



Charles Darwin *sketched by*  
Harriet Lubbock *in 1865*  
*(from her sketchbook)*

*Darwin at Downe*



*This leaflet describes how  
Charles Darwin came to live in Downe,  
his life here and places he knew  
that you can see today.*

Darwin was a family man who involved himself in the life  
of the small rural community where he lived.

He was friendly and got on well with his neighbours,  
sharing with them the fear of epidemics such as scarlet fever  
which swept through the village from time to time.

He was a familiar figure, well liked and respected and it  
was partly because he was sociable and communicated well  
with other people that he was able to obtain so much information  
about the world around him, which he was able to use  
in developing his scientific ideas.

## *Darwin before Downe*

Charles Darwin was born in Shrewsbury on 12th February 1809, the son of Robert Darwin, a doctor and Susannah Wedgwood, daughter of Josiah Wedgwood II, owner of the Wedgwood pottery works. Known throughout the world as 'the father of evolution', his theories fundamentally changed the way in which we now view the world. Although the inspiration for his ideas came from the things he saw on his voyage around the world in 'HMS Beagle' and were stimulated by scientific discoveries of the time and the people he knew, it was his observations and experimental work with plants and animals around his home near Downe which provided much of the evidence vital for the



1 HMS Beagle in the Murray Sound, Tierra del Fuego by Conrad Martens



2 Map to show Darwin's voyage 1831-1836

acceptance of his ideas. After his return he settled in London, marrying his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood, in January 1839. At first they lived in Gower Street, London, in a house they called Macaw Cottage on account of its gaudy decoration. Even before their marriage, Charles had written an outline of ideas about species and how they might be related, or change over time and in a notebook entitled, 'Questions and Experiments', he started to outline a series of enquiries, observations and experiments he wished to carry out if they moved to the country. After the birth of their two eldest children, William in 1839 and Annie in 1841 they started house hunting in earnest, stimulated by Charles' deteriorating health and the desire to escape from some of the social demands, noise, dirt and the ever present fear of disease that life in London presented.



3 Charles and Emma Darwin painted by George Richmond in 1839/1840

## First Impressions

In July 1842 they came to view Down House. Darwin noted, 'We arrived safely at Down. It being noon when we arrived at the George Inn, we gave our horse a rest and ourselves some refreshment'. It seemed a quaint, old-fashioned place, a haven of peace after the bustle of life in town. The next day he wrote to his sister, Catherine, 'Position... 16 miles from St. Paul's ... I calculate we are two hours going from London Bridge. Village about forty houses with old walnut trees in the middle where stands an old flint church and the lanes



4 Outside the George Inn, late 19c

meet. Inhabitants very respectable...all touch their hats as in Wales and sit at their open doors in the evening... The little pot-house where we slept is a grocer's shop and the landlord is the carpenter... The charm of the place to me is that almost every field is intersected by one or more foot-paths. I never saw so many walks in any other country. The country is extraordinarily rural and quiet with

narrow lanes and high hedges and hardly any ruts. It is really surprising to think London is only 16 miles off....' Emma later wrote, 'We...fixed upon a place which had no great charms - a commonplace-looking square house of 3



5 Downe Village pond in about 1890 by W H Boot with inset picture of Down House

storeys standing on a rather nice lawn with complete exposure to the south west in a flat field with some good ashes and beeches on it... At the edge of the table land on which the village and house stand are steep valleys crowned at the top with old hedges & hedgerows very disorderly & picturesque & with enormous clusters of Clematis and blackberries and a great variety of yews, services etc.'

## *Darwins at Downe*

They moved into the house in September 1842, Emma then nearly 8 months pregnant with their 3rd child. Ten days later, the baby was born, 4 weeks early. Christened, 'Mary Eleanor', in the village church, she died aged 3 weeks and was buried close to the west door of the church.

Joseph Parslow had been Charles Darwin's manservant in London. As the Darwin's butler, he moved with them to Downe and lived in the cottage next to the coachhouse at Down House and married Emma's maid, Eliza, in the early 1840s. She set up as a dressmaker in a cottage in the village, where she taught needlework to girls apprenticed to her by Emma. Parslow worked for the Darwins for many years and remained a lifelong friend of the family and part of the village community. He sang tenor in the parish church choir and won prizes for vegetables at the village vegetable and flower shows. Other servants who worked at Down House included William Brooks the cowman and gardener who lived in a cottage close to the cow yard with his wife Keziah (the best smocker in the village) and Joseph Comfort the second gardener who helped with the cows and pigs and drove the family's two carriages. The parish of Downe served 440 people in the 1840s and had a butcher, baker, carpenter and post office as well as two public houses. The village wheel-wright, John Osborne, sang bass in the church choir to Parslow's tenor and was also the parish clerk. Most of the parishoners were agricultural labourers and tenant farmers. Downe also had several gentry houses owned by people who had made their money outside the parish, while opposite Down House itself was Down Court, which Darwin described as, '*a most beautiful old farm-house with .....traces of a moat*'.



6 Downe High Street looking towards the church, about 1900

Early visitors to Down House included the Lubbock family. Sir John Lubbock, ran the family bank in London and acted as squire in the village. He was an astronomer and mathematician, who won the Gold Medal of the Royal Society for his work on tide tables. He had recently rebuilt the family house: the new mansion at High Elms was completed in 1842, and like Darwin he supported 'progressive' causes. His eldest son, also



7 High Elms Mansion 1880

John Lubbock, was 8 years old when Darwin moved to Downe and very interested in natural history. Darwin persuaded the elder Lubbock to buy his son a microscope and helped and encouraged the young John Lubbock in his scientific studies.

During 1843 alterations and extensions to Down House were carried out under the supervision of John Lewis, the village builder, who lived in Walnut Tree House near the Church.

Gradually the Darwins settled into village life. One of the Darwins' new friends in Downe was the new vicar, the Reverend John Brodie Innes. Charles, a liberal scientist, was very different from the

conservative vicar, but despite this they became firm friends and remained so even when Innes left the village. Darwin once described him, 'as one of those rare mortals from which one can differ and yet feel no shade of animosity'. He helped Darwin with some of his experiments, particularly in relation to his studies on hive bees.



The Reverend Innes helped Darwin with his experimental investigation of the comb-making instincts of bees (see *The Origin of Species*, Chapter 6)



In June 1858, Emma Darwin wrote to her son William, 'I came here with all the children on Saturday leaving poor Papa at home (as he was too busy with bees' cells to endure to come) ... only think how bold Papa has become; he hived a swarm of bees all himself. He and Mr Innes go about, wonderful figures in their bee dresses with white veils on their hats.'

In 1848 the Reverend Innes had asked Charles to take over the local Coal and Clothing Club into which the villagers paid a few pennies every month and for which large donations were obtained from the local gentry. This was used to help the villagers with winter necessities. In addition, Charles in discussion with the Reverend Innes and labourers who came to Down House proposed starting a benefit



8 Downe village cricket in 2006, note Down House in the background

society called the Down Friendly Society. A small monthly subscription bought villagers a few shillings a week to live on in case of illness and £5 for burial expenses. Darwin as treasurer invested the money in the Bank of England and the Club met every month in the George and Dragon. There were keen cricketers in the village and Charles provided a pitch in his meadow for them to play on. Downe village cricket is still played here during the summer.

When the Reverend Innes inherited property in the Scottish Highlands and went there with his wife and son, he put the parish in care of the Curate, Reverend Thomas Stephens, but left the care of the Coal and Clothing Club and Friendly Society to Darwin as well as making him treasurer of the village school.



9 Henrietta Darwin aged 8 (1851)

The Darwins had a large, extensive family and kept in close contact with sisters, brothers, aunts and cousins. In 1847 Emma and Charles' Aunt, Sarah Wedgwood, moved into Petleys, an old house built in many different styles situated on the Luxted Road in Downe. George Darwin recalled, *'The solemn visits to our old great-aunt were rather awful but rare events,'* but her servants, Mrs Morrey, Martha and Henry Hemmings, always made a fuss of the Darwin children. Henrietta (Etty) remembered *'whenever life was a little flat at home, we could troop off, crossing the three fields that separated our house from Petleys, sure of a warm welcome'*. When 'Aunt Sarah' died in 1856, the Reverend Innes conducted the funeral and her house was sold by auction.

Darwin's children were often involved in his researches. He used his observations of their expressions as small children when he wrote 'The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals' (1872), they helped him with his studies of bees, collected moths and flowers for examination and tagged and observed spindle bushes. Etty remembered *'He cared for all our pursuits and interests, and lived our lives with us in a way that very few fathers do...'* He took them for walks with him and sometimes the family took picnics in the countryside around. Francis Darwin wrote, *'Another favourite place was 'Orchis Bank' above the quiet Cudham Valley, where fly and musk orchis grew amongst the junipers ....and.. the little wood, Hangrove, just above this [now Downe Bank Nature Reserve].* Henrietta also recalled, *'Just on the other side of the narrow steep little lane leading to Cudham, perched high on the side of the valley was 'Orchis Bank'....a grassy terrace under the shaws of old beeches, and with a quiet view across the valley, the shingled spire of Cudham Church shewing above its old yews.'*



10 Cudham Church and yew



11 View north-east from Downe Bank along the Cudham Valley to High Elms in the distance: note junipers in the left foreground

In 1851 Lord Stanhope, the historian and a local landowner, founded a National School at Cudham. Darwin contributed to the building fund and paid an annual contribution towards its running costs. Similarly, in Downe village, Sir John Lubbock provided and maintained a new village school completed in 1855, on the site of the poor house, which Darwin supported by paying fees for a few needy children. The school was run on the model of the British and Foreign School Society and in the 1870s used Hooker's botany primer, the first school textbook to emphasize the value of an evolutionary approach to the origin of species. John Mumford the village schoolteacher coached William and Annie Darwin with writing and in the evening the schoolhouse was used as a reading room and social club for adults, which Emma supplied with newspapers and books.

Also in 1851, Mr John Carter set up a Baptist Church in Downe on the Luxted Road. The Darwins' under-gardener, Henry Lettington, was a deacon of the chapel. Charles' son Francis recalled how Henry Lettington taught him how to make whistles and care for his tame rabbits and how in Darwin's later years Lettington helped with many of his plant experiments.

After the publication of 'On The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection' in 1859, Darwin threw himself into botanical research. According to Darwin expert, Professor David Kohn, a series of observations Darwin made between May and September 1860 in the local countryside, led to the important research he published in 'On the Various Contrivances by which British and Foreign Orchids are Fertilised by Insects' (1862), 'Insectivorous Plants' (1875) and 'The Different Forms of Flowers on Plants of the Same Species' (1877).

During the early 1860s Darwin was approached by the Kent Commission of The Peace and asked to serve as Justice of the Peace in the Bromley Division of Kent. He had testimonials from the Reverend Innes and Sir John Lubbock. The hearings were held at the White Lion Inn, Locksbottom, which was

*built in 1629, and Darwin attended the Petty Sessions regularly, gaining a reputation for leniency. 'Many's the cup of tea and piece of cake I've had from Mr Darwin. He used to have us boys in to weed his garden. He was a magistrate, and I remember how troubled he was once when he had to punish some boys who had robbed his orchard. 'I do wish the police hadn't caught them,' he said to me.'*

George Sales 1939



12 White Lion

# RULES AND REGULATIONS

## FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF

### DOWNE NATIONAL MIXED SCHOOL.

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#### I.—ADMISSION.

Parents may obtain admission for their Children by applying themselves with the child to one of the Committee, provided they agree to these Rules, a copy of which will be given to them. They will then receive a Ticket of Admission.

#### II.—TERMS.

Payment of 2d. is to be made every Monday morning by each child.

#### III.—TIME.

School-hours are from Nine to Twelve in the Morning, and from Two to Four in the Afternoon.

#### IV.—ATTENDANCE.

Every Child is expected to attend every day, both Morning and Afternoon, unless leave of absence has first been obtained. Leave of absence can be given by the master, but only on pressing occasions and seldom. If a child is kept at home by sickness, notice must be sent to the Master, or the child will be considered absent without leave.

#### V.—APPEARANCE.

Every child is required to come to School clean and tidy.

#### VI.—CONDUCT.

Every child is required to behave respectfully at all times. The parents should endeavour to make them behave well at home.

#### VII.—ADMONITION.

The parents of any child absent without leave for three successive days, either in the Morning or afternoon, will receive a ticket of Admonition, and if absent for more than six days in a month, the child will be considered to have left the School, and cannot be allowed to re-enter without a fresh application, and a promise of more regular attendance.

#### VIII.—SUSPENSION.

The Master may suspend the attendance of any child who shall refuse to comply with the Rules of the School, and he shall enter the name of the child and his fault in a book, and report the case to the Committee.

#### IX.—COMPLAINTS.

Any complaint by the parents is to be made to one of the Committee. No complaint is to be made to the Master on any subject.

#### X.—LEAVING.

Any parents who wish their child to leave the School, are required to inform one of the Committee, as at entrance.

HOLIDAYS: Every Saturday; One Week at Easter; Three at Harvest; One at Christmas. = /

THE VICAR OF DOWNE, *Chairman and Treasurer.*

*Committee.*

SIR JOHN LUBBOCK, BART., High Elms.

C. R. DARWIN, Esq., Downe House.

F. ALLEN, Esq., Downe Lodge.

Mr. C. HARRIS, *Secretary*, Hostye Farm.

Mr. H. OSBORNE, Downe.

J. SMITH, Esq., Downe Court.

Mr. SALES Downe.

Mr. SNOW, Downe Hall Farm.

However, Charles did have a deep-seated dislike of cruelty, witnessed by his son, Francis, who remembered his father returning from a walk pale and faint from arguing with a man he had seen ill-treating his horse. When a gentleman farmer was said by some villagers to have allowed some of his sheep to starve to death, Darwin went around the parish collecting evidence, had the case brought before the local magistrates and secured a conviction.

In 1868 Elizabeth Wedgwood, Emma Darwin's elder sister, came to live at 'Trowmers', a house, parts of which date back to 1717. She suffered from curvature of the spine, cared for her invalid parents until they died, and had always been there to support Emma when her babies were born.

As he grew older Darwin was persuaded by his family to travel around the local countryside on horseback as well as on foot. Francis in 'Life and Letters' (1887) described how they found a cob called Tommy and wrote how, *'He enjoyed these rides extremely and devised a number of short rounds which brought him home in time for lunch.'* Recollections of him riding around the area were also published in the local paper after his death, *'Up to ten or twelve years [before his death], his tall figure, seated upon a favourite old black cob, was a familiar object in the lanes round about. ...it was observed that he was rarely seen in the village or met on the roads, preferring, as he did, to take his way generally southward by the footpaths through the woods and meadows. Little children, who have a quick instinct for a kind and gentle nature, would run to open a gate when they saw Mr Darwin coming, encouraged thereto by a smile and a kind word. Downe folk, by whom he was much beloved, like now to dwell upon these trifles, and of speak of his considerate kindness to all about him.'* Daily News 24 April 1882

Francis wrote how Tommy fell heavily one day with his father on Keston Common. *'This and an accident with another horse upset his nerves and he was advised to give up riding.'*



13 Darwin on his horse, Tommy, in the 1870s

Every year the Darwins held afternoon tea for the members of the Downe Friendly Society at Down House where Darwin gave his annual treasurer's report. They also sometimes entertained parties from London, in particular young labourers from the Working Men's Club



14 Down House gardens

in London where Henrietta's husband, Richard Litchfield, taught music, maths and science. Henrietta reported, *'The first time was in the summer of 1873. These invitations gave great pleasure and there was always a large attendance, often as many as sixty or seventy. My father's and mother's gracious welcome, an excellent tea on the lawn, wandering in the garden and singing under the lime-trees made a delightful day'*.

Throughout the 1870s Darwin completed and published 8 books. He further explored man's place in the natural world in 'The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex', (1871) and completed three more botanical books; 'The Movements and Habits of Climbing Plants' (1875), 'The Effects of Self and Cross Fertilisation in the Vegetable Kingdom' (1876) and 'The Power of Movement in Plants' (1880). His last major work, 'The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms,' was published in 1881. By now he was suffering from heart trouble and he died in April 1882. It was arranged that the funeral would be held at Downe; Darwin's old friend the Reverend Innes offered to perform the ceremony and John Lewis the builder, who years before had supervised the extensions at Down House, made a simple coffin. But Darwin's colleagues wished to celebrate the man and his achievements and to further establish his scientific ideas by having him buried in Westminster Abbey. The President of the Royal Society approached the family and Darwin's friend and lifelong supporter, John Lubbock (later Lord Avebury), who was the Member of Parliament for Maidstone petitioned MPs in the House of Commons to allow the request. Darwin was duly buried near Sir John Herschel and Sir Isaac Newton on April 26th. A memorial can be seen on the wall of Downe Church.

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Darwin Heirlooms Trust © English Heritage Photo Library: Figures 1 3 6 9 and 13

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Lyulph Lubbock: Figure 7 and frontcover

Randal Keynes: Honeycomb and Downe School Rules

John Howard: Figure 14 (Downe House Gardens)

Kent Beekeepers' Association: Orpington Branch: Honey bee

## Sources

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- The London Borough of Bromley (2006) **Darwin at Downe Nominated World Heritage Site Nomination Document**
- Wyhe J. van (Ed.) **The Writings of Charles Darwin on the Web**, at <http://pages.britishlibrary.net/charles.darwin>

For more information about Darwin's life and work around Downe, including walks and events in the area and how you can become involved, see [www.darwinswildlife.co.uk](http://www.darwinswildlife.co.uk) or [www.darwinatdowne.co.uk](http://www.darwinatdowne.co.uk). 3 self guided trails, obtainable from libraries and High Elms Country Park lead along routes familiar to Darwin and pass many areas where he observed and studied plants and animals

To read Darwin's publications on line see, 'The Writings of Charles Darwin on the Web', at <http://pages.britishlibrary.net/charles.darwin/>, or <http://darwinlibrary.amnh.org>. More information can also be found in the World Heritage Site Nomination Document (2006) at your local library.

## *How to Reach the Proposed World Heritage Site.*

### **Bus**

- 146** (Mon-Sat) Bromley to Downe via Hayes & Keston
- 246** Bromley to Westerham via Hayes Station, Keston & Biggin Hill
- 320** Bromley to Biggin Hill via Keston & Leaves Green
- 353** Orpington (Ramsden Estate) to Addington via Orpington Stn, Locksbottom, Keston Mark & Hayes Station
- 358** Orpington to Crystal Palace via Farnborough, Bromley, Beckenham, Penge & Anerley
- 402** (Mon-Sat) Bromley North to Tunbridge Wells via Farnborough, Green St. Green, Knockholt, Sevenoaks, Hildenborough & Tonbridge
- R1** Green St. Green to St. Paul's Cray via Chelsfield, Orpington & St. Mary Cray
- R2** (Mon-Sat) Petts Wood to Biggin Hill via Orpington, Keston & Leaves Green
- R5** (Mon-Sat) Petts Wood Stn to Halstead via Orpington, Green St. Green and then via a circular route to Cudham/Pratts Bottom (check your journey with Traveline)
- R8** (Mon-Sat) Orpington to Biggin Hill via Green St. Green, Shire Lane, North End Lane, Downe & Lusted Road (Hail & Ride: Green St. Green to Jail Lane)
- R11** Green St. Green to Sidcup via Orpington, St. Mary Cray, St. Paul's Cray & Footscray

**Trains:** Nearest Stations: Orpington, Hayes or Bromley South

For more details of how to reach areas within the site, including information about the areas, train and bus times, a journey planner and online maps, see <http://wildweb.london.gov.uk> . Information about train & bus times also available at <http://journeyplanner.tfl.gov.uk> or phone Traveline on 020 7222 1234.  
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