

Charles Darwin's Cambridge Life 1828-1831¹

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Abstract: Darwin's years in Cambridge were some of the most important and formative of his early life. For the rest of his life he felt a particular affection for Cambridge. For a time he even considered a Cambridge professorship as a career and he sent three of his sons there to be educated. Unfortunately the remaining traces of what Darwin actually did and experienced in Cambridge are very rare. Consequently his day-to-day life at Christ's College has remained almost totally unknown. This article is based on new research, including newly discovered Christ's College manuscripts and Darwin publications, and gathers together recollections of many of those who knew him as a student.

Key Words: Charles Darwin, Cambridge University, Christ's College.

In 1827 Darwin's father proposed that his son become a clergyman. This was a respectable profession for a young man of his social background. Pre-requisite to becoming a clergyman in the Church of England was the acquisition of a B.A. degree from an English university.

It has long been debated why Darwin came to Christ's College, Cambridge. His grandfather, the poet Erasmus Darwin, went to St. John's College. Darwin's school, Shrewsbury School, had connections to St. John's. In 1821, Darwin's cousin, Hensleigh Wedgwood (1803-1891), later a philologist and barrister, also went to St. John's. At the time it had a reputation for strict discipline. Wedgwood migrated to Christ's after only a single term. He took his B.A. in 1824 and was elected a Finch and Baines Fellow (one of the few Fellowships that did not require taking Holy Orders) of Christ's in February 1829, a position he held until October 1830. Hence it is not surprising that his cousin, Darwin's brother Erasmus, joined Christ's College on 9 February 1822. He received his M.B. in 1828. Darwin's second cousin, William Darwin Fox (1813-1881), later a clergyman naturalist, came up in 1824. It was therefore perfectly natural that Darwin would follow his cousins and brother to Christ's. And equally that he join a college amenable to wealthy young men devoted to hunting and shooting.

In Darwin's day Christ's was a quiet and relaxed institution, neither academically rigorous nor religiously strict. Darwin's name was entered in the Admissions Books at Christ's College on 15 October 1827. It is often said that Darwin studied theology or divinity at Cambridge. This is not correct. Darwin was a candidate for an ordinary Bachelor of Arts degree, or B.A. After the B.A. he

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could have taken divinity training before taking Holy Orders. Darwin never undertook the divinity training. To earn a B.A. at Cambridge it was necessary to pass two university examinations, the 'Previous Examination' in the second year, the B.A. Examination in January of the final year, and to reside ten terms in Cambridge.

Darwin arrived in Cambridge on Saturday 26 January 1828. He was eighteen years old. As the academic year began the previous October, all College rooms were already full. He therefore took lodgings above the premises of W. Bacon, tobacconist, in Sidney Street, less than a minute's walk from the College Gate. Formal admission to the University followed Matriculation. The word derives from the requirement that undergraduates enter their names on the 'matricula' or role. Previous biographies have not included the correct date of Darwin's matriculation. The first University matriculation ceremony after Darwin's arrival in Cambridge was Ash Wednesday, 20 February 1828. On that day five men from Christ's matriculated. Around one o'clock Freshman, grouped by college, gathered in the Senate House and signed their names in the Registry's book under the heading declaring they were bona fide members of the Church of England as by law established. Darwin signed as "Charles Robert Darwin". They took the Latin oaths of allegiance and supremacy before the Senior Proctor, that year Professor of geology Adam Sedgwick (1785-1873). Thus began Darwin's lifelong association with the University of Cambridge.

I. Darwin's first year at Christ's

Settled in his lodgings overlooking the then narrow Sidney Street, Darwin began to make friends and renew old acquaintances. His brother Erasmus returned on 8 February. Perhaps lodging over the tobacconist's shop led to some teasing. One friend, Albert Way (1805-1874) of Trinity College, drew a mock coat of arms for Darwin in April 1828. This comic coat of arms depicts crossed tobacco pipes, meerschaum pipes, cigars, a wine barrel and beer tankards, evidently Darwin's trademarks were meant to be drinking and smoking!

Darwin also cultivated more sedate interests and opportunities available at Cambridge. Another friend, John Maurice Herbert (1808-1882), took Darwin to King's College Chapel. Darwin recalled how a former Shrewsbury school friend, Charles Thomas Whitley (1808-1895), then at St John's, "inoculated me with a taste for pictures and good engravings, of which I bought some. I frequently went to the Fitzwilliam Gallery [then in Free School Lane, now the Whipple Museum], and my taste must have been fairly good, for I certainly admired the best pictures, which I discussed with the old curator." (*Autobiography*, p. 61) According to Herbert: "[Darwin] had a great liking for first-class line engravings — especially for those of Raphael Morghen & Müller; & he spent hours in the Fitzwilliam Museum in looking over the prints in that collection." (Herbert 1882)

Most of Darwin's friends were from other colleges, as he recalled in later life "I do not think I knew even to bow to 15 men in college & was intimate with only 2 or 3 men.— Most of my friends belonged to Trinity & St. Johns & Emanuel [sic]." (*Correspondence*, vol. 7: 38) Perhaps Darwin's closest friend at Cambridge was his second cousin, William Darwin Fox, who was also studying at Christ's (admitted 26 January 1824) for an ordinary Arts degree with the aim of becoming a clergyman — like Darwin. Fox, again like Darwin, enjoyed riding, shooting and natural history. Fox was particularly fond of birds and insects. He kept a series of diaries which record in remarkable detail the life of a Christ's undergraduate of the time. Darwin's letters to Fox are now preserved in the College's Old Library. They provide a unique source for Darwin's interests and activities as an undergraduate. After morning service in the College chapel Darwin often joined Fox for breakfast in his rooms just through the archway leading to Second Court in what is today E staircase. In after years Darwin fondly remembered "our antient snug breakfasts at Cambridge". (*Correspondence*, vol.

1: 223) “What pleasant hours, those were when I used to come & drink coffee with you daily!” (Correspondence, vol. 7: 196)

It was apparently Fox who inspired Darwin to embrace the scientific hobby of collecting insects, especially beetles. Darwin was soon scouring the surrounding fields and fens for rare species. After fifty years Darwin’s Cambridge friend Frederick Watkins (1808-1888), at Emmanuel College, could still remember Darwin’s enthusiasm for *Panagaeus cruxmajor*, or the crucifix ground beetle, one of Darwin’s favourites. It occurs in Wicken and other fens under sedge litter. Darwin later recalled in his *Autobiography*, p. 63, “I am surprised what an indelible impression many of the beetles which I caught at Cambridge have left on my mind. I can remember the exact appearance of certain posts, old trees and banks where I made a good capture. The pretty *Panagaeus crux-major* was a treasure in those days”. Darwin’s notes in his copy of Stephens 1829, p. 13, record his capture of one: “Cam: Spring 1828”. In June 1828 Darwin reported excitedly to Fox “I Have taken *Clivina Collaris*, fig 3 Plate III of Stephens”. Herbert recounted how one of the beetles was examined: “One day in his rooms he doped a large Beetle with a penful of prussic acid. The creature almost instantaneously kicked & fell over on his back apparently dead — but after a few minutes exposure to the lense it rallied and waddled off as if nothing had happened to it, to our general amazement.” (Herbert 1882) [Figure 1]



Figure 1

Darwin returned home to Shrewsbury for the summer. He visited friends and relatives for shooting and beetling. On 1 July 1828 Darwin set out for Barmouth, Wales for what he called his “Entomo-Mathematical expedition” a study holiday with a few other Cambridge undergraduates and their private tutors. Darwin’s mathematical tutor was George Ash Butterton (1805-1891) of St. John’s. Darwin spent most of his time in Barmouth with two particular friends, Herbert and Thomas Butler (1806-1886), the son of the headmaster of Shrewsbury School. What the tutor did while Darwin scrambled over mountains and popped beetles into bottles is not recorded. Herbert later described Darwin’s activities.

On 27 August Darwin left Barmouth early for the start of the shooting season on 1 September. He returned to Cambridge for the Michaelmas Term on 31 October 1828. Finally, there was a free room in College and the Tutor assigned Darwin to a comfortable set on the south side of First Court. There

is a tradition that these rooms were once occupied by the famous natural theologian William Paley (1743-1805). No evidence at Christ's College has been found to substantiate this story. However many such College traditions are surprisingly accurate. When writing to his son William in 1858, Darwin mentioned his College rooms: "You are over the rooms which my cousin W. D. Fox had & in which I have spent many a pleasant hour.— I was in old court, middle stair-case, on right-hand on going into court, up one flight, right-hand door & capital rooms they were." William was at the time staying in E6, though he later lived in his father's old rooms. (F. Darwin 1914) Darwin gave this lengthy description of the location because the College staircases were not then named with letters as they are today. Darwin's rooms are now known as G4. The rent was normally £4 per quarter.

Darwin's rooms consisted of a panelled main sitting room (c. 8 x 8m) with an adjoining dressing room and bedchamber. His three windows on the north overlooked First Court, with the Chapel directly across from him. His postulated clerical future was never out of view. The Master's Lodge was to its right and closer still the Hall. Darwin's south facing windows overlooked what was formerly called Bath Court and is today the site of the new undergraduate library. [Figure 2]

It was possible to buy the furniture left by the previous tenant from the College upholsterer. Darwin may have done so. It was common to buy crockery, tea sets, decanters and wine glasses from the bedmaker. A large bill of £40 5s 6d for a woollen draper in the Easter term may have been for a carpet ordered for his new rooms. In December Darwin wrote to his brother Erasmus "After you left Cambridge I got into very nice rooms in College, far more comfortable than lodgings, as you will find when you come next to Cambridge. I imbibed your tastes about prints, and put it into practice, and have bought some very good prints, which I long for you to see." (*Correspondence*, vol. 1: 71)

A college servant, known in Cambridge as a gyp, was assigned to each staircase. The word gyp is from the Greek for vulture, though by Darwin's time the reason why gyps were thus named was lost in obscurity. Darwin's gyp is recorded simply as 'Impey'. Gyps delivered letters, brushed clothes, ran errands and made coffee. The College porters took letters to and from the post office. Another servant known as a shoeblack cleaned and polished shoes and boots. These services were listed



Figure 2

separately in the College accounts for each student. For example, in the quarter ending Lady Day (25 March) 1830 Darwin was charged £4.12.6 for coal, 7 shillings for the shoeblack and £2 one shilling for the barber.

A typical day at Christ's College for Darwin probably began around 7am when he was awoken by Impey in time to dress for Chapel at 7.30. While attending Chapel the bedmaker would come in and make the bed. This too was charged on the account, in this case £1 one shilling for the same quarter. Darwin would return from Chapel and have breakfast in his room before a blazing coal fire with the kettle boiling on the grate. The table was laid by Impey and the College breakfast, according to the recollection of a near contemporary at Trinity, consisted of: "the fourth part of a half-quarter loaf, and twopenny-worth of butter". ([Atkinson] 1825, p. 507) Tea and coffee and any other extras were provided or paid for by the student. After breakfast Impey cleared the breakfast things.

Clearly a wide variety of activities took place in Darwin's rooms. He read for his College curriculum, wrote letters, compared his captured beetles with published descriptions in his copy of Stephens *Systematic catalogue of British insects* and carefully pinned the beetles to cork boards. He had friends to coffee, and in the evenings they sometimes dined there and would then drink wine and play cards. Darwin recalled in his *Autobiography*, p. 61: "I used generally to go by myself to King's College, and I sometimes hired the chorister boys to sing in my rooms." Herbert remembered accompanying Darwin to the afternoon service at Trinity "when we heard a very beautiful anthem — At the end of one of the parts, which was exceedingly impressive, he turned round to me & said with a deep sigh "How's your backbone?" (Herbert 1882)

Even before coming up to Cambridge Darwin was a passionate sportsman. In October 1828 Darwin's father and sisters contributed £20 towards the purchase of a new double barrelled shotgun. With it Darwin often went shooting in the surrounding fens. He also acquired a dog named Dash.

About this time, Herbert recalled that he and Darwin had an "earnest conversation about going into Holy Orders; & I remember his asking me with reference to the question put by the Bishop in the Aduration service: "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit &c" whether I could answer in the affirmative—: & on my saying "I could not," he said "neither can I, & therefore...I can not take orders." (Herbert 1882) However in a letter from May 1830 Darwin wrote to Fox "I have some thoughts of reading divinity with [Henslow] the summer after next." (*Correspondence*, vol. 1: 104)

Chapel

Members of the College were called to Chapel by the bell, which rang for five minutes as the start of services approached at 7.30am. Students were probably required to attend Chapel eight times per week, at least one service per day and twice on Sunday. Undergraduates probably rotated through Chapel readings. It is interesting to note, and it seems no biography has ever done so, that Charles Darwin may well have stood at the lectern in Christ's College Chapel and read from the Bible.

Far from being an establishment-defending and entrenched Anglican stronghold Christ's had a large percentage of reform-minded Fellows. "In 1837 a draft of a new body of statutes was made, and on 24 February 1838 an order was signed by the Master and ten Fellows (including Shaw, Baines, and J. Cartmell, the future Master) that a petition for the substitution of [the Elizabethan] Statutes should be presented to the Queen. ... [the draft statutes] seem to have permitted the marriage of Fellows, and some participation in College emoluments by persons not members of the Church of England. ... Divine service should be held on Sundays only in the College chapel..." (Peile 1900, p. 279) and so forth. However, the draft was unsuccessful. Darwin's tutors, Shaw and Graham, are buried in the ante-chapel. Their Latin-inscribed tombstones in the floor can still be read today.

College Lectures

After breakfast in their rooms students were expected to attend the two College lectures in the lecture room, probably from 9-11am. In his *Autobiography*, p. 58, Darwin recalled “With respect to Classics I did nothing except attend a few compulsory college lectures, and the attendance was almost nominal.”

After College lectures students might have tea or coffee in their rooms and were free to visit friends or go for walks. Around 1.00 it was customary to visit private tutors. Dinner was then at 4.00 in Hall. For Pensioners like Darwin the meal or commons provided consisted only of joints of meat and beer. However extras could be purchased such as vegetables, pies and cheese. In fact the College record book T.11.25 had a separate column for vegetables next to the record for commons. In 1828 vegetables were charged at “5 ½ p/day”. In the first quarter of Darwin’s residence in Cambridge his vegetable bill came to £1 2s 5½d. (T.11.25)

The Hall

The Hall was the largest building in Christ’s College, and the place where members of the College gathered for dinner. The Hall today is quite different from its appearance in Darwin’s day. “In 1723 money was given to “beautify” it: which was done by putting deal wainscot over the oak panelling, by covering up the old fireplace, and by hiding the roof with a cylindrical plaster ceiling.” It remained thus until 1875 when “the old roof was removed, reconstructed, and replaced; the walls were rebuilt and raised about 6 feet...and new oak panelling was put up, some of the original work being sufficiently sound to remain at the south end.” The panelling at the north end was added in 1900. (Peile 1900, p. 31) In 1882 and in following years stained glass portraits were added to the Hall’s west oriel. Darwin is represented in the top right and final panel in his scarlet honorary LL.D. gown. The work was done by Messers. Burlison and Grylls. (Peile 1900 p. 16)

Before the meal a Latin grace was read. The Fellows and Fellow Commoners ate a three course meal with port or sherry at their own table on a raised dais at the north end of the Hall. The Pensioners sat together at long tables at the south end of the Hall. The Sizarers acted as waiters. After dinner the Fellows and Fellow Commoners would retire to the Combination Room located upstairs behind the gallery at the south end of the Hall. Here they would drink wine or port and converse until evening Chapel at 6pm.

On 20 December 1828 Darwin arrived back in Shrewsbury with his new dog Dash. He visited friends and relatives in Shropshire and Staffordshire for shooting and visits. In a January 1829 letter to Fox Darwin made a rare reference to his College studies: “my Studies consist of Adam Smith & Locke, in the latter of which I suppose you are an adept, & I hope you properly admire it— About the little Go I am in doubt & tribulation. I have had very little shooting.” (*Correspondence*, vol. 1: 74) The “little Go” was the nickname for the University’s Previous Examination, which undergraduates took in their second year. According to the *Cambridge University Calendar*, 1829, p. 169, “The subjects of examination are one of the four Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles in the original Greek, Paley’s Evidences of Christianity, one of the Greek and one of the Latin Classics”. Locke’s *An essay concerning human understanding* appeared in the B.A. examination for those who were not candidates for honours. The work by Adam Smith, probably his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, did not appear in the Previous or B.A. Examinations. It may have been a reading assigned by his College Tutor or Lecturer. Before returning to Cambridge for Lent Term Darwin stayed with his brother in London.

II. Darwin's Second Year at Christ's

Darwin returned to Christ's on 24 February 1829. Fox was gone; he had taken his B.A. degree on 23 January, ranking 88th out of 160 students. Earlier in the month, Darwin's cousin Hensleigh Wedgwood was elected a Finch and Baines Fellow, but he would hold this only until October 1830 (he resigned because of his religious doubts). Two days after returning to his comfortable rooms Darwin wrote Fox to report on his stay in London where he had visited entomologists F. W. Hope and J. F. Stephens. The former had generously given Darwin specimens of 160 beetle species for his collection. Darwin ordered a beetle cabinet for £15 to help house his growing collection. This cabinet must have been rather large. Darwin also reported that "By Grahams decided advice, I do not go in for my little Go." John Graham (1794-1865) replaced Shaw as Tutor in 1829. Shipley described Graham as "one of the most brilliant of the *alumni* of the College (fourth Wrangler and Chancellor's Classical Medallist in 1816), who was elected Master of the College in 1830, and was appointed to the Bishopric of Chester in 1848. Graham was one of the small group of Cambridge Liberals in the days of the first Reform Bill, and a strong supporter of the abolition of University tests. As a disciplinarian in College he is said to have been somewhat too easy-going". (Shipley 1924, p. 127)

On 15 March Darwin wrote to Fox of the routine in his College rooms: "I am leading a quiet everyday sort of a life; a little of Gibbons history in the morning & a good deal of *Van. John* [Blackjack], in the evening this with an occasional ride with Simcox & constitutional with Whitley, makes up the regular routine of my days."

At the beginning of June Darwin may have received the latest number of Stephens' *Illustrations of British entomology*, *Haustellata* vol. 2 (appendix) dated 1 June 1829. On page 200 appeared the record of Darwin's capture of a *Graphiphora plecta* (a moth) and the first word Darwin ever published: "Cambridge", the location provided by Darwin as the site of capture. On the 15th another number of Stephens appeared, this time with thirteen species of beetle collected by Darwin. He later described the feeling of seeing his captures in print: "No poet ever felt more delight at seeing his first poem published". (*Autobiography* p. 63) [Figure 3]

Page 136. *GRAPHIPHORA plecta*. "Cambridge."—*C. Darwin, Esq.*

Figure 3

For a time between 1828 and the summer of 1829 Darwin kept a list of beetle species in an old Edinburgh notebook (DAR 118). He also wrote annotations next to the descriptions of 281 species in Stephens 1829 — sometimes recording where he collected a species with the date or the person who gave him a specimen. Darwin's copy is in the Cambridge University Library. He obviously became more proficient in capturing and identifying beetles over the years.

He returned to Shrewsbury and continued his usual lifestyle of shooting and beetling in Shropshire and Staffordshire. In mid-June he went on an entomological tour in North Wales with F. W. Hope. In July Darwin wrote to Fox that, although he planned to entomologize and shoot throughout the summer, he also needed to prepare for the Previous Examination. "I must read for my little Go. Graham smiled & bowed so very civilly, when he told me that he was one of the six appointed to make the examination stricter, & that they were determined they would make it a very different thing from any previous examination that from all this, I am sure, it will be the very devil to pay amongst all idle men & Entomologists." (*Correspondence*, vol. 1: 89)

In early October Darwin attended a music meeting in Birmingham with his Wedgwood relations. He returned to Christ's on 12 October 1829. (T.11.25) He entomologized with Leonard Jenyns (later named Blomefield) (1800-1893), vicar of nearby Swaffham Bulbeck. Darwin became a fixture at the Friday evening soirées at the home of the Professor of Botany, John Stevens Henslow (1796-1861), where the scientifically-minded of the University, young and old, were welcomed.

Darwin also enrolled in Henslow's university botany lectures three times between 1829-1831. Darwin recalled that he "liked them much for their extreme clearness, and the admirable illustrations; but I did not study botany. Henslow used to take his pupils, including several of the older members of the University, field excursions, on foot, or in coaches to distant places, or in a barge down the river, and lectured on the rarer plants or animals which were observed. These excursions were delightful." (*Autobiography*, p. 60) Many years later Darwin referred to his friendship with Henslow as the most important influence during his time at Cambridge.

In early November Erasmus stayed with Darwin for a few days. The brothers spent long hours at the gallery of the Fitzwilliam Museum. Thus ended Darwin's second year at Christ's College. He had settled into a congenial world of genteel pleasures and pastimes. As Janet Browne noted "[Darwin's] Cambridge was an easy-going affair, for the most part happily engaged with the internal world of his college in preference to any of the wider issues that might rampage outside." (Browne 1995, p. 93)

III. Darwin's Third Year at Christ's

After the Christmas break Darwin returned from London to Christ's on New Year's Day 1830. About this time Darwin and seven friends formed a weekly dining club called the "Gourmet Club" or "Glutton Club". The club consisted of Darwin, Herbert, Whitley, Watkins, Cameron, James Heavside of Sidney Sussex College, Robert Blane of Trinity College and Henry Lowe of Trinity Hall. They dined in each other's rooms in rotation.

Cambridge did not consist exclusively of dining, shooting and beetling for Darwin. In addition to his College lectures and readings he had to pass the two set University examinations. On Wednesday 24 March 1830, after weeks of fervent cramming, Darwin nervously entered the Senate House to take the Previous Examination or "Little Go". Candidates were examined orally, in turn. Three hours in the morning were spent on the classics and three hours in the afternoon on the New Testament and Paley. Darwin passed the examination.

In March Darwin wrote Fox "My new [beetle] cabinet is come down & a gay little affair it is." In a later letter written from Shrewsbury Darwin described the cabinet from memory: "The man who made my cabinet is W. Edwards 29 Wilton St. Westminster. I advise to get one bigger than mine.— Mine cost £5.10. & contained 6 drawers, depth, 1¹/₂. breadth 1¹/₂.—& whole cabinet stood in height 1¹/₂4.—" (*Correspondence*, vol. 1:127) I found a cabinet in the possession of Dr Milo Keynes, a great-grandson of Darwin, which Keynes used as his television stand. He believed his collecting cabinet came from Down House and belonged to Darwin. Dr Keynes recalled that the cabinet contained shells when he inherited it from his mother. The cabinet somewhat resembles the one described by Darwin. The firm of Cheffins Antiques in Cambridge estimated the cabinet dates from the early nineteenth century. It is made of mahogany, contains six shallow drawers which have cork-lined bases. Some have a camphor compartment at the front. At some later point the drawers were lined with paper. In some places the paper has been torn away revealing the cork. In one of these exposed areas two very fine insect pins are stuck in the cork, and bent over. Inside one of the camphor compartments was a minute printed label: "LIGUSTRI Privet.", (a type of moth). This label is almost certainly remains of use of the cabinet after Darwin's time.

In April Darwin wrote to Fox “I find I get on very slowly with my cabinet, & shall be very glad of your assistance. I have only yet got to the *Amarœ*.—... I have been seeing a good deal lately of Prof. Henslow; I took a long walk with him the other day: I like him most exceedingly, he is so very goodnatured & agreeable”.

On 3 June 1830 Darwin was recorded as leaving Christ’s at the end of Easter Term. He spent a few days in London before heading north to Shrewsbury. In August he returned to North Wales for collecting beetles and fishing followed by the usual rounds of shooting in Shropshire and Staffordshire. In September he wrote to Fox about his new horse which he hoped would make a very good hunter. Darwin took the horse with him to Cambridge when he returned to Christ’s on 7 October 1830, for the start of the Michaelmas Term. He wrote to Fox “I arrived here in my most snug & comfortable rooms yesterday evening”. In November Darwin wrote to Fox that because of all the reading involved in “getting up all my subjects” he was left no time to catch or send insects.

Darwin paid Henslow to act as his private tutor in mathematics. Darwin wrote to Fox that “the hour with him is the pleasantest in the whole day”. At Henslow’s botany lectures Darwin helped to arrange the specimens and materials before the lectures, and was generally considered to be Henslow’s favourite. William Allport Leighton, an old Shrewsbury school friend, recalled: “I remember that the Professor in the concluding remarks at the close of his course of lectures said he hoped his teaching had influenced many to perseverance — certainly he knew it had influenced one — no doubt he meant Darwin.” (Leighton 1886)

Darwin spent the Christmas vacation of 1830 in Cambridge preparing for his final examination. Only after the voyage of the *Beagle* would Darwin reject Paley’s argument of design, already quite outdated by the 1830s. (Hanging in the College Old Library is the last College Paley examination paper from 1920.)

IV. Darwin’s Last Terms at Christ’s

Darwin’s final examination for the B.A. degree, which consisted of three days of written papers, occurred between 14-20 January 1831. Darwin was a poll candidate. The poll (an abbreviation of the Greek ‘Hoi Polloi’ for the crowd) consisted of those students who took an ordinary pass degree rather than an honours degree. The examination consisted of six parts: Homer, Virgil, Euclid, arithmetic and algebra, Paley’s *Evidences of Christianity* and *Principles of moral and political philosophy*, and Locke’s *An essay concerning human understanding*.

The papers were marked by Friday 21 January. On Saturday the 22nd a second edition of the *Cambridge Chronicle* appeared which showed Darwin placed 10 out of 178 in the polls. There were only 86 honours candidates that year. As Darwin recalled in his *Autobiography*, p. 59, “By answering well the examination questions in Paley, by doing Euclid well, and by not failing miserably in Classics, I gained a good place among the $\delta\tau$ πολλοι, or crowd of men who do not go in for honours”. However, Darwin had not resided the requisite number of terms so he could not yet be awarded his degree. His final two terms at Christ’s, without the pressure of preparing for examinations, were some of the most important he spent in Cambridge.

In February he read J. F. W. Herschel’s *Preliminary discourse* (1831), an authoritative and thought-provoking model on correct methods of scientific investigation. It was essentially a survey of the science of the day, as well as an account of the progress of scientific knowledge. Herschel’s law of continuity meant that all parts of nature and science would be interconsistent. Given the collection of enough facts, powerful general laws could be deduced. Darwin also read Alexander von Humboldt’s *Personal narrative* of his expedition to northern South America.

Some years later Darwin described his time in Cambridge after his degree: “During these months lived much with Prof. Henslow, often dining with him, & walking with. became slightly acquainted with several of the learned men in Cambridge. which much quickened the little zeal, which dinner parties & hunting had not destroyed. In the Spring...talked over an excursion to Teneriffe.” (Journal Darwin’s planned trip to Tenerife, in the footsteps of Humboldt, never materialized.

At the end of April Darwin’s degree was conferred, along with one other student from Christ’s. Darwin signed the Subscriptions book “Charles Robert Darwin Christ. Coll: April 26.th 1831” Two days later he wrote to his sister Caroline: “I took my Degree the other day: it cost me £15: there is waste of money.” (*Correspondence*, vol. 1: 122) Nevertheless Darwin’s degree is officially recorded in 1832. Francis Darwin explained: “he was unable to take his degree at the usual time,—the beginning of the Lent Term, 1831. In such a case a man usually took his degree before Ash-Wednesday, when he was called “Baccalaureus ad Diem Cinerum,” and ranked with the B.A.’s of the year. My father’s name, however, occurs in the list of Bachelors “ad Baptistam,” or those admitted between Ash-Wednesday and St. John Baptist’s Day (June 24th); he therefore took rank among the Bachelors of 1832.” (F. Darwin 1887, vol. 1: 163)

His father gave him £200 to settle his Cambridge debts before closing this part of his life. Darwin’s time at Christ’s College came to an end when he finally left after the Easter Term on 16 June 1831.

V. Voyage of the *Beagle* – and Return to Cambridge

In August 1831 Darwin took an important and instructive geological tour of Wales with Adam Sedgwick. Upon returning home, Darwin received a letter from Henslow which changed his life, and the world, forever. It was the offer to travel on board HMS *Beagle* as naturalist. After visiting Henslow in Cambridge and hurried preparations Darwin departed on the *Beagle* in December 1831. The *Beagle* voyage is recounted in many works, foremost of which is Darwin’s own *Journal of researches* (1839). Throughout the voyage Darwin shipped home thousands of geological, botanical and zoological specimens to Henslow in Cambridge.

The *Beagle* returned to England in October 1836, after circumnavigating the globe. After disembarking Darwin went directly to Shrewsbury to see his family, before moving back to Cambridge to arrange his veritable mountain of specimens in December 1836. At first he considered living in Christ’s College and inquired about rooms from the Tutor, Ash. But as Darwin felt he would probably need to move to London after a few months, the year-long College accommodation arrangement, as well as the need to furnish it and buy crockery etc., was inconvenient. Instead, Adam Sedgwick found lodgings for Darwin at 22 Fitzwilliam Street. The house is marked today with a stone plaque. Darwin arrived in Cambridge on 13 December and stayed with Henslow. On the afternoon of his arrival Joseph Romilly visited the Henslows, as he recorded in his diary: “Drank tea with M^{rs} Henslow to meet Marchesa &c: here also I met M^r Darwin (g[rand]. s[on]. of Bot^{ic} Garden) who is just returned from his travels round the world: he declares that in ‘terra del fuego’ whenever a scarcity occurs (wch is every 5 or 6 years) they kill the old women as the most useless living creatures: in conseq. when a famine begins the old women run away into the woods & many of them perish miserably there...” (Bury 1967. p. 110.)

Darwin wrote to Fox on 15 December “It appears to me, most strange to stand in the court of Christ, and not to know one undergraduate: It was however some kind of satisfaction to find all the old “gyps””. On 16 December Darwin moved into his lodgings in Fitzwilliam Street. He continued to dine at Christ’s. The College wine book demonstrates that he dined at Christ’s on 19 October during a short stay in Cambridge and was possibly listed as “MA” for 26 December. On the 29th “Mr Darwin [fined for being] too late in hall.” He paid his fine with a half bottle of port on each of the

two following evenings. On 23 February 1837 Darwin bet one of the Fellows, Edward Baines, that he could guess the height of the ceiling in the Combination Room (now the Old Combination Room) overlooked by a portrait of the Foundress of the College, Lady Margaret Beaufort, and a full length portrait of William Paley.

23 Feb. 1837. Mr Darwin v. Mr Baines. That the Combination Room measures from the ceiling to the floor more than (x) feet.

N.B. Mr Darwin may measure at any part of the room he pleases. (F. Darwin 1887, vol. 1: 279)

Darwin's name is crossed through, which means he lost the bet. It was forbidden to bet for money, so bets were always for a bottle of port. Indeed if the person laying a bet forgot to say it was for a bottle, he could be fined a bottle! Interestingly, Baines bet on the height of the Combination Room ceiling several years before, so he probably knew he would beat the world traveller.

Darwin recorded in his pocket diary or Journal "Jan [1837]: Cambridge — time spent in arranging general collection; examining minerals, reading, & writing little journal in the evenings Paid two short visits to London. — & read paper on elevation of coast of Chile." On 27 February he presented a paper at a meeting of the Cambridge Philosophical Society. The minutes of the General Meeting record: "An account by Mr C. Darwin of fused sand tubes found near the Rio Plata, which were exhibited along with several other specimens of rocks." Darwin wrote to his sister Caroline: "I have just been reading a short paper to the Philosoph. Soc^y. of this place, and exhibiting some specimens & giving a verbal account of them. It went off very prosperously & we had a good discussion in which Whewell & Sedgwick took an active part. ... On Friday morning I migrate [to London]. My Cambridge life is ending most pleasantly." (*Correspondence*, vol. 2: 8-10) Apparently on 6 March 1837 Darwin moved to London to be closer to the scientific colleagues and institutions who were discussing his *Beagle* collections. (Journal) Darwin wrote to Fox from London "The only evil I found in Cambridge, was its being too pleasant". (*Correspondence*, vol. 2:11) Darwin's formative life of living in Cambridge had come to an end.

VI. Conclusion

Cambridge changed Darwin and his life forever. There was the scientific and methodological influence of Henslow, the re-introduction to geology by Adam Sedgwick and the other scientific luminaries of the day. Cambridge, too, brought Darwin the offer to travel on the *Beagle* as naturalist. After the voyage Darwin briefly considered a life as a Cambridge professor. Independent wealth prevented that course from being pursued. Cambridge did not make Charles Darwin, but it came at the right time in his life and introduced him to the right people and finally brought him the most important opportunity of his life. His entire life programme thereafter was altered. He even continued to rise early in the morning, something that was popularly believed at the time to distinguish Cambridge from Oxford men.

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