



Press Release

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Darwin mentor and geology pioneer Charles Lyell's archives reunited

Fascinating writings of an influential scientist who shaped Charles Darwin's thinking have become part of the University of Edinburgh's collections.

A rich assortment of letters, books, manuscripts, maps and sketches by Scottish geologist Sir Charles Lyell, have been reassembled at the University Library's Centre for Research Collections, with the goal of making the collection more accessible to the public.

Some 294 notebooks, purchased from the Lyell family following a £1 million fundraising campaign in 2019, form a key part of the collection. Although written in the Victorian era, the works shed light on current concerns, including climate change and threats to biodiversity.

Now a second tranche of Lyell material has been allocated to the University by HM Government under the Acceptance in Lieu of Inheritance Tax scheme. These new acquisitions, from the estate of the 3rd Baron Lyell, will join other items that have been part of the University's collections since 1927.

The new archive includes more than 900 letters, with correspondence between Lyell and Darwin, the botanist Joseph Dalton Hooker, the publisher John Murray and Lyell's wife, Mary Horner Lyell, and many others. It also includes a draft manuscript and heavily annotated editions of Lyell's landmark book *The Principles of Geology* and several manuscripts from his lectures.

Lyell, who died in 1875, aged 77, mentored Sir Charles Darwin after the latter's return from his five-year voyage on the *Beagle* in 1836. The Scot is also credited with providing the framework that helped Darwin develop his evolutionary theories.

The combined collection of Lyell's notebooks, pre-existing archive, new tranche of materials and an ongoing programme of acquisitions, is one of the most comprehensive archives of 19th century science and networked communication in the world.

Daryl Green FSA, Head of Special Collections at the University of Edinburgh, said: "The Sir Charles Lyell Collection offers a unique insight, not only into a towering scientific figure of the 19th century, but also a window into a society that was in the midst of global change.

"This is a vital resource for teaching, research and public engagement and an emerging iconic highlight from the University's Centre for Research Collections.

"To meet the collection's full potential we will be investing time and resources so that it will become freely accessible in person and online. We aim to host a series of linked public exhibitions around the Lyell collection and climate change in 2023."

Edward Harley OBE, Chairman of the Acceptance in Lieu Panel, said: "I am delighted that the papers of Sir Charles Lyell, the prominent Scottish geologist best known for his landmark publication, *Principles of Geology*, have been acquired for the nation through the Acceptance in Lieu Scheme and reunited with his notebooks that were acquired by private treaty sale following their export deferral. The reunification of these papers and notebooks at Edinburgh University Library will ensure their preservation at one site in perpetuity."

Charles Withers, Professor Emeritus and Geographer Royal for Scotland, said: "The remaining correspondence and papers of Sir Charles Lyell hold riches almost beyond description. Here are letters to



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and from leading nineteenth-century scientists – Charles Darwin and Joseph Dalton Hooker to name but two – and letters to and from his family.

“There are manuscript lectures as Lyell wrote, re-wrote, and aired his thoughts, geological notebooks, and, perhaps most wonderful of all, annotations in Lyell’s own hand of his hugely influential *Principles of Geology* as his ideas about time, climate, and the earth’s history changed over time. With the arrival in Edinburgh of these further Lyell materials, Edinburgh has surely secured its place as the centre for the study of this world-leading earth scientist.”

The University is hopeful that with renewed and extended support and investment, the Lyell collection will be made fully accessible – in person and online.

Such an important collection will be given the highest standards of professional care, description and public engagement.

For details regarding how to help, please visit the [Sir Charles Lyell Collection’s website](#).

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