, Keswick, Skiddaw, Penrith, Leeds, Grantham, Cambridge, Warrington, Preston, Leicester, Sheffield, Helvellyn, Stirling, Callander, Loch Katrine, Doncaster, Tunbridge Wells, Bognor, Southampton and Dawlish.



- 1 **1753 Hanover** A musician in Hanoverian Guards along with his brother Jacob.
- 2 **1756 Maidstone** As a musician in the Guards he visits England with his father and brother.
- 3 **1757 Hastenbeck** After the battle of Hastenbeck (26 July) he leaves for London with his brother Jacob.
- 4 **1758 London** Visits a number of places outside of London including Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and Rochester. Jacob returns to Hannover.
- 5 **1759-60 Darlington** William accepts the job of director of the militia band of the Earl of Darlington in September and leaves for Yorkshire, basing himself in the North of England for the next six years. He stays at Halnaby Hall working for Sir Ralph Milbank, composing symphonies and concertos, visiting Doncaster and the surrounding area. **Places to visit:** Halnaby Hall Parks and Gardens
- 6 **1761 Sunderland** He leads the Durham militia band and travels to Edinburgh to apply for the job of Director of Concerts. He meets and performs with Charles Avison in Newcastle and with the Duke of York at Halnaby.
Places to visit: Sunderland Heritage Trails
- 7 **1762-6 Halifax and Leeds** In 1762 William produces many compositions including some grand symphonies. He performs in Newcastle and is appointed Director of Concerts in Leeds. Gaining formal dismissal from the Hanoverian Guards he becomes Director of Subscription Concerts. Composing and visiting musical families around Leeds, he still teaches, performs and composes. After a visit to Hanover William seeks a job as an organist and develops his keyboard skills. In 1766 he moves to Halifax and directs Handel's Messiah with the Halifax Messiah Club. Winning the competition for job of organist at Halifax Church he also applies and accepts job as organist at Bath's new Octagon Chapel and leaves for Bath. **Places to visit:** Halifax Minster
- 8 **1767-82 Bath** William has his first benefit concert and starts a lucrative teaching practice in Bath. Starts summer evening concerts at the Spring Gardens and opens the new Octagon Chapel organ with a concert and later The Messiah. Works with Thomas Linley (senior) who tries unsuccessfully to replace Francis Fleming as leader of Pump Room Band. Develops his teaching and performing portfolio in Bath and Bristol, publishing his *Sei Sonate per il Cembalo* (with optional parts for cello and violin) in October 1769 in Bath - his only substantial printed work. Alexander arrives to live in Bath (stays 46 years) and begins a career as a cellist and clarinetist – he joins the Bath Orchard Street Theatre Band and Assembly Room orchestras. New Upper Assembly Rooms opened. Herschel is included in the band and Linley is the director but they fall out over the 'incident of the music stand'. Herschel walks out, operating his concerts in Bristol and Bath's Lower Assembly Rooms. In 1772 William travels to Hanover to rescue sister Caroline. He runs concert seasons of his own in Bristol and Bath and trains Caroline as a singer. In 1773 his developing interest in astronomy leads him to start to make his own telescopes to observe and meet other astronomers. Caroline works with William on performances and choir training and he performs less, concentrating more on science and teaching. There are many private concerts with pupils organised by the Marchioness of Lothian. In 1776 Linley leaves Bath and William becomes Director of Music at Assembly Rooms. No longer working for the Octagon he takes over as organist at the Margaret Chapel. At this time, he builds a 10-foot reflector telescope. A year later, William's youngest brother Dietrich comes to live with the Herschel family in Bath. Caroline sings in a season of Lenten oratorios as a principal singer for the first time, later turning down the opportunity to sing in Birmingham and take on a career as a principal singer. William joins the Bath Philosophical Society through Sir William Watson in 1779. His profession as a musician is increasingly neglected and his teaching practice declines. In 1780 William starts his search for double stars, discovering the planet Uranus from the garden of 19 New King Street the following year, a discovery for which he was awarded the Royal Society Copley Medal. By Easter 1782 William's performances begin to fail and he performs publicly with Caroline for the last time at the Margaret Chapel.
Places to visit: Herschel Museum of Astronomy, Octagon Chapel, now The Botanist, The Pump Rooms, The Assembly Rooms, River Street, The Old Theatre Royal
- 9 **1782-92 London and Slough** In 1782 William visits Sir William Watson in London and has audiences with the King at Windsor. He also takes the 7ft telescope to Greenwich for comparative tests with Dr Nevil Maskelyne and others, as part of his campaign to get Royal patronage. He then takes the 7ft telescope to show the royal family at Windsor, securing his appointment as King's Astronomer with a pension of £200 p.a. In late July 1782 William, Caroline, (and briefly Alexander) move to Datchet. In 1783 William begins construction of the 20 ft telescope, gains the King's commission to build the 40 ft telescope with a grant of £2000, and continues observing and recording with Caroline, submitting key papers to the Royal Society. William and Caroline move to Clay Hall, Old Windsor, during 1785, seeking less damp living conditions. The following year they move to what becomes Observatory House in Slough, William's home for the rest of his life, where major modifications of the house and garden take place. In 1787 they are visited by the King who grants an additional £2000 to the 40ft telescope project. At this time Caroline is awarded a salary of £50 p.a for her work. The following year William marries Mary Pitt and in 1789 the second *Catalogue of Nebulae and Clusters* is presented to the Royal Society. From now on William and Mary have extensive touring holidays in Great Britain over the Summer months. In 1792 his son John Herschel is born.
Places to visit: Slough Museum, The Curve, Slough, St Laurence's Church, Slough, Royal Society Library and Archive, London, Royal Observatory, Greenwich, London, Royal College of Physicians, London, Windsor Castle, London
- 10 **1792 Birmingham** Visits James Watt at his house and factory, remains of the Boulton and Watt Soho foundry and mint, Birmingham Canal, Smethwick.
- 11 **1792 Llanorust** Attempts a climb of Snowdon with the 7ft telescope – defeated by cloud and wet ground. **Places to visit:** Snowdon walk*
- 12 **1792 Glasgow** Is presented Freedom of the City, and an Honorary Degree from Glasgow University.
- 13 **1792 Edinburgh** Visits Edinburgh Castle and Observatory, tries out their Gregorian reflector telescopes on land objects.
Places to visit: Royal Observatory, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Castle
- 14 **1802 London** Presentation of the third catalogue of the *Catalogue of Nebulae and Clusters* of Stars to the Royal Society, including 500 clusters and nebulae.
- 15 **1809 Keswick** Climbed Skiddaw. **Places to visit:** Skiddaw walk*
- 16 **1811 Lake District** Climbed Helvellyn. **Places to visit:** Helvellyn walk*

*All mountain walks should be undertaken with caution, please check location advice before visiting.