

Charles Darwin's Personal Library

An introduction by J. David Archibald



For both casual readers and scholars there is curiosity about what publications Darwin owned and read, and those that influenced his thinking. The *Darwin Online* project has reconstructed most of the lost *Beagle Library*. Much of the library that Darwin kept in his study at Down House, Kent has survived with the greatest portion housed in the University Library, Cambridge.

For many years the only publication chronicling the books owned by Charles Darwin was the [volume](#) compiled in 1908 by H. W. Rutherford with an introduction by Darwin's son Francis. Many but not all of the books and reprints that had stood in Charles Darwin's study at Down House, Kent at the time of his death in 1882 were transferred by Francis in 1908 to the Botany School Library, Cambridge then under the supervision of Professor of Botany, A. C. Seward. This was called 'Darwin's Library' by Francis. Later much of this collection along with additional materials acquired from Charles Darwin's descendants found their way to Cambridge University Library with some at various times being returned to Down House to be viewed by the public.

Especially intriguing is that Darwin annotated many of these works providing insights into his thought processes. Even in those instances that Darwin did not mark or annotate a book, he seems to have added the symbol "Ø" indicating that he had looked through or read parts of a work. Presumably this was to prevent Darwin wasting time rereading the same work at a later date.¹

Today a wealth of information on Darwin's Library of just over 1480 books is being digitized. Of these 730 contain his marginal notations. At present 541 volumes representing 433 titles, containing 174,361 pages, can be viewed at the Biodiversity Heritage Library.² The majority of these, many coming from the original transfer by Francis Darwin, are now held at Cambridge University Library, with digitization representing a collaboration between Cambridge, the Darwin Manuscripts Project at the American Museum of Natural History, the Natural History Museum (London), and the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Much of the digitization of the marginalia found in Darwin's books derived from the 1990 published work of Mario A. Di Gregorio, with assistance of Nick Gill.³

For the mid- and earlier 20th century, both published and unpublished efforts documenting Darwin's Library are more difficult to obtain and are less well known. Six of these earlier works are listed below with digitized versions of four of these provided here, two of unpublished contributions for the first time.

The earliest of the published volumes included here is the aforementioned 1908 book by H. W. Rutherford, *Catalogue of the library of Charles Darwin now in the Botany School, Cambridge*. This encompassed only books in Darwin's Library.

The next publication over fifty years later in 1960 was the *Handlist of Darwin papers at the University Library Cambridge*. As the then University Librarian H. R. Crestwick wrote in the preface, original papers of Darwin arrived at the university library after World War II in "parcels each containing small packets of manuscript wrapped in tissue paper on which the subjects had been noted in Darwin's hand." These later formed the basis for the bound manuscripts of Darwin, many which have now been digitized. Also included were copies of Darwin letters, press-cuttings, and of interest here, a number of journal articles by friends, colleagues, and contemporaries.

In 1961 the University Library created a typescript catalogue, titled *Darwin library: list of books received in the University Library Cambridge March-May 1961*. Some of Darwin's books remained at the Botany School, either on display or integrated into the Botany School's general collection, and had never gone to Down House. In the years that followed most, if not all, of these have also been transferred to the Manuscripts Department in larger or smaller lots, and these have been entered in the Darwin Library catalogue.⁴

In 1963 P. J. Vorzimmer prepared a catalogue of Darwin's reprint collection then held at the Botany School Library, Cambridge. The number of extant copies of this typescript work is unknown, but the online source *WorldCat Identities* lists three editions (likely referring to three copies) held at two libraries.⁵ The *scan of the privately-owned typescript* presented here is signed by Vorzimmer and includes hand written notes and corrections by him and his wife, likely in the anticipation of publication, which never occurred. Typescript appears on only the front (recto) side of each leaf with a number added digitally to enhance ease of use. In a number of cases there are handwritten notes on the back (verso) of a leaf pertaining to the page that its faces. Such pages are designated by a "v".

In his introduction to the 1963 catalogue and elsewhere⁵ Vorzimmer indicated that Darwin divided his reprint collection into three groups: a general group, a group of articles which are reviews or criticisms of specific works of his, and a third group all of quarto size. Francis Darwin had transferred these reprints to the Botany School Library, Cambridge in 1908 but only the hard-bound works were included in Rutherford 1908. Vorzimmer further indicated that the 1961 photo-offset *Darwin Library* listed only books then housed at the University Library, Cambridge. He further noted that at that time less than 10% of the remainder of Darwin's Library was housed at the Botany School Library, Cambridge, and Down House, Kent. According to Vorzimmer, all books annotated by Darwin were at the two Cambridge libraries.

J. David Archibald
July 2018

Published and unpublished works:

The Darwin Library in Cambridge University Library can be searched here: **CUL-DAR.LIB**

1960. *Handlist of Darwin papers at the University Library Cambridge*. [Text Images](#) [PDF](#) A94

1961. *Darwin library. List of books received in the University Library Cambridge March – May 1961*. Bound photo-offset typescript. [Images](#) [PDF](#) A1036

Newton, T. W., Rutherford, H. W., Darwin, F. *Catalogue of the library of Charles Darwin*, 1875. Bound manuscript book, with later manuscript additions. 426pp. [Text](#) CUL-DAR240

Rutherford, H. W. *Catalogue of Charles Robert Darwin's pamphlet collection*. 4 vols. + quarto vol. [CUL-DAR252](#)

Rutherford, H. W. 1908. *Catalogue of the library of Charles Darwin now in the Botany School, Cambridge. Compiled by H. W. Rutherford, of the University Library; with an Introduction by Francis Darwin*. [Text Image](#) [PDF](#) A4

Vorzimmer, P. J. 1963. *A catalogue of the Darwin reprint collection at the Botany School Library, Cambridge*. Bound typescript. [Images](#) [PDF](#) A1037

Notes:

1 Vorzimmer, P. J. 1968. Darwin and Mendel: The historical connection. *Isis* 59, No. 1 (Spring): 77-82

2 <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/collection/darwinlibrary>

3 Di Gregorio, M. A. 1990. *Charles Darwin's marginalia*, vol. 1, with the assistance of N. W. Gill. New York: Garland Publishing. [Text](#) [PDF](#) F3275

4 <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/collection/darwinlibrary#history>

5 <https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n89632821/>