

Darwin Bust unveiling ceremony on Simon's Town Jetty

Sunday, 20th April 2025

On a beautiful although windy afternoon in the historic port of Simon's Town, over 170 people gathered on Simon's Town Jetty to unveil the bust of a young Charles Darwin with the historic Dutch tall ship, *Oosterschelde*, flagship of the *Darwin200* project, anchored in the background. The *Darwin200* project partnered the Darwin Bust Fund in the month-long celebrations of Darwin, evolution and the value of science in Cape Town and Simon's Town. *Oosterschelde* is sailing around the world retracing the route of HMS *Beagle* and acting as a host for conservation research projects at each major port of call.



***Oosterschelde* at anchor in Simon's Bay in April 2025**

Mike Bruton, leader of the Darwin Bust Fund, opened proceedings by first thanking Piper-Major Andrew Imrie for his inspiring musical performance on the bagpipes that welcomed people to the ceremony introduction to our proceedings. Mike then invited the Deputy Mayor of the City of Cape Town, Alderman Eddie Andrews, to address the audience. The Deputy Mayor gave an inspiring speech in which he emphasized the symbolic importance of Darwin's visit to the Cape Colony in June 1836 and suggested that Simon's Town Jetty should become a 'Simon's Town Hall of Fame'.

Mike then introduced the project by saying that, as a student of Zoology at Rhodes University, he had always been fascinated by Darwin but that the origin of this project can be traced to 2009, the bicentenary of Darwin's birth, when he was invited to give an online talk to a group of historians in the USA on the significance of Darwin's visit to the Cape of Good Hope. After giving this talk, he realized that it might be of interest to South Africans as well, so he has given it over 50 times to various audiences. During his research for the talk, he realized two things: Firstly, that Darwin had critically important discussions with Sir John Herschel during his visit to the Cape, secondly, that the importance of Darwin's visit to the

Cape in 1836 is not widely recognized, and thirdly, that there is little to commemorate Darwin's historic visit to the Cape.



Deputy Mayor, Alderman Eddie Andrews



The audience gathered on Simon's Town Jetty for the unveiling ceremony



Mike Bruton



Roger Bagshaw

As a result, he included in his talks the need to commemorate Darwin's visit, but this idea gained little traction until he gave the talk to the Simon's Town Historical Society in November 2023. The members of that society were enthusiastic about the idea and, within two weeks, a project had been launched to raise funds for a bronze bust of a young Darwin to be displayed in Simon's Town where *Beagle* had dropped anchor 189 years ago. Roger

Bagshaw, chairman of the Simon's Town Historical Society, then spoke about the historic importance of the project and of Simon's Town.

As it costs money to create a bronze bust, Mike had approached the Geological Society of South Africa (GSSA) to make available a ring-fenced bank account into which donations could



Dr John Rogers



Dr Ted Grobicki in the audience

be deposited and from which payments could be made. The GSSA through its President, Craig Smith, readily agreed. Dr John Rogers, a prominent geologist representing the GSSA, then made the point that Darwin had been a respected geologist and explained the goals of the GSSA's Geoheritage Project which had supported the Darwin Bust Fund.

Mike explained that a fund-raising campaign had been launched and that the first donor was an ex-Rhodes University friend of his, Ted Grobicki, who had flown over from Perth in Australia to attend the unveiling ceremony. Soon thereafter Mike was contacted by Andrew Jones of the Cape Town Heritage Foundation who stated in his speech that their decision to support the project had been a 'no brainer'. Mike emphasized that the CTHF's generous donation of R50 000 had laid the foundation for the fundraising campaign and had made the project possible. He thanked Andrew Jones, Ian Pretorius, Nicci Hoal and Robert Thorp, Trustees of the Conservator Trust, for their generosity.



Andrew Jones addressing the audience

Thereafter, with additional generous donations by the *Darwin200* project, Johan Steyn, formula D_, Barbara Hockett, Simon's Town Historical Society, Cape Mining Club, GSSA, Roger Bagshaw, Graham Johnson, Gudrun Schirge, Rowan Mary Mentis and many other generous donors, the target amount of R105 000 was raised. Throughout this campaign another process was played out in the corridors of power – obtaining permission from the City of Cape Town to display the bust in a public place. This process was orchestrated by the Naming Committee of the Cape Town City Council, expertly managed by Mbuthokazi Kubashe and chaired by the Deputy Mayor.

Mike invited Andrew Darwin, the great, great grandson of Charles Darwin, to address the audience and unveil the bust. Andrew expressed his profound gratitude for the honour that had been bestowed on the Darwin family and emphasized the symbolic importance of this historic event. He then unveiled the bust with the help of the sculptor, Johan Steyn. Mike acknowledged the support of the *Darwin200* project that had made it possible for Andrew and his wife, Lucy, to travel to South Africa for this and other Darwin celebratory events.



Andrew Darwin



Andrew Darwin and Johan Steyn unveil the bust

To create a sculpture, you need a sculptor, and Cape Town is most fortunate to have one of South Africa's most gifted sculptors, Johan Steyn, in its midst. In his short presentation Johan gave thanks for the opportunity to create the sculpture and stated that he would leave the bust to speak for itself.



Johan Steyn



The Darwin bust



Johan Steyn and Lucy and Andrew Darwin with the bust

Mike then stated that, in order to enhance the educational value of the Darwin bust, it had been decided to mount an educational sign adjacent to it. This sign provides additional information on Darwin, *Beagle* and *Oosterschelde*, with further information accessible through a QR code. Amber Borton from formula D_, who had sponsored the sign, then unveiled the sign with Jim Hallinan, who had produced it.



Amber Borton unveiling the educational sign with Jim Hallinan and Johan Steyn

In conclusion, Mike thanked everyone from many walks of life who had contributed to and participated in the Darwin Bust project. Among those whom he had not mentioned he thanked Stewart McPherson of the *Darwin200* project, Cherry Dilley, Secretary, and Eric Mawhinney, Vice-chair of the Simon's Town Historical Society, Denis Lihou of Stadco, Rear-Admiral (ret.) Arné Söderland, and Tazneem Wentzel of the Simon's Town Museum.

Mike reminded the audience that the Darwin celebratory events in Cape Town and Simon's Town in April 2025 are a multi-cultural celebration that includes an art exhibition, 'Art of Evolution, Evolution of Art' at the Art@Africa gallery on the Waterfront, a play, 'Darwin. A Curious Mind', written by Sir Alexander McCall Smith and performed by Nicholas and Liz Ellenbogen and Andrew Roux, visits to and excursions on the tall ship *Oosterschelde* courtesy of the *Darwin200* project, the 'Darwin Leaders' presentations, and talks at the Two Oceans Aquarium and Cape Town Science Centre. Piper-Major Andrew Imrie then bid farewell to everyone on his bagpipes while the audience mingled with the celebrities and took photographs of themselves with the Darwin bust.



Piper-Major Andrew Imrie





Andrew Wilson who draped a Shrewsbury

old boys' tie around Darwin's neck



**Charles Darwin enjoying a sip
of beer after a hard day's work!**