



Giving Caroline Herschel her voice back

The Herschel Museum of Astronomy acquires handwritten draft of Caroline Herschel's memoirs and will now display it in her former home in Bath

The Herschel Museum of Astronomy in Bath has been successful in its quest to buy Caroline Herschel's own handwritten manuscript draft of her memoir, thanks to generous funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), ACE/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of National Libraries, facilitated via Christie's Private Sales.

The fascinating 57-page document represents Caroline's life in her own words and is an enormously important addition to the Herschel Museum's collection, not least because her many scientific achievements were historically overshadowed by those of her brother, William Herschel (1738-1822).

This Manuscript Memoir gives us a unique and personal insight into the life and formative years of one of Britain's most prominent astronomers and pioneering women in science. Much of Caroline's personal correspondence and writing is still held by the Herschel family, so the acquisition of this manuscript provides a rare opportunity for public access.

This acquisition is particularly special as the majority of objects currently on display are on loan, and the Museum only owns one artefact directly connected with Caroline. Acquiring more objects directly relating to the Herschel siblings is a key priority for the Museum's team and Bath Preservation Trust, which owns and runs the site at New King Street.

£50,000 from the ACE/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, along with a £33,000 grant from NHMF, combined with £20,000 from Friends of the National Libraries and the proceeds of a public appeal, covered the funds needed to complete the purchase from Christie's Private Sales.

Izzy Wall, Assistant Curator and the member of staff who has researched the manuscript, explains: *"The manuscript was written around 1836 when she was 86, and consists of handwritten text in English by Caroline (1750-1848), with occasional passages or words in German. The chapters contained in this draft cover the years 1755-75, a crucial period of Caroline's life, from her childhood in Hanover to early years in Bath."*

Izzy adds: *“The manuscript provides a valuable insight into the Herschels’ life in Bath, Caroline’s education and her struggles when she arrived in England. It also gives us an understanding of their professional lives as musicians in Bath, at a time when William’s interest in astronomy, and his telescope-building endeavours were increasing.”*

This Memoir Manuscript consists of two chapters of Caroline Herschel’s draft recollections, which form the content for *The Memoir and Correspondence of Caroline Herschel*, published in 1876. Although the edited text of this draft was published, much of the colourful material Caroline wrote was removed and remains unpublished.

There is something special about seeing the original words in the author’s own handwriting; the corrections and additions show Caroline’s stream of consciousness, an older woman recalling the stories of her youth. Along with providing details about her own life, Caroline chronicles her brother William’s first experiences and experiments in making telescopes, something he would later become a world leader in.

For the Herschel Museum of Astronomy itself, and sole Trustee Bath Preservation Trust, the manuscript exemplifies the museum’s collecting priorities, to acquire objects that can help to interpret the Herschels’ daily life in Bath, their musical and astronomical achievements, and the specific priority to give the story of Caroline greater prominence.

Claire Dixon, Director of Museums for Bath Preservation Trust explains what will now happen with this unique, historic object: *“By securing this object and putting it on display in Caroline and William’s former home, visitors will be able to directly engage with Caroline’s story, literally through her own words. The manuscript will now be used as source material to inform a more authentic interpretation of the house and to inspire new content for our activity programmes and workshops, which focus on local schools, families and community groups. The acquisition of this Memoir Manuscript will fundamentally enhance our ability to tell the story of Caroline Herschel and her globally significant role in science.”*

For more information about the Memoir, Caroline and William Herschel and the Herschel Museum of Astronomy, visit herschelmuseum.org.uk and follow Herschel Museum of Astronomy on Facebook, @HerschelMuseum on Twitter, @herschelmuseum on Instagram and Herschel Museum of Astronomy on Tripadvisor.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Caroline Herschel (1750-1848) was the first woman to be paid as a professional astronomer in the United Kingdom. Caroline was born in 1750 in Hanover, the daughter of the bandmaster of the Hanoverian Guards. She moved to Bath in 1772 at the request of her older brother, William Herschel (1738-1822), who had settled in the city as a musician in 1766. William was a keen amateur astronomer and in 1781 made the major discovery of the planet Uranus from their garden in 19 New King Street Bath (now the museum). Caroline was trained as William’s observing assistant, but in addition to recording William’s observations, Caroline started performing her own ‘sweeps’ of the night sky and on 1 August 1786 she discovered her first comet, the first to be recorded as being discovered by a woman. She was also the first woman to have a paper read at the Royal Society (‘An account of a new comet’, 1787), and in recognition for her discovery she was paid a salary of £50 a year by the King for the work she was carrying out for her brother.

Caroline discovered a total of 7 comets, and 14 nebulae. She created an index to John Flamsteed’s star catalogue ‘Atlas Coelesti’ making corrections and adding 560 stars missing from the original. Caroline prepared William’s observations and notes for publication and re-ordered William’s catalogues of star clusters and nebulae into zones. For this achievement she was awarded the Royal Astronomical Society’s gold medal in 1828. In 1835, Caroline was one of the first two women to be accepted as a member of the Royal Astronomical Society, alongside Mary Somerville. When she died in 1848, at the age of 97, Caroline was highly regarded by the astronomical community across Europe. Caroline Herschel remains an inspirational figure within the field of science and astronomy.

The Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund is a government fund that helps regional museums, record offices and specialist libraries in England and Wales to acquire objects relating to the arts, literature and history. It was established at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 1881 and continues to be part of its nationwide work. The annual grants budget, currently £725,000, is provided by Arts Council England National Lottery Funding. Each year, the Purchase Grant Fund considers some 150 applications and awards grants to around 100 organisations, enabling acquisitions of over £3 million to go ahead. Visit the website: www.vam.ac.uk/purchasegrantfund

About the National Heritage Memorial Fund The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was set up in 1980 to save the most outstanding parts of our national heritage, in memory of those who have given their lives for the UK. www.nhmf.org.uk @NationalHeritageMemorialFund

About Friends of the National Libraries. FNL has helped to save the nation's written and printed history since its foundation in 1931. FNL awards grants to national, regional and specialist collecting libraries enabling them to acquire rare books, manuscripts, literary archives, fine bindings and estate archives that would otherwise be lost to the public domain and, in very many cases, to the nation. www.fnl.org.uk

Bath Preservation Trust campaigns for and promotes the conservation, sustainable enhancement and celebration of the unique historic built environment and amenity, green setting and global contributions of the City of Bath. Bath is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the only entire city in the UK afforded World Heritage Status. The core principles of BPT are: informed advocacy, learning for all, and the provision of authentic heritage experiences at its four museums (No. 1 Royal Crescent, the Museum of Bath Architecture (currently closed), the Herschel Museum of Astronomy, and Beckford's Tower (currently closed)), which focus on the architectural and historic importance of the city. BPT receives no statutory funding and is supported by visitor income, grants, legacies, donations and members who share a passion for the city and its environs. For more information visit www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk / Twitter @BathPresTrust / Facebook /@bathprestrust / Instagram @bath_preservation_trust.

HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGE FOR MEDIA USE CAN BE DOWNLOADED BY CLICKING ON THIS LINK

Caroline Herschel Memoir Manuscript © Herschel Museum of Astronomy, Bath Preservation Trust

FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES

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