

## Review of 'Voyage of the Beagle' by Dr James Taylor 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021

With humour, without notes and with many different illustrations we were treated to a most interesting and informative talk by Dr James Taylor. Dr Taylor has written several books including illustrated histories on maritime and yachting art and in 2008 'The Voyage of the Beagle', short-listed for the Mountbatten Maritime Prize in 2016. It was clear that Dr Taylor was conscientious in his approach to his research and had visited a number of places associated with Charles Darwin and the Beagle, including 'Down House' the Grade 1 listed family home of Darwin in Downe, Kent.

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house/>

We discovered that the Beagle was one of a class of vessels nicknamed 'Coffin brigs', due to the large number of them that sank, so it was fortunate that Captain FitzRoy, Darwin and the crew returned home safely. We also learnt that the ship was one of the first to be fitted with the lightning conductor invented by William Snow Harris. On the three main survey voyages from 1826 to 1843 a world record number of chronometers were carried on board with 22 on the second voyage with Darwin of which six were owned by the captain, Robert FitzRoy.



As a contributor to exhibitions at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich Dr Taylor was familiar with the museum's resources and used these to illustrate his talk. The museum holds many important artefacts relating to Darwin including superb watercolours showing the expedition by, the official artist on board Beagle, Conrad Martens.

Dr. James Taylor with u3a member, Ella Young

In 1835, HMS Beagle arrived at the Galapagos Islands, nearly four years after setting sail from Plymouth. Charles Darwin's book 'The Origin of Species' and the theory of evolution is associated with the Galapagos Islands. From Dr Taylor's talk we could see why Darwin must have marvelled at the most extraordinary and unique animal species he saw there. By the end of his talk we certainly had a good picture of Darwin and his family and the many people associated with the voyage. Altogether a most fascinating talk.

Review and photo by Christine Chittock,

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