

# Cambridge archives reveal Darwin's pampered student days

Famed scientist even had someone to polish his shoes

BY PETER GRIFFITHS

LONDON

With someone to polish his shoes, make his bed and stoke the fire in his spacious rooms, Charles Darwin enjoyed the sort of pampered university life that today's debt-laden students can only dream about.

Two hundred years after his birth, academics have uncovered new details of his comfortable existence at the University of Cambridge before he embarked on the gruelling five-year voyage that would transform science's view of the world.

Six leather-bound ledgers unearthed in the university archives reveal how he lived in the most expensive rooms available to a student of his rank from 1828 to 1831.

He hired a battery of staff to help him with the daily chores, including a scullion (dishwasher), a laundress and a shoeblack (someone who cleans shoes).

A tailor, hatter and barber made sure he was well presented, while a chimney sweep and a coalman kept his fire going. He even paid five and a half pence extra each day to have vegetables

with the basic ration of meat and beer at Christ's College.

Darwin scholar Dr. John van Wyhe, of the University of Cambridge, said little was known about the scientist's student life before his outgoings were found in the mainly hand-written ledgers detailing students' finances.

"It is just wonderful to have a previously unknown insight into what Darwin was up to in this part of his life," he told Reuters. "These are really intimate details."

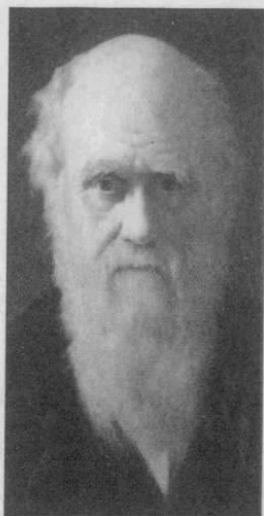
The archives are to be published on the Internet today at <http://darwin-online.org.uk>.

Darwin's bill topped 636 pounds during his three years of study for a general bachelor of arts degree at Cambridge, a time he would later describe as "the most joyful of my happy life."

That substantial sum would have been fairly typical for a student at Cambridge in the 19th century. The bills were paid by his wealthy father, Robert Darwin, a doctor.

"Cambridge was full of well-to-do gentlemen living a pretty good life," van Wyhe said. "When you look at the books, you see he is just one of a hundred students or whatever. He is well off, but they are all well off."

As well as the paid help, Darwin could also rely on the college "gyp," the Cambridge nickname for a valet



TAL COHEN, REUTERS

Charles Darwin is shown in a detail from British artist John Collier's 1883 painting. Newly discovered papers detail Darwin's comfortable university days.

or servant.

With so much help and just two hours of mathematics and classics lectures each morning, there was plenty of time for socializing or private study, van Wyhe said.

"He would be out shooting, collecting beetles, doing his scientific hobbies or visiting friends," he said. "They played cards and drank wine at night, just like students always have."

After leaving Cambridge, Darwin set sail on the *Beagle* bound for South America and Australasia where he developed his theories on evolution that would later be published in his seminal book *On the Origin of Species*.

REUTERS