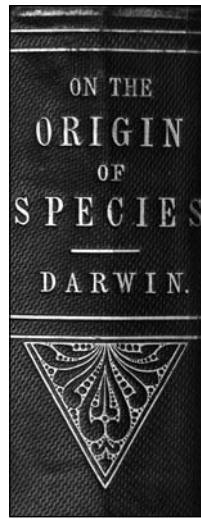


# Darwin's Edinburgh years and other influences

The College Library is celebrating the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth by putting its first edition of *On the origin of species* on display, together with books and other materials that represent significant influences on Darwin's theory of evolution.



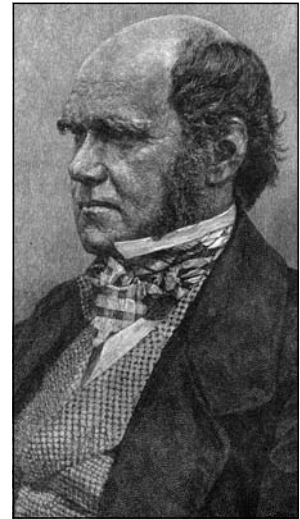
## THE BOOK

### Charles Darwin

*On the origin of species by means of natural selection*

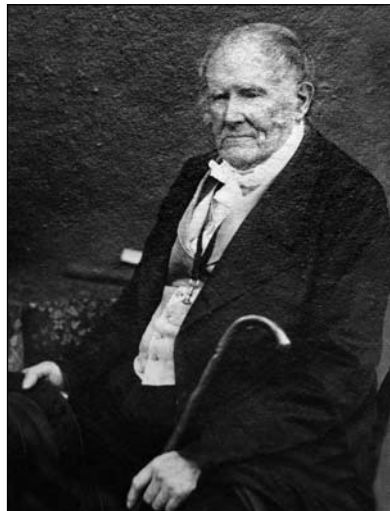
John Murray, London, 1859. Original blind-stamped cloth, with 32 pages of publisher's advertisements.

Darwin's pioneering work on the theory of evolution is probably the most important biological book ever written. The RCPE copy is from the first printing, shown by a misspelling of 'species' on page 20. The College Library also has copies of other editions and numerous Darwin biographies. One of the earliest is Grant Allen's *English Worthies: Life of Charles Darwin* of 1885.



## THE TEACHERS

Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Darwin studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, enrolling in 1825 at the age of 16. He did not enjoy the drudgery of nineteenth-century medical learning and left after two years. He was particularly appalled by the professor of anatomy, Alexander Monro III (pictured right in a rare photograph), who had inherited his father's and grandfather's chair. 'I dislike him & his Lectures so much that I cannot speak with decency



about them,' wrote Darwin, adding: 'He is so dirty in person & actions.'

Darwin also complained about 'a long stupid lecture from Dr Andrew Duncan secundus on medicines so very learned that his wisdom has left no room for his sense.' The lecture could not 'be translated into any word expressive enough of its stupidity'.

The one lecturer Darwin liked was Professor Thomas Hope. Hope's lectures on chemistry attracted the largest class in the university.

## THE PRECURSORS

The College Library holds copies of many works that strongly influenced Darwin's thinking:

### Erasmus Darwin

*Zoonomia: or, the laws of organic life*. 2nd ed. London: J Johnson; 1796.

Darwin's grandfather's most important scientific work contains a system of pathology and a treatise on 'generation', foreshadowing the theory of evolution.

### Thomas Robert Malthus

*An essay on the principle of population*. 3rd ed. London: J Johnson; 1806.

Reverend Thomas Malthus noted that human populations will only expand until they are naturally

halted by the limited resources that sustain them. Malthusianism led to the idea of the survival of the fittest.

### James Hutton

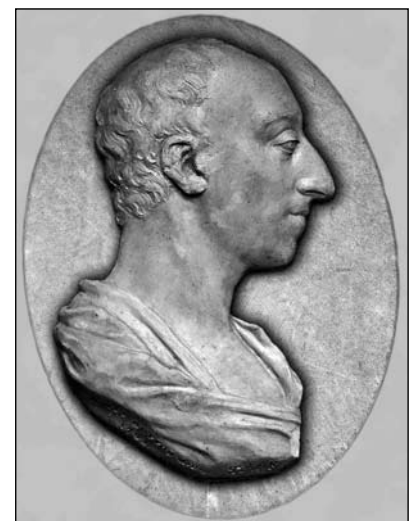
*Theory of the earth or an investigation of the laws observable in the composition, dissolution and restoration of land upon the globe*. *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 1788; 1:209–304.

Hutton's exposition of geological time contradicted the account of the Creation given in the Bible. The College owns a Tassie Medallion of Hutton's profile (pictured right).

### Charles Lyell

*Principles of geology*. 2nd ed. London: John Murray; 1832–33.

Lyell asked Robert FitzRoy, captain of *HMS Beagle*, to search for erratic



boulders on his survey voyage, and FitzRoy gave Darwin a copy of Lyell's *Principles*. Darwin dedicated the second edition of *A Naturalist's Voyage* to Lyell.