

Bicentenaries galore in the new year

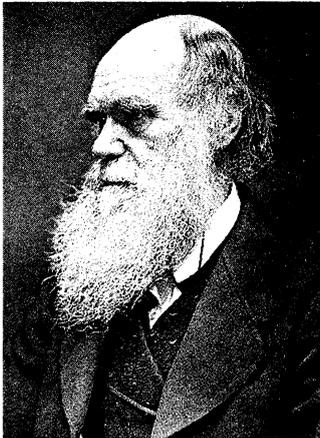
Sue Corbett

Next year is a big one for significant bicentenaries, with Abraham Lincoln, Charles Darwin, William Ewart Gladstone and Alfred, Lord Tennyson all born in 1809 (Lincoln and Darwin even arriving on the same day, February 12). This high-flying quartet also have in common some remarkably enduring fan bases, with current admirers ranging from US President-elect Barack Obama (Lincoln), David Davis, MP, (Gladstone) and Poet Laureate Andrew Motion (Tennyson) to the effervescent Richard Carter and Nigel Longhurst, founders of the 2,251-strong (at the last count) Friends of Charles Darwin (motto, Charlie is my Darwin).

Along with other present-day followers of the four memorable babes-in-arms of 1809, Messrs Obama, Davis, Motion, Carter and Longhurst will no doubt be interested in the conferences and festivals being staged at UK universities next July to commemorate their bicentenaries.

The first (by a whisker) will be the University of Oxford's *The Global Lincoln*, taking place at St Catherine's College and the Rothermere American Institute, Oxford, from July 3 to 5, co-sponsored by the university and the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and with additional funding from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, the Chicago History Museum, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of America History and the US Embassy in London. Aimed to appeal to the general public as well as to academics, *The Global Lincoln* will examine Lincoln's worldwide legacy, with speakers drawing attention to the 16th US President's lasting influence not only in the US but in the British Isles, Africa, India, East Asia, Latin America and Europe.

"Lincoln's political principles, his record of successful executive leadership in wartime, his role as the 'Great Emancipator', his resolute defence of popular government, and the perception of him as an exemplar of human brotherhood made him an international cult figure," says the conference convener Richard Carwardine, Rhodes Pro-



fessor of American History at St Catherine's College. "As David Lloyd George put it, Lincoln lost his nationality in death. Karl Marx admired him, Cuban rebels invoked his name, and the Indian statesman Jawaharlal Nehru had just two ornaments on his desk, a small statue of Gandhi, and a model of the hand of Lincoln."

Such is the concentration of bicentenaries in 2009 that two historians, Eugenio Biagini from Robinson College, Cambridge, and Lawrence Goldman from St Peter's College, Oxford, have been engaged to speak, first, on Abraham Lincoln at Oxford and then on William Ewart Gladstone at the Gladstone Bicentenary International Conference (from July 5 to 8) at the University of Chester's Centre for Victorian Studies. Other historians discussing Gladstone at Chester will include Lord (Asa) Briggs, editor of *Gladstone's Boswell: Late Victorian Conversations*, and Ruth Clayton Windschell, a Fellow of St Deiniol's Library at Hawarden, which was founded by Gladstone in 1889 and now constitutes a national memorial to him.

Hold in association with St Deiniol's and

organised by Professor Roger Swift, the Chester conference will explore public and private aspects of Gladstone's life and work, and offers the opportunity for delegates to visit Gladstone's study, the Temple of Peace at Hawarden.

The bicentenary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his seminal work, *On the Origin of Species*, will be commemorated at the University of Cambridge from July 5 to 10 with a festival of science, society, literature, history, philosophy, theology, art and music, which is aimed at members of the public as well as scholars. Sir David Attenborough will give the keynote speech at a gala dinner at King's College on July 9, and other festival speakers will include professors Steve Jones and Richard Dawkins, a clutch of Nobel Prize winners, and the writers Ian McEwan and Antonia Byatt. There will also be conducted tours of some of Cambridge's leading Darwinian collections, and a chance to view a bicentennial bronze of Darwin by a young sculptor Anthony Smith at Darwin's alma mater, Christ's College. Exhibitions coinciding with the festival will include the Fitzwilliam Museum's *Endless Forms*, which will explore how Darwin used visual imagery to develop his theories, as well as his influence on visual artists of the time.

The Young Tennyson, the Tennyson Society's International Bicentenary Conference, aimed at both the general public and academics, will be held at the University of Lincoln from July 16 to 20, with Christopher Ricks, Professor of Poetry at Oxford and editor of the definitive edition of Tennyson's poetry, as one of the key speakers. Lectures will be interspersed with a reading of Tennyson's early poems by the actor Gabriel Woolf and a tour of local sites with Tennysonian connections. "The Global Lincoln": rai.ox.ac.uk/lincoln/; Gladstone Bicentenary International Conference: chester.ac.uk/historyandarchaeology/gladstone2009/; "Darwin 2009 — The Festival": darwin2009.cam.ac.uk/; *The Young Tennyson*": lincoln.ac.uk/home/conferences/tennyson