

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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£70,301 to develop an exhibition explaining the young Charles Darwin's work as a . . . *Geologist!*

The Sedgwick Museum is to benefit from **Designation Challenge Funding** to enhance its internationally important collections. The **MLA** (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council), as a strategic funder of museums, is making the award (as part of a package of 34 to museums around the country) to ensure that outstanding collections can be enjoyed and appreciated by as many people as possible.

The **Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences** jointly with the **University Museum of Zoology** will receive a total of £141,272 to collaborate on the development of new permanent exhibitions of Charles Darwin's geological and zoological specimens from the museums' collections.

Rocks, minerals and fossils collected by Darwin on his voyage on *HMS Beagle* (1832 – 1836) and the experimental equipment he used to study them and how this led him toward new theories about the Earth, are the focus of the Sedgwick's exhibition. The emphasis will be to show how a young and enthusiastic collector developed the skills of observation and interpretation that would lead him on to become one of the greatest scientists of his generation.

These grants are part of the MLA's **Renaissance Programme** to transform England's regional museums. This latter funding scheme has also allowed the creation of a new post, the University Museums Development Officer (Dr Liz Hide – eah12@cam.ac.uk), who will contribute to raising the profile of the University's museums and develop the aim of making their collections accessible to as many people as possible.

Chris Batt, Chief Executive of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council explains: "MLA's vision for the future of England's museums is of places where everyone can be inspired to learn and to enjoy these fantastic collections. Our role is to encourage museums to exploit fully the possibilities for these collections, exploring innovative ways to reach audiences whether in the local community or beyond. I am delighted that MLA can continue to give direct financial support to England's museums through Renaissance."

Dr David Norman, Museum Director, said "We are delighted to receive this MLA funding to enable us to develop the displays in the museum's gallery. We look forward to enabling visitors to enjoy seeing and understanding Charles Darwin's original geological material, collected while he was the naturalist aboard *HMS Beagle*, during its epic circumnavigation of the globe"

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Notes for editors:

The Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences

Downing Street, Cambridge enquiries: 01223 333456 (www.sedgwickmuseum.org). The Sedgwick has more than one million fossils in its collection; these range from the earliest forms of life, dating back more than 3,000 000,000 years ago, to the remarkable wildlife that roamed the Fens less than 150,000 years ago. Displays include a gallery of minerals and gemstones, the world's largest spider, fossil plants, huge marine reptiles from the Jurassic Period, dinosaurs and Cambridgeshire's very own *Hippopotamus*.

MLA

MLA is the national development agency for museums, libraries and archives, advising the government on policy and priorities for the sector. MLA's roles are to provide strategic leadership, to act as a powerful advocate, to develop capacity and to promote innovation and change. www.mla.gov.uk

The Designation Scheme

The Designation Scheme, managed by MLA, aims to identify and celebrate the best museum, library and archive collections in England; those that are deemed to be of outstanding national and international importance. The Scheme recognises that organisations with Designated collections care for a significant part of England's cultural heritage.

Renaissance

Renaissance is a national scheme to transform England's regional museums, led by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. By 2008, £150 million will have gone to help regional museums across the country raise standards and deliver real results in support of education, learning, community development and economic regeneration.

Renaissance affects the entire museums sector. A network of 'Hubs' has been set up in each English region to act as flagship museums and promote good practice. Alongside the Hubs, Regional Agencies and Museum Development Officers are providing advice and support, Subject Specialist Networks have been set up, and national museums are sharing their skills and collections.

Renaissance is helping museums to meet people's changing needs - and to change people's lives.

Press and media enquiries

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