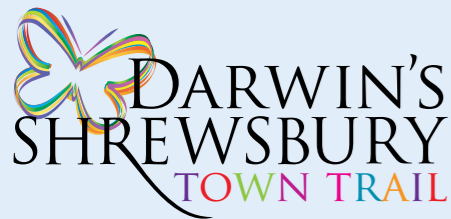


The Darwin Town Trail

Welcome to Shrewsbury – the birthplace of Charles Robert Darwin naturalist, explorer and true Salopian.

Darwin was born at Mount House in Shrewsbury on 12th February 1809 and spent the first 27 years of his life in the town. Darwin's early life inspired his fascination with the natural world leading to his theories of evolution. Much of Shrewsbury remains unchanged since Darwin's time, indeed he would still recognise much of the town today. The Darwin Town Trail takes you to the significant places around Shrewsbury that influenced a young Charles Darwin and helped shape him into one of the world's most famous people.

Many of the points on the trail have been marked with special commemorative way-markers set into the pavement near the Darwin point of interest. These way-markers have been kindly sponsored by Royal Mail who have also released special stamps to commemorate Darwin's birth 200 years ago.



The Darwin Town Trail has been kindly sponsored by Royal Mail

www.discoverdarwin.co.uk

1. DARWIN GATE

The starting point for the trail is Mardol Head where Darwin Gate is situated. Mardol, the name of the street, means ‘Devil’s Boundary’.

Darwin Gate was inspired by elements of the design and construction of St Mary’s Church (which Darwin attended whilst at school) and used the same sandstone. As night falls, defused light shines through the columns suggesting stained glass windows and the tops of the posts mimic ecclesiastical arches. Although the elements of the structure never change, it looks different from every angle and when it all comes together it shows the shape of a church window.

Walk away from Darwin Gate down Claremont Street towards Bellstone. On your right you will see a large black & white building called Rowley’s House home to Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery. Inside the museum there are collections reflecting many centuries of settlement in Shropshire as well as displays on the Darwin family in Shrewsbury.

2. THE BELLSTONE

Turn right onto Bellstone and on the opposite side of the road is a pair of black iron gates, the entrance to Morris Hall Yard. Through the gates, at the end of the courtyard stands a granite boulder named The Bellstone, which was Darwin’s first introduction to the science of geology.

According to Darwin it was a Mr Cotton who first drew his attention to the Bellstone. Mr Cotton explained that this type of stone was only found much further north in Cumbria or Scotland and went on to assure Darwin that “the world would come to an end before anyone would be able to explain how this stone came where it now lay.”

Darwin later learned, during his studies at Edinburgh, that the Bellstone was almost certainly brought down to Shropshire with the encroaching glaciers of the Ice Age.



(The Bellstone is where we gather at 12 noon on the 12th February every year to drink a toast to Charles on Darwin Day).

Look out for the way-marker featuring a common beetle. As a young man, Darwin collected beetles.

3. CLAREMONT HILL

Leave Morris Hall Yard and turn left and then left again up Claremont Hill. 13 Claremont Hill is where the young Darwin was educated by a Unitarian minister – the Reverend Case, before going to Shrewsbury School. Darwin remembered watching the military burial of an officer from a window overlooking St. Chad’s, when really he should have been studying! (The house is privately owned and not open to the public).



Look out for the way-marker featuring an ammonite fossil. These are very common marine fossils and many have been found on Shropshire’s Wenlock Edge – a well known landmark which was once a coral reef in the Caribbean.

4. ST. CHAD’S

At the top of Claremont Hill turn left on to St. Chad’s terrace and on your left is St. Chad’s Church. The church opened in 1792 after the old St. Chad’s collapsed in 1788. It was designed by George Steuart who also designed nearby Attingham Park.

Charles Darwin was christened at St. Chad’s in 1809. In recent times, the churchyard was used

as a location for the filming of ‘A Christmas Carol’. Scrooge’s ‘gravestone’ can still be seen today.



Look out for the way-marker featuring a newt. The view from St. Chad’s is one of the loveliest in Shrewsbury.

5. THE DINGLE

Cross the road from St. Chad’s church and enter The Quarry Park and head towards the Dingle now a pretty landscaped garden surrounded by trees. It was here, whilst studying with the Reverend Case, that the young Charles Darwin would often fish for newts.

6. THE LION HOTEL

Leave The Quarry opposite St. Chad’s church and turn right onto St. Chad’s Terrace, and walk along St. John’s Row towards the Town Walls. On the way you will see The Crescent, an elegant terrace dating from the eighteenth century where Robert Darwin lived for a short while before the construction of the family home at The Mount.

Just before The Crescent, turn left up Belmont and continue following the road as it merges into Milk Street then turn right on to Wyle Cop towards the Lion Hotel. The Lion was an important staging post for the stagecoaches travelling along the old A5, London to Holyhead road. From here, Charles Darwin caught the coach south to meet The Beagle and begin his epic voyage of discovery.

Darwin’s journey to meet The Beagle almost never happened: The invitation to join Captain Fitzroy as his companion and naturalist on The Beagle came not long after Charles Darwin had returned from studying to become a member of

the clergy at Cambridge. Years previously Charles had also studied medicine at Edinburgh, yet neither profession appealed to his nature.

Darwin’s interest in the natural world was formed at a very early age and Robert Darwin, despaired of his son and fearing he would never settle down tried to force the young Charles to concentrate on his future by refusing his request to join Fitzroy. However, Darwin begged his favourite uncle (Josiah Wedgwood II) for help and following his intervention Robert relented.

Darwin raced across Shrewsbury to the Lion Hotel to catch the next coach to London hoping that Fitzroy hadn’t already offered his place on The Beagle to another. When Darwin arrived at the Admiralty, he found that Fitzroy had indeed offered his place to another – however, Fitzroy had recently received his apologies and Darwin was able to join The Beagle! On the night of his return to Shrewsbury Darwin may have stayed at The Lion before making his way to the family home in time for breakfast.



Look out for the way-marker inscribed with HMS Beagle. Darwin was a passenger on the second voyage of The Beagle, which was due to last two years, but in fact took five.

7. THE LIBRARY

From The Lion, cross the road onto Dogpole and continue until you meet Pride Hill. On your way you will pass St. Mary’s church and The Parade. The Parade was formerly the Royal Shrewsbury Infirmary, it was built as a subscription hospital and completed in 1830 and Robert Darwin practiced medicine here. The building has been renovated and converted into specialist shops and cafés. The rear of the Parade offers a spectacular view

over the river to the countryside beyond the town.

In front of The Parade is St. Mary’s church, which is said to date back to 960AD. The fine east window came from the former church of the Franciscans in St Julian’s Friars. Some 50 ft. of the spire fell in 1894, severely damaging the church and necessitating extensive restoration. A local vicar suggested that the collapse was divine retribution for the decision to erect a statue to Charles Darwin in the town! The church is in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust. The spire of St. Mary’s church is the third highest in England.

When you reach Pride Hill turn right into Castle Street and follow the road down until you see the Library and the Darwin statue on your left. The statue was designed by H. Montford and erected in 1897 to celebrate Shrewsbury’s most famous son. The building was previously Shrewsbury School where Darwin attended school after leaving the tutorship of Reverend Case.

Darwin did not enjoy school and states in his autobiography “Nothing could have been worse for the development of my mind than Dr Butler’s School” – he was not much for ‘classical’ learning! Though he lived only a fifteen-minute walk away, Charles was a boarder and thought little of the Spartan living conditions.



Look out for the way-marker featuring a marine iguana. Marine iguanas are only found on the Galapagos Islands. In his journal, Darwin described these iguanas as the “most disgusting clumsy Lizards” and nicknamed them “imps of darkness”.

8. THE UNITARIAN CHURCH

From the Library go back up Castle Street towards the town centre and down Pride Hill and turn left at the bottom onto High Street, 30 metres on your right hand side you will find The Unitarian Church. Darwin worshipped here with his mother until she died when he was aged eight. Inside the church there is a commemorative plaque to Darwin. Outside the church you will see a plaque outlining the liberal outlook of the Unitarian movement which is thought to have helped Charles develop his open and enquiring mind.



Look out for the way-marker featuring a trilobite (marine creature) fossil. Some of the oldest examples of this fossil have been found in Church Stretton.

DARWIN’S BIRTHPLACE

Should you wish to walk to see the outside of the Darwin family home, the walk takes around 15 minutes. Go back along High Street towards the Darwin Gate, over the Welsh Bridge and up the Mount.

The building is currently an office for the District Valuer and is not open to the public (nor are the gardens). The gates, however, are open during office hours so visitors are able to walk up the drive and take photos of the house and the plaque. Please be aware that this is a working office so we ask for your discretion when visiting.

The house was built by Robert Darwin in 1798 with a loan from his father Erasmus. The family moved here in 1800 and Charles was born nine years later. *Look out for the way-marker of a fish fossil.*

