The Darwin-Wedgwood family relationship is one of the most famous alliances in modern history. It began with a friendship between two like-minded entrepreneurial men in the mid eighteenth century: the polymath physician Erasmus Darwin and the potter-industrialist Josiah Wedgwood.
The personal ties were strengthened through marriages over the next two generations. Erasmus’ son, Robert Waring Darwin, married Josiah’s eldest daughter, Susanna Wedgwood. Their daughter, Caroline Darwin, married her first cousin Josiah Wedgwood III (son of Susanna’s brother, Josiah II), while their youngest son, Charles Darwin, married another first cousin, Emma Wedgwood. The intermarriages generated an intimate social bond between two large families, established financial interdependence, and, to Charles Darwin’s mind, may have led to a tendency of hereditary constitutional weaknesses among their offspring. The relationship also gave rise to the joke repeated by later descendants that ‘the Darwins were more Wedgwood than the Wedgewoods’.

It is well known that since the days of Erasmus and Josiah I, the Darwin and Wedgwood families had an affinity that was established through a number of common interests and beliefs. Both of the patriarchs were passionate about scientific inquiry, shared radical political views, were more secular than religious, and were driven to succeed through innovation and entrepreneurship. They built family fortunes upon their own industriousness and were critical of inherited privileges. They advocated social responsibility and democracy.

They also had their differences which were expressed throughout future generations. The Darwin men were encouraged to follow a family tradition of university education and training for the medical profession, while the Wedgwoods were assumed to maintain responsibility for the family manufacturing business. The Darwin patriarchs were literary and booksmart, as well as skilled with managing accounts, while the Wedgwoods tended to be more technical and craftsman-like, and were ominously bad at dealing with financial affairs. Under the command of Charles’ father, Robert Waring Darwin, the household was staid, disciplined and somewhat edgy, especially after Susanna’s death. The Wedgwoods, however, were notably sociable. The families maintained close contact through correspondence and regular visits, and the particular genealogy that concerns us – from the friendship of grandfathers Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood to the marriage of Charles Darwin and Emma Wedgwood – saw nearly a century-worth of close upbringing, shared holiday travel, and mutual financial support.

A particular moment in Charles Darwin’s life that had profound implications for his career and the history of science had everything to do with his family’s relationship to the Wedgwoods. When Darwin wanted to accept an offer to join the Beagle voyage as a naturalist his father refused to consent unless ‘you can find any man of common sense who advises you to go’. The man his father most admired was his brother-in-law, Josiah Wedgwood II, to whom Charles appealed for support, which he received. Charles was able to allay his father’s worries about the voyage saying that ‘the danger appears to me and all the Wedgwoods not great’.

While a number of other circumstances in the Darwin-Wedgwood family relationship would have important consequences for Charles’ life and career, the explicit question over individual character raises perhaps the most important concern to both families. Charles’ generation was the first in either family to be able to live off of family wealth without the necessity of helping to create it. Yet both families were acutely aware of the effort and sacrifices that had been made for them to attain that status. They courted a life of public respectability. For physicians and businessmen alike, careers were bolstered by
social connections, patronage, and philanthropic engagements. Yet each family suffered private tragedies. In all of the ways the ‘industrial revolution’ was revolutionary, one cannot underestimate the effects it had on its first generation of entrepreneurs. Manufacturing porcelain dinnerware or practicing medicine seem innocuous enough pursuits, but the fantastic wealth these practices generated bought them opportunities to let Britain’s ruling classes know that they were at odds politically, religiously, and philosophically with the establishment. Social respectability was a tricky negotiation in this context.

The second generation, that of Charles’ mother and father, found sudden wealth and social pressures difficult to deal with. Charles’ uncle, Erasmus II, failed in law and business and, heavily in debt, is believed to have committed suicide in 1799 at age forty. (Another Darwin uncle died of an infection as a nineteen-year-old medical student in Edinburgh.) On the Wedgwood side, Emma’s uncle Tom developed a fondness for poetry and opium, and died unmarried and intoxicated in 1805 at age 34. Emma’s other uncle, John, lived the highlife without much interest in family affairs and eventually lived off a trust established by his more responsible brother, Josiah II and Robert Waring Darwin. ‘All my endeavours to render myself useful to society are vain,’ declared an embittered John Wedgwood in 1812.6

Thus while Charles had the comfort of wealth and a large family to offer support and guidance, each family was not without its history of tragedy. What sort of character Charles Darwin would become was very much a matter of coming to terms with the way the Darwin and Wedgwood families confronted and managed the personal and professional challenges they continually faced.

Increasing Secularisation
Charles’ grandfather Erasmus Darwin had first met Josiah Wedgwood in 1762 when Wedgwood suffered a leg injury during a business trip to Liverpool and convalesced in the home of a physician friend. Their relationship gelled in 1765 when Darwin proved an enthusiastic supporter of the Trent and Mersey Canal development, a plan to dig a system emanating from the Mersey near Liverpool to the River Trent, near Derby. Wedgwood spearheaded a proposal to have the canal built along a path that conveniently ran along the front of his pottery factory in Staffordshire.
In fact, Erasmus Darwin supported many projects, large and small, that might have had an impact on industry and his investments in new business endeavours. He and Wedgwood were both involved with the pursuits of the Lunar Society, an association of like-minded natural philosophers and industrialists including Matthew Boulton, James Watt and Joseph Priestley who occasionally met to discuss ideas and innovations. On long carriage rides between patient visits Erasmus Darwin himself scribbled plans for a wide range of inventions. A Cambridge graduate who attended Edinburgh medical school, Darwin also treated Wedgwood as a patient when his injured leg was amputated in 1768 and also received Wedgwood’s wife, Sarah, into his home at Lichfield while she recovered from a protracted illness in the early 1770s. Toward century’s end, Darwin’s fame as ‘the greatest physician in the world’ (as a contemporary physician is supposed to have said) spread so much that he was invited to look after the ailing health of King George III. He declined, not-so-subtly illustrating his contempt for royalty and Tories.

Josiah Wedgwood, self-styled ‘Potter to Her Majesty’ however, was not likely to turn down an invitation to provide service to royalty, recognizing the importance of such patronage. Nevertheless, among friends he shared Darwin’s contempt for royalty, the landed aristocracy, and their politics. It was ironic that his wares represented a great shift in the arts from the courtly to the commercial while he, a dissenting Whiggish radical, owed so much of his success to royal patronage. It was an irony he himself recognised and which provided a lesson in strategic double standards for future generations.

Wedgwood’s grandfather was a Unitarian minister. Unitarians were different from followers of the Church of England: they rejected the doctrine of original sin and did not believe in the Holy Trinity, instead believing there was only a ‘divine unity’. Josiah’s mother was taught that rational education – knowledge based upon reason, experience, and experiment – was preferable to dogma. The Wedgwoods were raised to respect free enquiry, free worship, and voluntary prayers rather than blind allegiance to the church. Throughout his life Josiah turned increasingly secular in his beliefs, another point in common with Erasmus Darwin.

While a medical student at Edinburgh, Erasmus Darwin’s father (Charles’ great-grandfather) died. A despondent Erasmus wrote a letter to a friend where he reflected on life and religion, expressing scepticism about notions of divine providence. Biographers have referred to him as a ‘sceptical Deist’ – a doctrine rooted in materialism and rationalism that challenged ecclesiastical authority that proclaimed the power of ‘divine rights’. Steeped in the sciences of chemistry, botany and anatomy, throughout his life Erasmus was a devoted experimentalist, entering the realm of metaphysics in investigations he referred to as ‘a Comparison of the Laws of the Mind with those of the Body’. He further developed radical ideas about the transmutation of species and the competition among males to propagate with females, an evolutionary position he refers to in his medical treatise *Zoonomia* and other writings (including poetry) that would be lampooned by conservative critics. Surrounded by the physical suffering and premature death of a number of friends and family he loved, by the end of his own life Erasmus’ faith was forcefully challenged, leading to his despondent remark that ‘I am surprised we live, rather than that our friends die’.

Both Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood understood the risks to their families and careers if they expressed their religious and political views more publicly. In correspondence between friends that broached on sensitive subjects they would implore the reader to destroy the letter (fortuitously for historians this request appears often to have been ignored). Soon after the French revolution erupted, Erasmus wrote to James Watt asking: ‘Do you not congratulate your children on the dawn of universal liberty? I feel myself becoming all French in chemistry and politics.’ However at the first anniversary of Bastille Day when a rinous ‘King and Country’ mob burned their friend Joseph Priestley’s chemical laboratory to the ground out of the belief that he, like other French sympathisers, was antiroyalist, the friends were grimly reminded that liberty had not yet arrived in England.

The next generation of Darwins and Wedgwoods knew of Priestley’s persecution and that he fled to America where he lived the rest of his life. From then on the families held quietly casual religious views while still not imposing religious doctrines on their children, merely stating, as Charles Darwin’s aunt and future mother-in-law did, that ‘it is better to conform to the ceremonies of our Church than to omit them…’. 
United Through Marriage

Following the death of his eldest son, Erasmus Darwin put pressure on Robert Waring to enter into the profession of medicine, and to that end sent him first to Edinburgh and then to the prestigious University of Leiden. He also proffered advice to his friend Josiah Wedgwood about how best to educate his children.

The Darwins were friends with the educational writer Richard Edgeworth whose ideas had inspired the Wedgwoods to develop plans for schooling their children at their home, Etruria Hall. It included lessons in Latin, French and English grammar, account keeping, reading travelogues and horseback riding for the boys, while his daughters received instruction in French, drawing and music. Darwin's children occasionally attended the 'Etruscan education,' and the boys would later remember their joy at ‘fossiling’ and performing chemical experiments at which Josiah's youngest son, Tom, excelled. Wedgwood's youngest daughter, Susanna (known as 'Sukey'), excelled at the piano, and would regularly visit the Darwin household to offer music lessons to the boys. Robert Waring Darwin and Susanna Wedgwood had ample opportunity to share each other's company in their youth.18

Josiah Wedgwood had once envisioned that his eldest boy would settle as a 'gentleman farmer' while his two younger sons would take over the family business. Things did not turn out that way. The eldest son, John, spent extravagantly but was kept from bankruptcy through the family's collective efforts. Josiah Jr, the middle son, was slow to take an interest in the family business, preferring to be served rather than provide a service. The youngest, Tom, lived a life of idle pursuits. A brilliant chemist who published a paper in the prestigious Transactions of the Royal Society of London on a topic that is considered one of the first contributions to the invention of photography, he had followed his cousin Robert Waring Darwin to Edinburgh to study chemistry and natural philosophy. But it seems he turned his chemical knowledge to self-destructive ends, experimenting with developing new barbiturate drugs which he consumed with his friend, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Things did work out more to plan for Erasmus Darwin's son, Robert Waring, however. After completing his medical education at Leiden in 1787, he established a medical practice in Shrewsbury, in Shropshire, a wealthy and quiet country town on the fringes of the industrial Midlands. In 1794, 28-year old Robert Waring and 29-year old Susanna Wedgwood announced their engagement. Their fathers were jubilant. The marriage would not be immediate but knowing that the two families would be united through their children gave Josiah a near unsurpassable pleasure. However he would not live to see their marriage. Josiah died with Erasmus Darwin, his son Robert, and much of the Wedgwood family at his side months before the union, in 1795.
Susanna brought a dowry worth a fifth share of Wedgwood’s Etruria works and a £25,000 inheritance. Robert used much of it to invest in agricultural land and to build a house, called The Mount, along the River Severn. Robert epitomized what the historian Noel Annan dubbed ‘the intellectual aristocracy,’ a person who was able to enter the realms of the gentry following the rapid accumulation of wealth derived from professional or entrepreneurial careers.20 Susanna was the perfect complement. Graceful and intelligent, she had grown up alert to the demands of ‘self-made’ wealth but was familiar with the protocols for receiving and entertaining nobility (who often toured her father’s factory while travelling the countryside), mingling with the literati and conversing with famous artists including John Flaxman, George Stubbs and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Susanna was said by an early biographer to have ‘entered zealously into all her husband’s pursuits’.21 Like his father, Robert Waring Darwin often had to travel away from home to visit distant patients. Susanna was therefore required:

… to receive, sometimes entertain, high-class patients in her husband’s absence; to give dinner and supper parties; to be on visiting terms with the gentry of a wide neighborhood; to take an interest in the town and town-folks; and not omit what was one of the established customs of the place, two great yearly feasts to the chief medical practitioners of town and country.22

When Susanna’s brother, Josiah II, realised he had to assume the role of family patriarch and take responsibility for the family business, he forged a close relationship with his sister and new brother-in-law. With a loan from Robert Waring, he purchased Maer Hall, an Elizabethan estate provided with a thousand acres of wooded countryside in Staffordshire,
nine miles from Etruria. From hence the families grew closer. They went on summer holidays together to destinations such as fashionable Bath, the Welsh coast or Paris. The eight children of Josiah II and five Darwin children regularly shared time at The Mount and the Maer. Reminiscent of the previous generation, the girls took singing and dancing lessons together, the boys received chemistry lectures.

Like their fathers, Robert Waring and Josiah II shared details about their accounts and investments, with Darwin offering his business acumen. Robert had the mind of an accountant and invested shrewdly. He once wrote to Josiah II:

I have often thought of buying an estate, principally as the most secure position for our daughters, merely intending to buy land for the sake of property & income, not for situation or other consideration, therefore where I could get most for my money would suit me.23

He subsequently purchased two properties in Lincolnshire, Beesby and Sutteron Fen, which he willed to his children.

It has been suggested Robert Waring would have preferred a life as an entrepreneur rather than following the family profession into medicine, and would have been more successful at it than the Wedgwoods. As it was, Robert Waring was a very successful businessman and investor. Ironically, Robert Waring, like his son Charles Darwin years later, hated the practice of medicine. A bemused Charles later remembered him saying that ‘the thought of an operation almost sickened him’.24 Revealing his real ambition to Josiah II, Robert confessed his desire ‘to change this proud idle town into a busy manufactory’.25

Everything changed for Robert Waring Darwin in 1817 when Susanna died. Her frail health was notable following the birth of her six children but her final days were grueling.26 Robert would never recover from his grief. ‘The depression which occasionally had struck him in the past seemed never to lift now,’ wrote Wedgwood descendants, ‘and the atmosphere at The Mount was one of never-ending gloom.’27 It was fortunate for the children that they could travel to Maer Hall, a day’s carriage ride away, where Josiah II did all he could to provide consolation. ‘I trust too that our long friendship and brotherly love will suffer no abatement from the removal of her who loved us both so well,’ he wrote to Robert. In many ways Susanna’s death drew the family even closer together.

Challenging Choices

Charles Darwin was nine years old when his mother died. Consequently his older sisters, Marianne and Caroline, looked after his and his younger sister’s education. The women in the Darwin and Wedgwood households shied away from the strong dissenting Unitarian
tendencies of their fathers and grandparents. ‘It was Caroline who ensured Darwin’s continuing education and that he knew his Bible,’ notes biographer Janet Browne. Caroline took Charles for worship at St Chad’s, the Shropshire parish church where his mother was buried, removing him from the context of his earlier studies under the local Unitarian minister Rev Case. Shortly after, in 1818, Charles joined his brother Erasmus to board at Shrewsbury School, a nearby public school. The sisters would later establish a Sunday school for poor children, financed by their father. The school at the nearby poor district of Frankland provided instruction in writing, reading and basic hygiene, along with readings from catechisms from Scripture.

The Wedgwood girls also contributed to this curriculum. Josiah II’s youngest daughter, Emma, would assist with Sunday school instruction offered at Maer Hall, further demonstrating the family’s willingness to embrace Anglican faith in an effort to assimilate to the conventions of the ruling class. Indeed, it was a necessary condition in order to extricate oneself from being disenchanted. So much had Josiah II distanced himself from the radical sensibilities of his father that, upon his election as Whig MP for Stoke-on-Trent in 1832, in the period of great reform, Emma expressed the family’s relief that he had finally begun to return to family ways after acting ‘too Tory for these radical times’. Still, this generation articulated an ‘anti-radical’ Whiggism that showed renewed sensitivity to the notion of social respectability, which others have pointed out would play on Charles Darwin’s own consciousness. While Josiah II had declared that ‘My principles are those of the reform Bill’ during his first campaign for parliament, he also spoke openly against the ‘fierce & licentious’ radicals. As historian of science Adrian Desmond writes, ‘The Darwin-Wedgwood family [at this time] typified the wealthier aspects of the provincial Whig squararchy, not least in its practical attitude toward the social and recreational benefits of a Church career’. This emerging family context would have an important role to play in Charles Darwin’s later career considerations.

Yet not every semblance of the past was gone. Emma Wedgwood once contrasted the formality and discipline imposed on the household at The Mount to life at Maer Hall where the children were ‘free to do just what they liked’. Even so, the Darwin boys found enough ways to amuse themselves.

Before her death, Susanna and Robert Darwin had created a garden on the banks of the Severn, foreshadowing some of the set-up at Charles’ Down House. They had ‘petted and reared birds and animals; and the beauty, variety, and tameness of ‘The Mount pigeons’ were well known in the town and far beyond,’ according to one account. Later, Charles and his brother Erasmus (Ras) constructed a chemical laboratory in a shed on the grounds stocked with earthenware vessels and an industrial thermometer manufactured by Wedgwood. They were continuing a history of experimentation pioneered by their grandfather and his friends and their Wedgwood cousins. With a fondness for hunting and shooting, the Darwin boys regularly visited Maer to spend time with uncle Josiah II. One biographer has suggested that Wedgwood welcomed the young Charles Darwin because his naturalist curiosities and love of science reminded Josiah II of his brother Tom.

When Charles was sent to Edinburgh to join Ras for medical studies in 1825, a new world of scientific theory and investigation was opened to him, but ironically, it was also a world that summoned the memory of grandfather Erasmus’ radical thinking. At Edinburgh, Charles found pleasure in combing the shores for marine invertebrate specimens, collecting...
and classifying insects, and reading papers presented at the Plinian Natural History Society, a student organisation that met weekly to discuss all range of scientific and philosophical topics. He befriended Dr Robert Grant, a physician and zoologist who lectured on invertebrate anatomy. Grant knew of Darwin’s grandfather Erasmus. He had read and incorporated arguments from the *Zoonomia* into his thesis.38 It was a book Charles was familiar with, having read it and which, he later noted, he ‘greatly admired’. One day the two of them were on a nature excursion and Grant ‘burst forth in high admiration of Lamarck and his views on evolution’.39 It struck Darwin because these ideas seemed just as radical as when his grandfather and his chemist friends first articulated their ideas about material life. It evoked the origins of the Darwin-Wedgwood family friendship and put such philosophical ideas into historical, familial, context. The young medical student who, like his father, hated medicine but loved science was reminded of the way such interests had played out over two generations in the two families.

Soon Darwin was facing his own personal crisis over his aversion to blood and horror at witnessing a pre-anaesthetic operation on a street-boy which discouraged him from following the path of becoming a physician. Taking leave of Edinburgh and destined for Cambridge in contemplation of joining the clergy, in late 1827 he visited uncle Josiah II at Maer. At that time, the Wedgwood company finances were once again in dire straits and Robert Waring had stepped in with a loan to assist in the business’s recovery. Charles Darwin later recalled how he ‘greatly revered my Uncle Jos; he was silent and reserved, so as to be a rather awful man, but he sometimes talked openly with me’.40 During this visit Charles also met with the economist and Wedgwood relative Sir James Mackintosh with whom he discussed history, politics and moral philosophy. There is no record of whether or not Charles was aware at the time of the Wedgwood business fiscal fragility, but for his uncle and relatives it must have seemed that everything in life was precarious and uncertain despite all the success and apparent financial strength that the two families had amassed over the previous half century.

Josiah II was no doubt reassuring to his nephew about life’s challenging choices, and Charles was treated to an unexpected surprise when he was invited to join his uncle Josiah II on a trip to Paris to collect the Wedgwood women. Not long after Charles had left Cambridge, Josiah endorsed the plan for Charles to become the captain’s companion onboard the *Beagle*.

New Unions
When Charles had returned from the *Beagle* voyage, he settled into a house in London not far from his cousin Hensleigh Wedgwood (another son of Josiah II’s) and his wife Fanny Mackintosh, patron of the literati who held regular salons for authors including Sydney Smith, Thomas Carlyle, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Harriet Martineau. They, along with Charles’ brother Ras, who had finished medical school but never practiced medicine and was also living in London, introduced Charles to intellectual life. Charles had the opportunity to socialize with political economists at the Wedgwood household. He could further discuss Mackintosh’s theories of market competition and the division of labour, which, along with Thomas Robert Malthus’s theory of populations’ struggle for limited natural resources, found its way into Darwin’s own theory as a modified expression of competitiveness in nature.41 Having inherited his father’s aptitude for accounting, Charles Darwin became ‘the shrewd economist of the natural world,’ as characterized by biographer Janet Browne. ‘For Darwin, the balance of nature resembled an account book recording the financial affairs of an enterprising company, with adaptations acting like circulating capital, representing past achievements and the wherewithal for future ventures.’42 Darwin was developing some radical ideas, but kept his thoughts largely to himself, a self-styled ‘solitary brute’.43

Josiah Wedgwood II’s wife (and Charles Darwin’s future mother-in-law) Bessy had once described Charles as ‘an inoffensive lad.’44 It is difficult to discern if thoughts of him marrying her youngest daughter were already planted. However, another relationship was developing that would create a new union between the two families. Charles’ older sister Caroline Darwin married Josiah II’s son, Josiah III, in 1837.
It appears by most standards that Charles’ subsequent announcement of engagement to his cousin Emma Wedgwood, uncle Josiah’s youngest daughter, was more joyous for the rest of the Darwin-Wedgwood family than for him. ‘Emma having accepted Charles,’ wrote Robert Waring to Josiah II, ‘gives me as great happiness as Jos having married Caroline.’ However, few from the Darwin or Wedgwood families seemed to expect anything but another family union, save for the notion that it might have been Ras that Emma wed had he been the first to ask. The proposal seemed more a matter of convenience, embedded in the historical legacy of familial courtship and business relations rather than individual love. As mentioned above, such ‘intermarriages’ between close knit families were common in the period, and from the patriarchal point of view, it was satisfactory, if not a relief, that dowries and family fortunes would remain closely controlled.

Josiah II established a trust fund which provided £5,000 principal for Emma, to be passed on to her children, plus £400 a year while Robert Waring Darwin provided £10,000 in stock which provided an additional income of £600 a year. Enough to live a genteel, leisurely life. Having such close family ties meant that Charles was more than familiar with the sociable and lively household that Emma was raised in at uncle Josiah’s in Maer. Before their marriage, Charles wrote to Emma forewarning a contrast of life with him since he preferred ‘quietness & a good deal of solitude’. He explained that his chosen vocation, along with the experience of sailing great oceans as a solitary naturalist and travelling over deserts, conditioned him to be somewhat withdrawn. Though, he hoped, ‘I think you will humanize me, & soon teach me there is greater happiness than building theories & accumulating facts in silence & solitude’. Emma knew what to expect. Her father, like her grandfather, had spent endless nights alone in a workshop or study tending to the chores of business. She knew her future husband would not want to be ‘cut off from the power of doing your work,’ she wrote to him. ‘You must not think that I expect a holiday husband to be always making himself agreeable to me.’

If Darwin’s self-imposed solitude for the sake of his examinations of the specimens of nature was not a cause for alarm, one thing that concerned Emma was the difference in their religious beliefs. This was not altogether a difference between the Darwin and Wedgwood families, but differences in beliefs and attitudes between the men and the women in both families. Charles’ father had warned him about this, advising him to conceal his religious doubts. Still, Emma’s faith in Christianity remained a sensitive issue. In the lead up to marriage Emma was compelled to write to Charles expressing her fear ‘that our opinions on the most important subject should differ widely,’ asking him not to disguise his beliefs but also to do her the favour of reading her favourite parts of the New Testament. Charles Darwin had certainly turned on his heels from the direction of taking holy orders after Cambridge but, just as other Darwin and Wedgwood men had done, he learned to live a life of ‘ambiguity’ when dealing with his scientific beliefs and personal relationships. As historian of science David Kohn has pointed out, Charles and Emma shared the same social and political values and their relationship remained inscrutable regarding religious matters.

Charles and Emma married on January 29, 1839 in a quiet ceremony at Maer. That evening on the train back to London the couple ate sandwiches and sipped water, and Charles was already beginning to disappear into his own world, jotting notes about a conversation he had with uncle Wedgwood about turnips. Soon the couple would settle at Down House in Kent, a former parson's residence, where Charles assumed the ambiguous life of what biographer James Moore called a ‘squarson-naturalist’.

Emma, with keen insight to her family's internal struggles over religious beliefs, philosophical theories and interests in 'experiments' in search of knowledge about the world, and possessing a famous Wedgwood resolve, managed her household without conflict. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century the Darwin-Wedgwood families remained close, and Down House took over the role that the Maer estate once played as a regular venue for large family gatherings while Charles scribbled away quietly in his study.

**Fulfilment of a Dream**

In 1869, Charles and Emma were visited by an 89-year old Wedgwood aunt, Fanny Allen. She was the only family member alive who had personally known the first Josiah Wedgwood. She told Emma that both grandfather Wedgwood and grandfather Darwin would have been proud of Charles for what he had accomplished ‘and for being a gentleman about it all’.

Indeed, he had fulfilled a dream they had shared of pursuing science without letting controversy in the form of political and social pressure stand in the way.

In 1883, the year after Charles died, Emma returned to Staffordshire and visited a childhood friend who reminisced about the social gatherings at Maer Hall over half a century earlier. The Etruria factory nearby was still a family business, now owned and operated by Emma’s nephew, Godfrey Wedgwood, who like so many before him struggled with the company's financial uncertainties. In 1887, Godfrey purchased a collection of manuscript correspondence written by Josiah I that had fallen out of the family's possession. He gave the letters to Emma.

It is appropriate that Emma, now the matriarch of the Wedgwood-Darwin families, came into possession of her grandfather's letters in which the very friendship between Josiah I and Erasmus Darwin was first formed. To this day, they represent the origins of a family alliance that helped to create a context for revolutionary changes in the way we view the nature of biological life and its struggles for survival.