

Press release: Notebooks of Charles Darwin's mentor at risk of export

- Resource includes letters from Darwin on his developing theory of evolution
- Charles Darwin once wrote: "I always feel as if my books came half from Lyell's brains"

Arts Minister Michael Ellis has prevented the sale of notebooks by Sir Charles Lyell – the renowned Scottish geologist who influenced Charles Darwin – in a bid to keep the important archive in the UK.

Sir Charles Lyell (1797 – 1875) was a key figure in the history of geology and science. He is best known for writing the Principles of Geology, which presented the idea of uniformitarianism – the theory that changes in the earth's crust during geological history resulted from the action of continuous and uniform processes.

The 294 notebooks and manuscripts, valued at £1,444,000, contain Lyell's conversations with fellow scientists including his transcribed correspondence with the father of evolution, Charles Darwin.

The archive also contain Lyell's notes for his printed works and record his developing ideas about the uniformity of nature including early ideas on climate change, extinction, and biodiversity.

Arts Minister Michael Ellis said:

This archive reveals the workings of one of the most influential scientists of the last 200 years and provides us with an extraordinary insight into a time when science was changing long-held beliefs about the world.

I hope a buyer can be found to keep the unique records of a British great in the country.

Lyell acted as Darwin's principal mentor upon his return from the Beagle voyage in 1836. During the five year voyage, Darwin documented information and samples of different species. He kept Lyell informed on the developing theory of evolution through natural selection and shared copies of the letters that he received following the publication of On The Origin of Species in 1859. The letters, copied by Lyell, are unique survivors from the time and of huge importance to the study of late Georgian and Victorian scientific ideas.

The collection includes 10 notebooks kept during Lyell's tour of Italy and Sicily in 1829 which include his observations about the earth's formation and volcanoes, which were an important influence in his later work, Principles of

Geology. Seven books contain notes on the origin and antiquity of man, record his private conversations with Darwin and contain the reactions of key figures to Darwin's theory of evolution. Other volumes in the collection include his notes from reading books, articles, letters and unpublished manuscripts.

The decision to defer the export licence follows a recommendation by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA), administered by The Arts Council.

Committee Member Peter Barber said:

Charles Darwin once wrote that "I always feel as if my books came half from Lyell's brains". Lyell's notebooks and papers are perhaps the most important source of information not only on Lyell's own multifarious researches – including climate change as well as geology – but also on intellectual networking and networks in Victorian Britain and on numerous other, non-scientific as well as scientific, aspects of Victorian society.

It is of the utmost importance that Lyell's notebooks and papers are retained in this country so that they can, at long last, be made available to researchers.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds of the outstanding significance of the notebooks to the study of Lyell's work, the development of modern scientific knowledge, and late-Georgian and Victorian intellectual culture. They noted that the impressions in these notebooks are a largely unstudied resource for historians and a window into the development of science and the social and political issues of the 19th century.

The decision on the export licence application for the notebooks and manuscripts will be deferred until 15 July 2019. This may be extended until 15 October 2019 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase the notebooks is made at the recommended price of £1,444,000.

Offers from public bodies for less than the recommended price through the private treaty sale arrangements, where appropriate, may also be considered by Michael Ellis. Such purchases frequently offer substantial financial benefits to a public institution wishing to acquire the item.

Images of the notebooks can be downloaded from [Flickr](#).

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Notes to editors

Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the notebooks should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.

Details of the notebooks are as follows:

- 294 manuscript notebooks of the geologist Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875).
- In two series: 263 numbered notebooks, 1825-1874, on geology, natural history, social and political subjects; * 31 additional notebooks, 1818-1871, with indices.
- Mostly octavo format.

The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by The Arts Council, which advises the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.

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