

Darwin's Sons

Image: Silhouette of Erasmus Darwin (right), playing chess with his son Erasmus (left).

Image from: Erasmus Darwin House, Lichfield (By kind permission of Jane Darwin).

Photograph: David Remes (2003).

Erasmus and Polly both were freethinkers and sceptical about religion. The three of five their children who survived the childhood were brought up with “*no seeds of superstition*”. They were “*an inexhaustible fund of happiness*” for their parents.

Polly's early death in 1770 was a great shock to Darwin: “*The dear Partner of all the Cares and Pleasures of my Life ceased to be ill - and I felt myself alone in the World!*” Darwin was left to bring up his small sons, Charles (1758-1778), aged eleven, Erasmus (1759-1799), ten and Robert Waring (1766-1848), four. His sister Susannah agreed to come and help to look after the children and run the household.

Charles, the eldest, became a brilliant medical student at Edinburgh University, but died as a result of an infection contracted while was conducting a dissection. Erasmus became a lawyer and died tragically by drowning in 1799. Robert Waring trained as a doctor at Edinburgh and practised as a doctor in Shrewsbury where his son, Charles Darwin (1809-82) was born.