



DARWIN'S SHREWSBURY

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Charles Darwin
Born in Shrewsbury on the
12th February 1809

Charles Darwin – Homo Salopian

Welcome to Charles Darwin's Shrewsbury.

As the old saying goes, you can take the man out of Shrewsbury, but you cannot take Shrewsbury out of the man. Of this, there is no finer proof than the case of one Charles Robert Darwin, esq. – born in the county town of Shropshire exactly 200 years ago this year.

For Charles went on to craft the much-lauded Theory of Evolution; and, as the great man himself said

'I was born a naturalist'

We shall demonstrate in the pages which follow, almost everything contained in that theory can be traced directly back to Charles' formative years, here, in Shropshire's noble heart.



*Charles Darwin
Aged 6*

Naturally selected for greatness

THE WEDGEWOODS

Josiah Wedgwood
1730 – 1795

Sarah Wedgwood
1734 – 1815

Susannah Wedgwood
1765 – 1817

THE DARWINS

Erasmus Darwin
1731 – 1802

Mary Howard
1740 – 1770

Robert Darwin
1766 – 1848

Charles Darwin
1809 – 1882

Born on February 12th, 1809, at Mount House, Shrewsbury, Darwin was the genetic product of two great families. His paternal grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was a noted doctor and naturalist who had come up with his very own theory of evolution; while his maternal grandfather was Josiah Wedgwood, the famous potter. Both great men were founder members of the famous Lunar Society – so called because it used to meet on the night of the full moon.

Naturally enough, young Charles combined these qualities: as a small child, he loved nothing more than to potter about in Shrewsbury's parks, where he collected all manner of plants, bugs and beasties, by day or indeed, moonlight.

Today, the Quarry Park (est. 1719), the ponds and flower gardens of the Dingle, and the River Severn herself are all still teeming with life (evolved and otherwise).

Survival of the fittest



Darwin's secondary education, at the Revd. Samuel Butler's famous Shrewsbury School, revealed no signs of the greatness that was to come. Charles hated Latin and Greek – then the school's main subjects – and was considered by many to be a slow learner.

Two things, apparently, kept the poor boy sane. First was his elder brother's chemistry lab, built in a shed at the bottom of the garden, where their odiferous experiments soon led him to acquire the nickname "Gas Darwin" amongst his schoolboy contemporaries (that, at least, was Darwin's story).

The second was walking which kept him very fit indeed. Notebook, net and jam-jar in hand he wandered for mile after mile, through the beautiful Shropshire countryside that surrounds the town. You too can follow in his footsteps through pastoral fields and over the Shropshire Hills (later immortalised by A.E. Housman) – still blue, still remembered.

It's all about sex

Revd. Butler would be shocked to see the imposing statue of his former pupil that now graces the front of his old school buildings (since converted into the town library); shocked, too, by the very content of Darwin's theory of evolution – both in its perceived assault on the literal truth of the Bible, and in its requirement for copious amounts of reproduction over long periods of time.

Mind you, Darwin's own attitude to procreation was ambiguous, to say the least. His first girlfriend, Fanny, dumped him because he preferred the company of beetles.

In due course, though, his natural Shropshire fecundity cut in, and he and his devoted wife Emma produced ten children – in the process creating a dynasty that would keep many a university stocked with scientists for years to come.

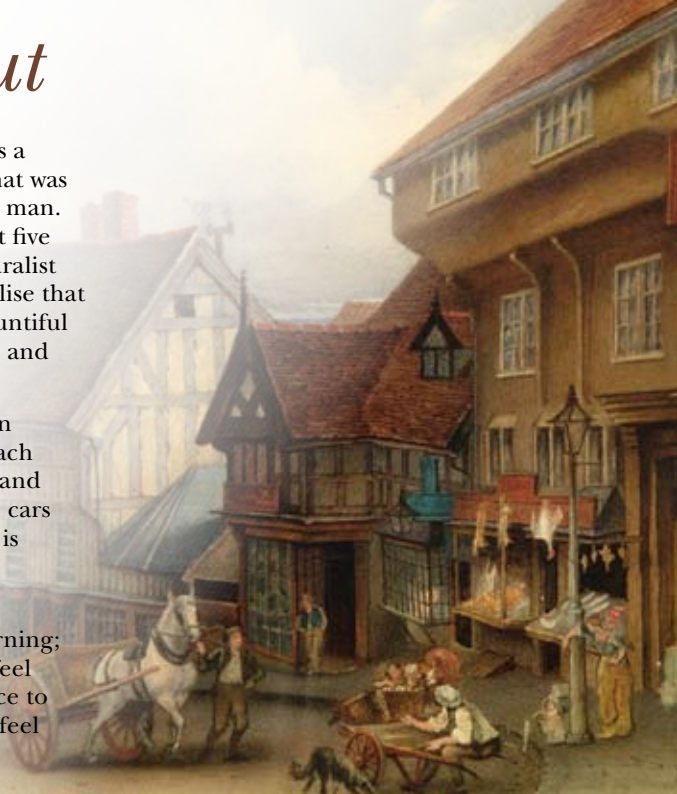


Beagle's about

They say that no-one truly knows a place until they leave it, and that was as true of Darwin as it is of any man. Only after he had completed his great five year voyage around the world, as naturalist on board the HMS Beagle, did he realise that nature was even more diverse and bountiful than the fabulously varied restaurants and public houses of Shrewsbury.

This epic journey began in 1831, when Charles boarded the London stagecoach outside the Lion Hotel on Wyle Cop, and left his beloved home town. Although cars have since replaced horses, the scene is little changed today.

And, as you pass, spare a thought for Darwin's feelings that September morning; for you too, gentle reader, may soon feel the pang of leaving Shrewsbury, a place to which we hope you may also come to feel eternally attached.





DARWIN'S
SHREWSBURY

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DARWIN200

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