

Charles Darwin's Stuffed Monkey

Charles Darwin was a scientist who studied in Cambridge. He was supposed to train as a vicar, but he found beetle collecting much more interesting, and became a scientist instead. His radical theory of evolution by natural selection made us rethink our place in the world. Charles Darwin spread his ideas by giving lectures and talks and writing letters. But most importantly, he wrote a famous book which was a best seller, called "On the Origin of Species" and it was first published on 24 November 1859. His book is still read today and inspires scientists and thinkers.

Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection said that humans were descended from a common ape-like ancestor. In Victorian times, this was a controversial challenge to Christian ideas about God creating humans. As an old man, Darwin returned to Cambridge in 1877 to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. During Darwin's honorary degree ceremony, a prankster dangled this stuffed monkey dressed in academic robes from the gallery of the Senate House, which 'excited some mirth'. There is also a monkey that was carved in the roof at Great St Mary's centuries earlier. See if you can spot it high up above the nave!

