



Publishing *The Origin of Species*

John Murray VII:

Welcome to this extraordinary room. It was from here that Byron, Jane Austen, Washington Irving, Walter Scott, Faraday, Davey, Charles Lyell, David Livingstone and of course Charles Darwin were published, and it hasn't changed very much since Charles Darwin's time.

And here we have the albumen print by Julia Margaret Cameron of Charles Darwin in his later years and its unique point is that it's inscribed by Charles Darwin and Julia Margaret Cameron. It's the only copy of this albumen print that has both their autographs together.

And if I now take you from here to these items which we've laid out which show the whole story of *The Origin of Species* from our archive, and so I'll start with this letter. Now this is, in fact, perhaps I should start with explaining that Charles Lyell was asked by Darwin to approach Murray and ask him whether he'd be willing to publish *On the Origin of Species* and to tell Murray that there was nothing about the origin of man and there was no discussion about Genesis, so he needn't worry, his religious feelings will be left in tact.

Charles Lyell passed this onto Darwin, and Darwin then writes this letter to Murray saying that he's thrilled that Murray is willing to publish. But he's slightly worried. He feels Murray should read some of it before he decides, and he then gives a list of all the chapter headings and he also puts in brackets afterwards for Murray's help that this is a rather obtuse chapter. This is a slightly slow moving chapter but interesting, and he goes the whole way through and I think he recommends to Murray perhaps two or three chapters that he should read because I think he was right in believing that Murray certainly wouldn't read the whole manuscript.

But now we come to the more extraordinary answer from John Murray who was a canny Scot and who was very careful as a publisher, although he often risked things, but here you have written back to Darwin the day after Darwin's letter, and here you have him saying that without doubt he would be delighted to publish Darwin's manuscript, there was no need for him to read it, he would publish it, he would agree to it, a manuscript unseen, and then he went, he said that he'd give Darwin the same terms as Charles Lyell, and Charles Lyell of course was a great friend of Murray apart from being his author, and not only the same terms but he said he would only decide how many to publish once he'd read a part of the manuscript and had discussed it with Darwin and had considered the potential public demand for it.

It was only after Murray had agreed to publish it that he decided to send it to his advisor, a very safe move I think, like I think all Murrays, we always just make up our minds before we ask for advice.

Anyhow, here he gives the manuscript to Whitwell Elwin who was the editor of the *Quarterly Review* that Murray published and founded at the beginning of the century and was also a man of the cloth. And Whitwell Elwin as you see here says that he's very concerned about this, there isn't enough evidence in the manuscript to back the theory and the public will demand evidence, you know, it's like having a court case without allowing any of the witnesses to speak before the jury makes a decision. And he goes on to say that he agrees with Charles Lyell that Darwin should in fact concentrate on pigeons and put *On the Origin of Species* to one side because the pigeons would not only be a great seller but it would be reviewed in all the journals, and also people love pigeons.

Well, I'm glad to say my ancestor didn't pass that advice on to Darwin. I mean, in fact Charles Lyell opted out. He asked Whitwell Elwin to send this advice to Darwin. Whitwell Elwin opted out and sent it to Murray asking Murray to send it to Darwin, and Murray very sensibly decided to forget about it. But the pigeons were absolutely essential in the first chapter of *On*

the Origin there were I think six breeds of pigeon which were vital to Darwin's thinking behind his theory.

And we have here for the first time and probably the last time since Darwin's lifetime the six breeds of pigeons, live pigeons which are in this building to show the ones that Darwin included and on which he'd based his theory.

Murray published of course. We don't know how much of the manuscript he read, but here is his working copy of the first edition of *The Origin of Species*, the file copy from which he worked which was published on November 24th 1859, exactly 150 years ago.

And it was a great success. It sold 1,250 copies – that was the print number. Darwin wrote to Murray saying that's far too large. Are you sure you should print as many? He was very concerned about Murray. He didn't want Murray to lose out, he told Murray that if Murray changed his mind halfway through he'd accept it and it needn't be published and he would return any money that Murray had given to him, and when it was so successful he wrote this letter to Murray from Yorkshire where he was taking the waters for his health. He says "I'm astounded at the news of the sale, but do send me sheets, unbound sheets, immediately so that I can make corrections for the next edition."

And what's interesting is the next edition which came out only weeks after the first included for the first time by the Creator in the last paragraph dropped into the actual sentence there, not even a new sentence he just put in "by the Creator", which shows really that he wasn't there to knock the Church, he was there to project his theory of evolution. But, as I say, evolution wasn't ever stated in that edition. It was only in the fifth edition that survival of the fittest came in, and it was only in the sixth edition which was the edition, last edition while Darwin was alive that in fact evolution was mentioned at all.

And now we come to the great item of this collection and the rarest of all which is one page from the manuscript of *The Origin of Species* which has come straight down through a family to their descendants today who've loaned it very kindly, and there were only very few of them, some people suggest only 42 of the original manuscript pages survive because Darwin tended to give them to his friends and relations and things, and very few of them saw them as worth keeping.

But I should mention before finishing that in 1871 Murray published *The Descent of Man*, Darwin's *Descent of Man*, which really was Volume II of *The Origin of Species*, and this is where it tackles the question of the evolution of man, and that is what I think many people thought was in the original edition when it was so attacked by some, and I think on the whole it was attacked by those who hadn't read it, and it was very interesting that my ancestor published the review in the *Quarterly Review* by Soapy Sam, Bishop Wilberforce, being so scathing about it, and Darwin writes a letter to my ancestor, John Murray III, saying "Thank you very much for sending me this review" which is interesting that Murray had published the review and published *The Origin*, but saying that he's quite clear that Soapy Sam hadn't read the book because lots of things he put in his review didn't exist in the book, and I think this is something which happened right across the board. Very few people I think who attacked it had probably read the whole thing.

So you can see here we have exactly 150 years since my ancestor published the book here, the whole story of it, and never again will these items be collected in one place.