

Darwin's bills discovered

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(PhysOrg.com) -- You've seen the documentaries and read the book - now, for the first time, you can find out how Charles Darwin spent his money.

200 years after the great naturalist's birth, his successors at Christ's College, Cambridge, have unearthed bills which record intimate details about the young Darwin's previously unknown day-to-day life during his student years.

The six record books will be published online on Monday, March 23rd, at The Complete Work Of [Charles Darwin](http://darwin-online.org.uk/) Online (darwin-online.org.uk/), making them freely available to readers anywhere in the world.

Together, they fill many gaps in our knowledge of Darwin's student days. The time he spent at Cambridge from 1828 to 1831 was one of the most significant periods of his life, but also one for which there is a comparative shortage of information.

Thanks to the discovery, historians now have the exact date of Darwin's arrival at the University (January 26th, 1828), as well as a huge assortment of details which will enable them to reconstruct his undergraduate life as never before.

The books show how Darwin enjoyed all the trappings one would expect of a 19th century gentleman, paying service-people to carry out tasks such as stoking his fire and polishing his shoes. They even reveal that he

was a stickler for his five-a-day, paying extra for vegetables at college meals.

"Before this we didn't really know very much about Darwin's daily life at Cambridge at all," Dr John van Wyhe, Director of The Complete Work Of Charles Darwin Online, said.

"It had been assumed that there were no significant traces of his time here left to discover, which meant that we were ironically short of information about one of the most formative parts of his life. Now, in his 200th anniversary year, we have found a real treasure-trove right in the middle of Cambridge."

The books appear to have been overlooked as dull administrative records of little historical importance until they were spotted by Professor Geoffrey Thorndike Martin in a pile of other old College papers and documents.

In fact, they provide a detailed record of Darwin's movements and how he spent his money. Students of the day did not pay cash for many services, instead paying local tradesmen by account. The individual bills would have been reported to the college, which then charged Darwin and his fellow-students on a quarterly basis.

Overall, Darwin's College bills amounted to £636.0.9½ over the three years he spent at Cambridge, not including the £14 he paid for his BA degree in 1831 and the £12 he spent collecting his MA in 1836, following his return from the Beagle voyage.

Darwin later described his years in Cambridge as "the most joyful of my happy life". As a well-to-do young gentleman of the time, he clearly enjoyed a privileged existence. The accounts reveal that he paid a bed-maker, a shoe-black to polish his footwear, and even someone to bring in

the coal that kept his fire going.

The newly uncovered record books also contain accounts for the barber, grocer, tailor, chimney-sweep, apothecary, porter, brazier, scullion, glazier, hatter, smith, laundress, linen-draper and painter, among others. His rooms at Christ's, recently restored and opened to the public, appear to have been some of the best (or, at least, the most expensive) available to undergraduates of his rank at the time.

Predictably, there are very few entries which suggest he bought many books, or anything else to aid his studies. Darwin famously spent little of his time at Cambridge studying or in lectures, preferring to shoot, ride and collect beetles.

The records also suggest that the young Charles was a stickler for eating his greens. Students eating dinner in college were given a basic ration of a joint of meat and a glass of beer, but Darwin was apparently quite fastidious about forking out a further 5½d. per day for vegetables. Other optional extras on the menu included pies and cheese.

Some details of Darwin's student days, however, remain unknown. "How much he spent on alcohol, for example, or to have his horse stabled we still don't know," Dr van Wyhe said. "What we do know is that a friend made a joke coat of arms for Darwin which makes drinking and smoking Darwin's trademarks."

Provided by University of Cambridge ([news](#) : [web](#))

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