



THE PIPER

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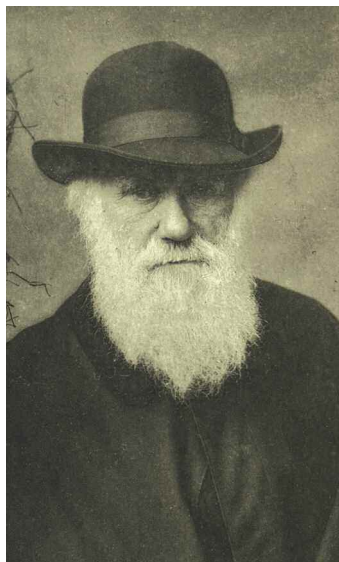
The Lyell Notebooks

A unique resource of world importance



'We will now discuss in a little more detail the Struggle for Existence.'

Charles Darwin *Origin of Species*



This *Piper* shows us the past preserved with the acquisition of the Lyell Papers which the Friends along with many others helped secure not only for the library but for the nation.

A unique collection of notebooks, travel journals and sketches that takes us into the mind of a 'discoverer' who thought about the natural world in new ways. It was a world of change and its partner uncertainty and we see

Lyell trying to understand the place of the humanities in a complex world. Darwin valued Lyell for his unique and rigorous intellect.

The changes on our own campus at New College will in 2021 reveal a handsome, refurbished library. The rehoused collection is not available because of the

pandemic which has closed many facilities including the CRC and the Main Library.

We have new, sudden phrases in our lives: 'social isolation' 'social distancing' and many of us have, of necessity, retreated into our homes, armed against the invader with withdrawal from the lives of others. We are surrounded with advice on how to 'cope'; social media, box sets, new hobbies (of which survival is one) and of course books. Most of us are already living lives whose restrictions we could not have imagined. These challenges will test us but perhaps unite us as well.

Shakespeare wrote 'King Lear' when quarantined by the Plague. Newton explored and formulated his ideas sheltering from the great Plague in Norfolk. Our own lives may be less dramatic in their revelations but perhaps this is a time for reflection and realignment – and reading.

People may return to the solid reassurance of the classics or brave the curious delight of new authors.

Our isolation may not be splendid but it may have something of lasting value in it.

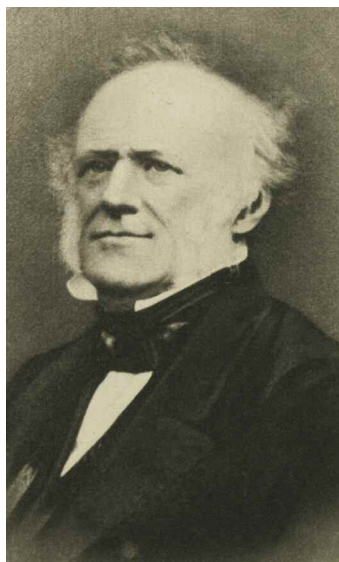
Lady Caplan,
President, Friends of Edinburgh University Library



Top left. Photograph of Charles Darwin from *Emma Darwin a Century of Family Letters 1792-1896*, Vol. II, New York, 1915, frontispiece

Left. Gastropods in a square box inscribed: *Cluricula Vulpina*, St Helena, collected by Charles Darwin

The Lyell Notebooks: a unique resource of world importance



The acquisition by the University of Edinburgh of the manuscript notebooks of Charles Lyell (1797–1875) – saved for the nation and for scholars everywhere through the generosity of institutional and individual donors – is many things at once: wonderful news, a once-in-a-lifetime achievement, a perhaps unparalleled opportunity for research, scholarship and public engagement, and a great responsibility.

Charles Lyell, born in Kinnordy House near Kirriemuir – the notebooks' home before their recent purchase – is widely acknowledged as a pivotal figure in the development of the earth and life sciences in Britain during the past two centuries.

Modern scholars share this view. It was certainly one held and expressed by contemporaries: Charles Darwin wrote how 'The science of geology is enormously indebted to Lyell; more so, as I believe, than to any other man who ever lived.'

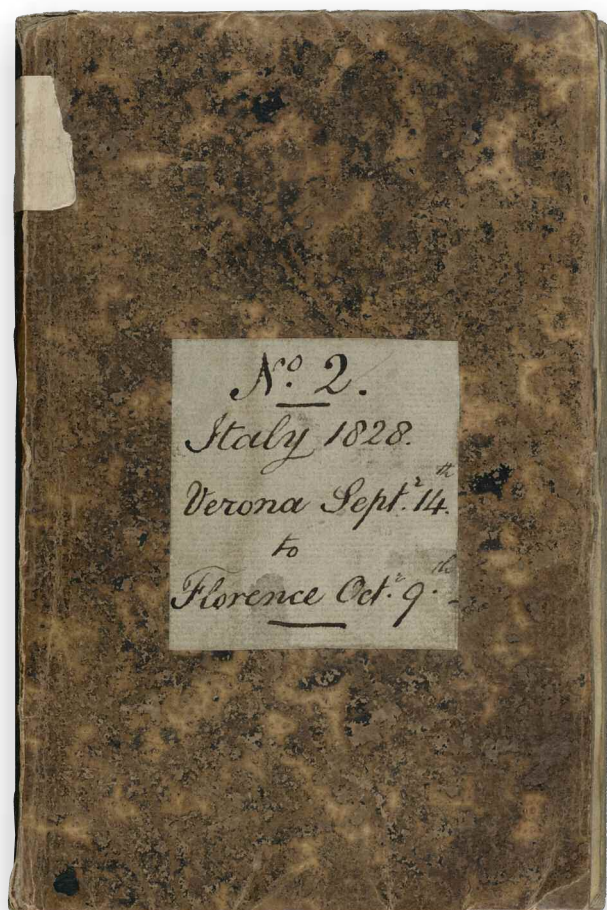
Lyell's manuscript notebooks, 294 in number, are the key to understanding his work not only in geology and the earth sciences, but also in other realms of intellectual and scientific debate. The notebooks are complex documents – working documents maintained over a lifetime of scientific enquiry – many with layers of annotation in Lyell's hand and other signs of use. They have, hitherto, been largely unstudied. They are of outstanding scholarly significance and vital elements in Britain's and the world's scientific heritage.

Evolutionary ideas and climate change

The notebooks record the development of Lyell's ideas about the uniformity of nature and the possibility of explaining climate change, species extinction and biodiversity through natural causes. These ideas were expressed in print by Lyell in his hugely-influential book *Principles of Geology*, published in three volumes between 1830 and 1833 by leading publisher John Murray. Lyell's *Principles of Geology* shook the geological and scientific world. Its ramifications are with us still. Lyell writes less about the past world as revealed geologically than he does about the historic present; about the importance of modern-day processes as being necessarily sufficient to account for the earth's age and state.

His notebooks and the thoughts there expressed would become an essential foundation for Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories. From the mid-1850s, Darwin kept Lyell fully abreast of his work, and the notebooks include the only known copies of letters sent to Darwin in response to the *Origin of Species* by a wide range of correspondents – the originals have not

survived. If Lyell's notebooks are especially important for understanding Victorian evolutionary debates, they contain, and they illuminate, very much more. Lyell's was a social and scientific world caught up with pressing questions: the relationships between science and religion in accounts of the age of the world, climate change – what Lyell called a 'grand new theory of climate': long-term climatic changes as the result of the world's ever-changing physical geography.



Top left. Photographic portrait of Sir Charles Lyell by unknown photographer

Left. Notebook No2 Italy 1828

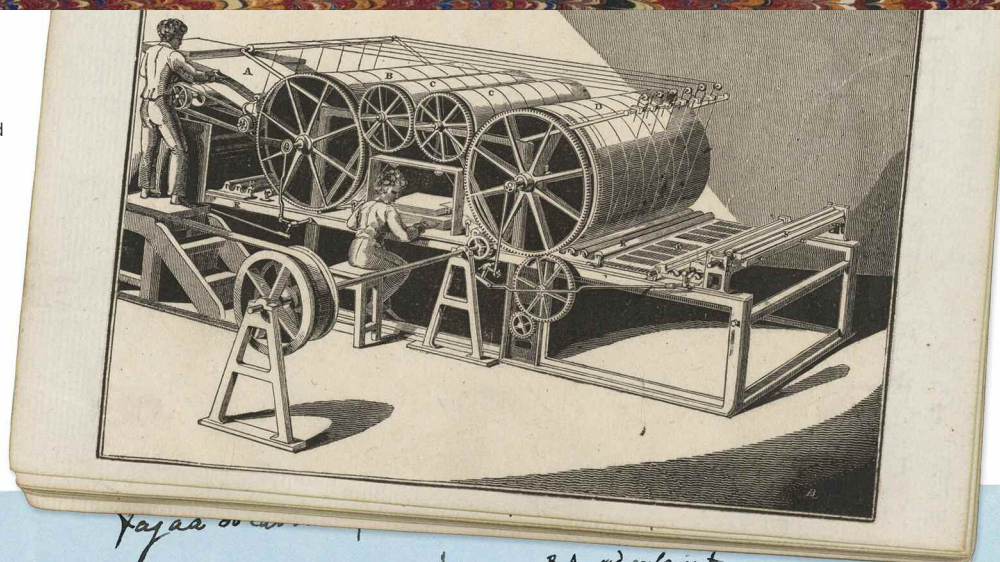


distribution and the origin of humans and other creatures?

What we now call palaeoanthropology was in Lyell's period a fiercely contested intellectual arena in which questions of archaeology, philology, ethnology and anthropology centred upon human prehistory. The notebooks contain Lyell's thoughts on human ethnology, and his correspondence with others interested in questions on human origins and diversity and aware of the implications of fossil evidence. The notebooks contain vital information about the provenance of tens of thousands of fossil and mineralogical specimens collected by Lyell, together with his wife, Mary, that are now held in the Natural History Museum in London, the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, and in other UK collections.

Right. Notebook No 4, p.42

Below. Sketch of the geological formations of the Fajaa do Taboada and the Acheda do Mundo, 1850s



An intellectual treasure house

As perhaps no other sources, Charles Lyell's notebooks provide evidence of one leading individual's life in science, and glimpses into the lives of the many others with whom he worked and lived. The Lyell notebooks are a kind of 'written laboratory', a scientific diary in multiple parts. They show Lyell reflecting, musing, piecing things together. His was the age of the enquiring mind enquiring by letter: Lyell wrote to people and was written to (American presidents, slave owners, literary figures, ethnologists, scientists in all fields): his notebooks are a sort of nineteenth-century address book-cum-diary. The notebooks have enormous value as travel documents – where he went, what he saw, his feelings about what he saw – and, for his own scientific thinking as vital records of his field work. And, of a few, they are in places quite personal documents, containing as they do reflections on the role of the scientist and upon human nature in the wake of private

conversations and correspondence.

Charles Lyell's notebooks are quite simply a unique and internationally important treasure house. They will complement the existing archive of Lyell letters, lecture notes and material specimens already held by the University, which, together with other collections, will make Edinburgh a world centre for the history of the earth sciences. The notebooks afford insight into a world of scientific enquiry whose impact in its own time was huge. And they can speak to us today, about many of the issues we together face – climate change, the responsibilities that come with scientific enquiry, and the importance of mutual respect in debating different and difficult ideas.

Charles W.J. Withers,
Professor Emeritus,
Geographer Royal for Scotland



Above. The New College of Edinburgh,
Elevation to the North External Front, No.9

Below. Front door detail

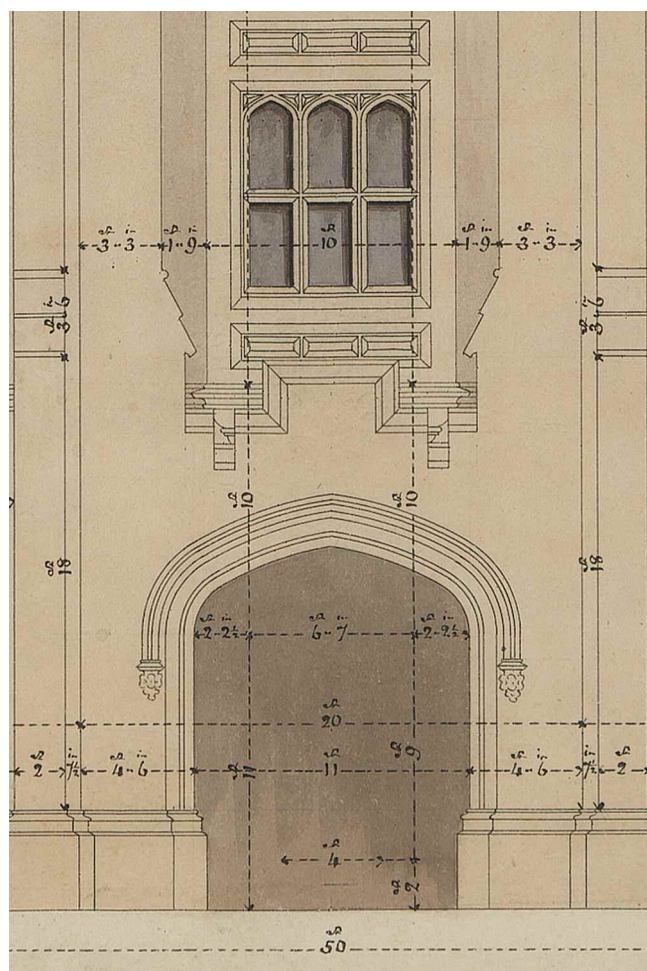
New College Library

New College Library is one of the largest theological libraries in the UK with over a quarter of a million items.

The Library recently relocated to the David Hume Tower until June 2021 while essential renovations are undertaken.

It was hoped that access would still be available to study space in New College including the Rainy Hall. Also during this period it was to be possible to borrow, order or reserve books from the temporary library on the ground floor of the David Hume Tower or at the CRC in the Main Library for New College archives. The high demand 'Reserve' Collection was also to be available from the Semple Room within new College: 11am – 3pm Monday to Friday. For arrangements to consult New College Special Collections and archives the contact should be to email: is-crc@ed.ac.uk.

However, due to the coronavirus pandemic the CRC has now closed as has the David Hume Tower and the other relevant areas for New College Library. This is for an indefinite period until matters improve and the University is able to announce the re-opening of these areas.



All FoEUL events have been cancelled until further notice.

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Gift aid

If you have already given us a Gift Aid Declaration, thank you. Please let us know if you want to cancel this declaration, or change your name or home address, or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you have not previously provided a Gift Aid Declaration and now wish to do so, please complete the appropriate section of the Membership Application Form on the Friends' website. Please send the signed form to the Friends' Administrator.



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