



Wallace Correspondence Project at the Natural History Museum, London

First year report (14 May 2014 - 13 May 2015)

In March 2014 a grant of \$109,989 was awarded to the project from the Wallace Centenary Celebration, directed by Richard Milner, a project funded by the John Templeton Foundation. The award was largely designed to fund the fourth year of the Wallace Correspondence Project, with a small amount of funding provided to maintain the project for a further two years after that.

Main aims

The main aims for year four of the project were to:

- Trace new letters and add up to 100 letters and other manuscripts to the Wallace Letters Online (WLO) archive
- Transcribe up to 500 letters
- Trace copyright holders and seek reproduction permission from them
- Employ a designer and a programmer to add a feature to WLO which will display biographical information about Wallace's correspondents. This information will be displayed on a specially designed 'People Tab' and the records for the correspondents will be linked to the names of the people in the main website, so clicking a person's name will take the user to the People Tab where biographical details of that person will be displayed.

Achievements

Documents catalogued and images added

We far exceeded our original aim, and located and catalogued a total of 982 letters and other documents (there are now records for a total of 5,865 documents in the project database). Scans of these documents totalled 5,394 images (we now have a total of 23,056 images). All Wallace-related manuscripts which the project knows about in the Natural History Museum and elsewhere in the world have now been catalogued and images have been obtained of nearly all of them.

Transcription work

The project Archivist (Ruth Benny) managed up to 50 volunteer transcribers at any one time – most of whom work remotely from home. Ruth also supervised a group of

15 undergraduate students from Harvard University, who worked on transcribing documents for the project for 2 weeks in June/July 2014.

The project's volunteers produced a total of 1,346 new transcripts (the project now has a total of 4,288). Note that there may be more than one transcript per item catalogued in the database. For example if a letter contains one or more textual enclosures, these are transcribed separately to the letter. Also there may be more than one version of a letter e.g. the original and one or more published versions (which may differ from the original).

Due diligence

The Archivist has continued the process of due diligence to secure permission from the families of authors other than those of the Wallace family, to reproduce the letters. Progress on this element is slow, nevertheless, a steady trickle of author's estates are granting us permission to display scans.

Web site development

The WLO user interface was considerably upgraded e.g. improvements were made to the search facility, the layout of pdf files of transcripts, and how records are sorted. In addition, a new feature was added which will enable users to search for biographical information about Wallace's 1,637 correspondents. This information is displayed on a new 'People Tab' and the records for the correspondents are linked to the names of the people in the main interface, so clicking a person's name will take the user to the People Tab where biographical details of that person will be displayed. This upgraded interface will be publically released in late June/early July 2015 and will be accompanied by a Press Release. The Templeton logo will be displayed on the WLO home page (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/wallacelettersonline>).

In addition to the work on the Website, we have done considerable work on identifying and obtaining biographical information for Wallace's correspondents. We now have at least some biographical information for 668 of them, which will be of considerable benefit to users of WLO as it will allow better understanding of the letters and other manuscripts. We estimate that it will take more than two years of full time work to complete work on this task.

Project publicity

a) On-line articles and blog posts

Dunning, H. 2014. Evolution pioneer's illegible notebook brought back to life. Natural History Museum, London (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/news/2014/nov/evolution-pioneers-illegible-notebook-brought-back-to-life133480.html>)

Interview with Ruth Benny, the project's Archivist:
<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/community/library/blog/2014/05/28/60-second-staff-encounter-ruth-benny>

Interview with Rod Cooper, one of the project's many hard-working volunteers:
<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/community/library/blog/2014/06/04/60-second-volunteer-encounter?fromGateway=true>

b) Presentations

25 June 2014. George Beccaloni gave a talk in which he discussed the project at the 29th annual conference of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) in Cardiff, Wales.

9 January 2015. George Beccaloni & Ruth Benny gave a public 'Nature Live' presentation about the WCP and the NHM's Wallace Family Archive at the Natural History Museum, London. This was recorded and the video was publically screened on the 14th February at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, as part of their event a "[Valentine to Alfred Russel Wallace](#)". To see the video click [HERE](#).

28 April 2015. Ruth Benny gave a talk about the project at The Linnean Society of London, at a conference entitled 'From Cabinet to Internet: Digitising Natural History and Medical Manuscripts'.

George Beccaloni (3/6/2015)