

# Charles Darwin & Downe

Charles Darwin lived the last 40 years of his life in the village of Downe at Down House. During his time in the village he published the Origin of the Species which, apart from the public acclaim he received, also brought him into conflict with the Church.

It is interesting to note that he was a man of Downe village who also had contact with St. Mary's Church - at least up to the time the Origin of the Species was published. (it is difficult to know whether it was Darwin's writings and beliefs or a particularly unpleasant vicar called Ffinden that drove him away from the church!)

In the following vestry minutes of St. Mary's, Downe from 1844-1882 there are a number of references to Charles Darwin, and to his butler, Joseph Parslow, who continued to remain involved with church matters for over 20 years until after Darwin's death in 1882. Some of these references are to Charles Darwin's butler Joseph Parslow, and some to Dr. F. Darwin.

[1844](#), [1845](#), [1846](#), 1847, [1848](#), 1849, [1850](#),  
1851, [1852](#), [1853](#), 1854, [1855](#), [1856](#), 1857, [1858](#), 1859, [1860](#),  
1861, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1868, 1869, 1870,  
[1871](#), [1872](#), [1873](#), [1874](#), [1875](#), [1876](#), [1877](#), [1878](#), [1879](#), [1880](#),  
[1881](#), [1882](#)

## **1844**

### **April 9th**

Sir J.W. Lubbock and Charles Darwin Esq. were appointed Surveyors of the Roads for the ensuing year.

## **1845**

### **March 25th**

Sir J. Lubbock and C. Darwin Esq. were appointed Surveyors of the Roads for the ensuing year.

### **July 15<sup>th</sup>**

CD present at a Vestry Meeting which agreed matters concerning: expenses of the repairs for the chancel (for which the Rector of Chislehurst was responsible); erecting slate tablets over the communion table; the Parish contributing £10 out of £50 towards painting, whitening and other repairs.

## **1846**

### **March 24th**

CD present at a Vestry Meeting, appointing surveyors (but not CD) and discussing other matters of parish business.

## **1848**

### **March 24th**

CD Present at a Vestry Meeting which agreed "that one years' rent be forgiven to the widow Osborne - on condition of her paying the remaining arrear, and in future the rent be £5 a year to be paid weekly."

### **April 25th**

CD seconded a motion by Sir John Lubbock "that it is the opinion of the vestry that the rating on the small tithes be reduced £20 on the prop value, and a further reduction of £5 making the prop value £70 and the rateable value £65." carried.

## **1850**

### **March 28th**

CD present at Vestry meeting which examined and passed accounts and set a highways rate of 6d in the pound.

## **1852**

### **September 10th**

CD proposed a motion (which was passed) requesting the overseers "to ascertain from the poor law commissioners if they have the power of selling the old workhouse by private contract to be held in trust for the site of a school for poor children ....."

## **1853**

### **May 27th**

CD present at Vestry meeting (signature in book) which consented "to the Guardian of the poor of the Bromley Union selling the premises consisting of an old house of wood & tile twenty four foot square opposite the church..."

### **October 21st**

Sir John Lubbock moved and CD seconded that the Guardians of the Poor of the Bromley Union convey the old Poor House and the land, and that the site be used for a school.

## **1855**

### **April 13th**

CD and four others requested to consider and report on the present state of Tromer pond. and the wish of a villager to remove part of his wall abutting on the road.

### **April 24th**

This committee recommended fencing the pond, making a tank in which to filter the water, and repairing the road where it had been worn away by the pond, but did not agree the alteration to the wall which would have involved diverting a footpath.

### **May 25th**

The vestry meeting which followed agreed the repairs to the pond, asked the committee to look at improving the supply and quality of water, but also considered that the wall *could* be moved,

provided it was rebuilt to the same height.

## **1856**

### **March 25th**

Mr Parslow appointed one of the overseers.

### **June 10th**

Because of an outbreak of smallpox, a vestry meeting requested the churchwardens and overseers "to take the most stringent steps in their power to prevent any person from Hemings house communicating with others". Also to ascertain the state of vaccination in the parish. Letter sent to Charles Heming warning that he would be punished according to law in they showed themselves outside their premises.

### **September**

Mrs Darwin (amongst a number of others) subscribed £5 towards a new organ (John Lubbock £7 12s 8d; Lady Lubbock £5; Mrs Lubbock £2). Mr Parslow gave 5 shillings.

## **1858**

### **April/May**

CD and Mr Parslow involved in a dispute between the churchwardens and a Mr Ainslie about his non-payment of the church rate. CD moved that "no further legal proceedings be taken in the matter of the Church rate which Mr Ainslie refuses to pay".

## **1859**

### **March 25th**

CD (signature in book) present at vestry meeting.

### **April 26th**

Joseph Parslow present at a vestry meeting which agreed to renew churchyard gate and part of wall, and repair and whitewash the church ceiling and walls. They set a rate of 9d. (50% increase!) to do the repairs.

## **1860**

### **March 29th**

Joseph Parslow appointed one of the overseers for the year (and for a number of the years following, inc. 1871).

## **1871**

### **November 24th**

CD proposed "that it is desirable to form a School board for the parish of Downe, Kent, and that the Education Department be applied to for the necessary powers". Carried by a majority of six.

## **1872**

### **January 19th**

The previous motion was unanimously rescinded (!). Another motion was unanimously passed (but not apparently with CD present!): "that with the view to provide the necessary funds for carrying on the Parochial Schools a voluntary rate at eight pence in the pound for the current

year payable in January and June .... and the following ratepayers hereby pledge themselves each to contribute their proportion of the same." (CD was not among those who pledged support.) However the Vicar proposed that certain named ratepayers be constituted a committee for the management of the School - the third name on the list after the Vicar and Sir J Lubbock was Mr Darwin! The motion was carried unanimously.

## **1873**

### **January 21st**

A Vestry meeting at the Boys School Room unanimously agreed that the School Committee (including CD) be requested to retain their offices for the current year. Among those at the Vestry meeting was Joseph Parslow.

## **1874**

### **January 3rd**

The Vestry meeting held at the School re-appointed CD (among others) to the School Committee.

## **1875**

### **January 2nd**

The Vestry Meeting did not include CD in the list of ratepayers appointed to the School Management Committee.

## **1876**

### **January 1st**

Dr F. Darwin was included in the list of ratepayers appointed to the School Management Committee.

### **March 25th**

Mr Joseph Parslow appointed again as one of the overseers.

## **1877**

### **January 6th**

F. Darwin again appointed to School Management Committee. The committee was given the powers to move the Infant School children to a room to be built at the National School. The Infant Schoolroom would probably be taken over by the Workmen's Club.

## **1878**

### **5th January**

Mr Joseph Parslow was added to the School Committee.

## **1879**

### **4th January**

The present School Committee (including F. Darwin and J. Parslow) were appointed for a further year.

**1880**

**10th January**

The present School Committee (including F. Darwin and J. Parslow) were appointed for a further year.

**1881**

**8th January**

The present School Committee (including F. Darwin and J. Parslow) were appointed for a further year.

**1882**

**5th January**

The present School Committee (including F. Darwin and J. Parslow) were appointed for a further year.

*(There is no mention in the Vestry minutes of the death of Charles Darwin)*

For more information concerning Charles Darwin visit <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house/>