

# About Wallace Letters Online

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## **Introduction**

Wallace Letters Online (WLO) is the [Wallace Correspondence Project's](#) (WCP) digital archive of the correspondence and other manuscripts of the great 19th century naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913). Wallace has many claims to fame, not least being that he is the 'father' of evolutionary biogeography and the co-discoverer with Charles Darwin of the process of evolution by natural selection.

## **Scope of WLO**

WLO aims to catalogue and provide digital images and transcripts of all known manuscript letters (including fragments) sent to or written by Wallace - including the original envelopes and any enclosures, plus selected letters between others which contain important information pertaining to Wallace (*e.g.* a letter from Charles Darwin to Thomas Henry Huxley which discusses Wallace's poor financial situation).

In addition, WLO aims to include the following items even though they were never part of posted letters:

- 1) Handwritten or typed transcripts of letters to or from Wallace, especially where the original letter is unknown.
- 2) Drafts of letters to or from Wallace, even when the text of the final 'posted' version of the letter is known.
- 3) Published letters to or from Wallace, generally excluding letters which were specifically written by Wallace for publication (*e.g.* 'letters to the editor' (LTTE)). Note that all known examples of these plus transcripts of them, are available on the [Wallace Page website](#) and [Wallace Online](#). Only the earliest published version of a letter will usually be catalogued, unless later versions are significantly different, in which case they too will be included. Published excerpts of letters will only be catalogued in instances where a more complete version of the letter is not known. Transcripts of published images of manuscript letters will usually only be included if the project does not already have images or transcripts of the originals.

4) In addition to correspondence, we also aim to include as many of Wallace's other manuscripts and other unique documents (*e.g.* certificates awarded to him, notebooks etc) as we can.

For more information see: <http://wallaceletters.info/content/project-overview>

### **Current coverage**

WLO is a work in progress which will only be completed at the end of Phase 2 of the Wallace Correspondence Project in *c.* 2023. The content is therefore constantly being added to and corrected.

As of August 2014 WLO contains records of 4922 letters, of which 2437 were written by ARW and 2042 were sent to him. Most of the other 446 are third party letters which pertain to ARW. WLO also contains records of 83 other documents such as notebooks. Of the 4922 letters, 3328 (68%) have publically viewable images and 1594 (32%) don't. 3153 (64%) have transcripts and 2904 (59%) have both transcripts and publically viewable images. 2018 (41%) letters currently don't have either publicly viewable images or transcripts.

WLO includes about 99% of Wallace's known surviving correspondence, including all of Wallace's early (pre. 1863) correspondence, and all of the surviving letters he sent or received during his epic trip to the Malay Archipelago between March 1854 and April 1862. It also includes the complete surviving Darwin-Wallace correspondence in full for the first time. Previous published compilations of the Darwin-Wallace letters (*i.e.* Darwin (1893), Marchant (1916)) were incomplete and the published transcripts often suffered from important omissions of text.

Other highlights include:

Wallace's two scientifically important 'Species Register' notebooks from his trip to the Malay Archipelago, which detail the specimens of insects, birds and other animals he collected on various islands he visited. (See [WCP4766](#) and [WCP4767](#))

Two of Wallace's address books, which cover the period from *c.* 1864 to his death in 1913, *i.e.* most of his adult life. (See [WCP4779](#) and [WCP4806](#))

Wallace's personal annotated copy of the famous scientific paper he co-authored with Charles Darwin in 1858, in which the theory of evolution by natural selection was proposed for the first time. (See [WCP4756](#))

Wallace's Last Will and Testament. (See [WCP4791](#))

### **What is a letter?**

For the purposes of our project a letter is defined as a manuscript which has been posted or telegraphed by one person to another. This therefore excludes published documents such as books or magazines, posted by or to Wallace without any enclosed manuscript text.

Most letters were sent enclosed in an envelope, but some were not. The latter includes postcards and some early letters where the writing paper bearing the handwritten text was folded in such a way that one side bore the postal address of the intended recipient. All items enclosed in an envelope together with a manuscript letter, plus the envelope itself, are regarded as being part of the letter (more precisely the ‘letter packet’). All of these items are individually catalogued in WLO.

### **Database record structure**

Records in the WLO database are of two basic types: parent and child. There are two types of parent records: one for ‘letter packets’; and another for all other items which are not letters (*e.g.* notebooks, original illustrations *etc.*). Each parent record has a unique permanent Wallace Correspondence Project number, which is prefixed by the letters “WCP” (*e.g.* “WCP23”). Parent records for letter packets hold ‘higher level’ information about the letter *e.g.* the names of the sender and intended recipient, their addresses, the date the letter was written, and a summary of the letter’s content.

Each parent record has one or more child records attached to it – one for each item making up the letter packet. There is also a child record type for published versions of letters. Each child record has a unique permanent reference number in addition to the WCP number of its parent. Child records can have one or more images or one transcript attached to them (except for envelopes which are never transcribed).

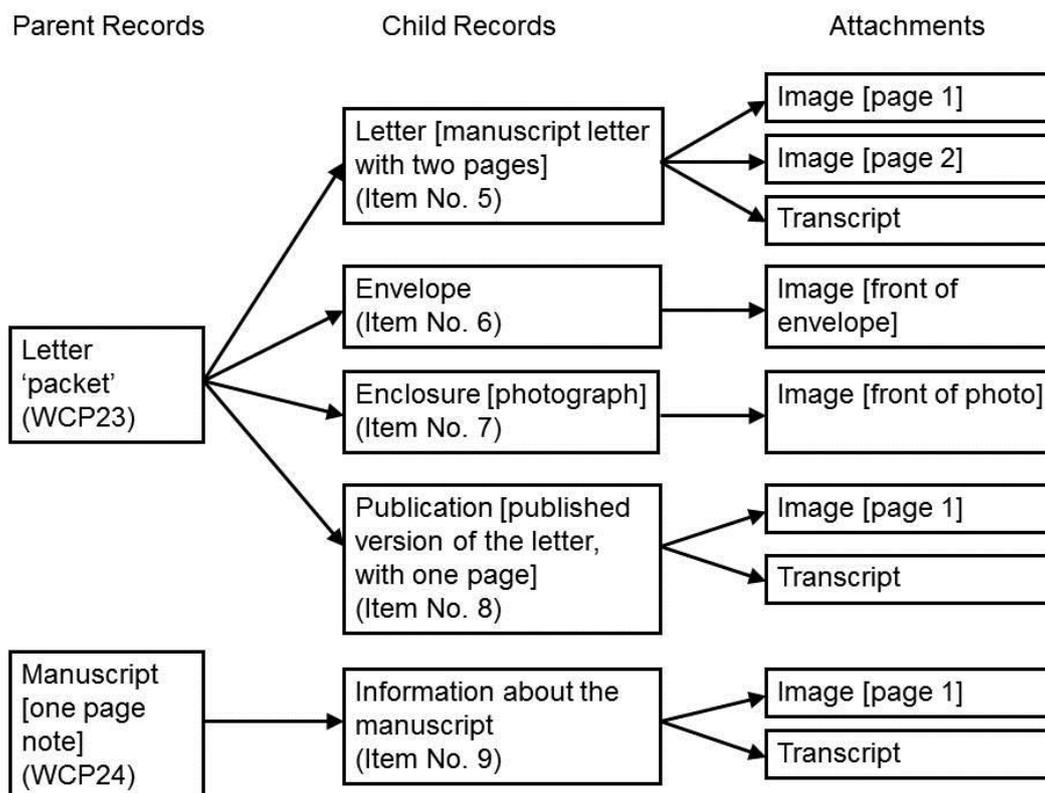
The four child record types are as follows:

**Letter:** Holds information about a manuscript letter *e.g.* the repository, the type of document (*e.g.* postcard, telegram), the condition of the document *etc.* There may be more than one **Letter** record, *e.g.* if there is a record for the original manuscript letter and another for a handwritten transcript of the same letter.

**Envelope:** Information about the envelope, including details of the repository. There is only ever a single envelope record for any parent record.

**Enclosure:** Information about an enclosure, including the repository. Enclosures can consist of a wide range of items, including letters by or to people other than Wallace, photographs, newspaper cuttings *etc.* There may be several enclosure records attached to one parent record.

**Publication:** Records information about any published versions of a letter. A letter may have been published several times, so there may be several of these records.



**Example relationships between parent and child records and various attachments for the two types of parent record in the WLO database.**

Structuring the information in the way described above means that everything which relates to a particular letter is united under one parent record. This enables WLO to 'reconstruct' letters - uniting enclosures and envelopes with the letter manuscripts - even in cases where these documents are now in different repositories. Manuscript and published versions of letters are also united for the first time, allowing comparisons between them to be easily made.

### **Conventions used when cataloguing documents**

1) **General:** Throughout the database, square brackets “[ ]” are used to enclose inferred information, and question marks “?” are used to denote uncertain information. Question marks are placed before the text being questioned e.g. “?1858”. Please note that the convention used to indicate questionable text in transcripts is different *i.e.* a question mark in italicised square brackets “[?]” is placed directly after any word which the transcriber was unsure of - for example “Darwin[?]”. Also note that square brackets “[ ]” are used in different ways in the database and in transcripts - please refer to the [Wallace Correspondence Project's transcription protocol](#) for more information.

2) **Date of the letter:** Any inferred information is enclosed in square brackets “[ ]” *e.g.* if the month was inferred the date might read “26 [April] 1856”. Question marks (“?”) are used to indicate uncertainty about the date or part of the date *e.g.* “26 ?April 1856” if the month is uncertain; or “26 April 1856?” if the entire date is uncertain.

The reasons why the date is inferred or questioned are usually given in the notes field associated with the parent record.

2) **Names of author/addressee:** The full name of a person used at the time of their death. Any commonly used nicknames are noted in (“”) after the forename(s) and any earlier surname(s) is/are noted in ( ) after the surname using "née" to indicate a maiden name, "formerly" to indicate a change for a reason other than marriage, and "then" to indicate any earlier married names.

Some examples are:

Alexander, Patrick Proctor (“Pat”)  
Allingham (née Paterson), Helen Mary Elizabeth  
Sims (née Wallace), Frances (“Fanny”)  
Comerford-Casey (formerly Casey), George Edward  
de Grey (née Withers, then Gwytherne-Williams), Marion

3) **Addresses of author/addressee:** This is the **full** address of a person - not necessarily the address as it is written on the letter (which will be recorded in the form that it is written in the transcript). The address of the author will usually be handwritten, typed, embossed *etc.* on the letter, whilst that of the addressee will usually be on the envelope or cover if one is present. Any inferred information is enclosed in square brackets “[ ]”, but only one version of the address (the most complete) is used in the database. For example, the address on the letter might simply read “Old Orchard” but in the database the complete address will be used *i.e.* “Old Orchard, Broadstone, Dorset”. If the whole address is enclosed in square brackets (“[ ]”) it means that it has been inferred for that letter. If it is preceded by a question mark (“?”) this means that it is uncertain whether it is the correct address.

## **Transcripts**

The text of all letters and other documents has been transcribed following the [Wallace Correspondence Project's transcription protocol](#). This is a 'clear text' method of transcription which leaves the text largely free of editorial symbols and comments.

The numbers enclosed in two sets of square brackets (*e.g.* “[[2]]”) in the text of the transcripts are ‘reading order numbers’ rather than page numbers, and denote the order in which the text pages of a manuscript should be read. In the case of letters (but not other manuscripts) blank pages have been ignored, so if a letter has four pages but page 2 is blank, then the text pages of the transcript would be numbered 1, 2 and 3. Note that the reading order of a letter may sometimes be different to the physical order of its pages *e.g.* if one page has several layers of writing on it (see the WCP’s transcription protocol for more details).

In the case of transcripts of published letters, the page numbers printed in the publication are given after the reading order number (*e.g.* “[[1]] [p. 262]”, where “262” is the number printed on that page of the publication).

## Images

Documents which belong to the Natural History Museum were imaged according to the procedure described on the following webpage:

<http://wallaceletters.info/content/document-scanning>

Images of documents supplied by other organisations and individuals may or may not have been produced following a similar procedure, but in any case they have been sized so that they have similar dimensions to the NHM images.

Please note that in the case of letters (but not other types of document such as notebooks) which have a reading order different to the physical order of their pages (*e.g.* because they have multiple layers of writing on a page), images of the relevant pages have been duplicated and rotated as appropriate in order to make it easier for the user to read the document. For example, a two page letter may have two layers (horizontal and vertical) of writing on both pages and the reading order of the text may be: page 1, then page 2, for the first layer; then page 1 and then page 2 for the second layer. WLO would therefore include four images for this letter, which would be ordered in sequence as follows: page 1, then page 2, then page 1 and page 2 again - but rotated so the vertical text can be more easily read. In the transcript these pages would have 'reading numbers' of 1 to 4.

Although the WCP has digital images of the majority of the documents catalogued in WLO (there are a total of 18,056 image files), images of about 32% of the letters cannot currently be displayed for copyright and other reasons. The WCP will continue to try to obtain permission to make these images available to users.

## Accuracy of the data and transcripts in WLO

The process of locating, scanning, cataloguing, transcribing and interpreting Wallace's correspondence is a work in progress, which will not be completed until the end of Phase 2 of the project (*i.e.* 2023 at the earliest). Our project's policy is, however, to make all the information we have available to users at the earliest possible opportunity, even if it is incomplete and/or imperfect. In order that project staff and users can judge how complete and accurate a record is, each parent and child record has a 'verification' field associated with it. If no verification information is shown then the record has not yet been checked. Only if the record has been verified by the senior editor, George Beccaloni, can it be regarded as being accurate. Transcripts can only be regarded as being accurate if the verification states that they have been 'signed-off'. If a transcript has not been signed-off then it is still a working copy and may contain any number of errors. The number of times it has been edited by project staff should, however, give a fairly good indication of how accurate it is likely to be.

**If you find any errors in WLO or know about any letters or other documents which are absent from our database, then please contact the project's Director, George Beccaloni ([g.beccaloni@nhm.ac.uk](mailto:g.beccaloni@nhm.ac.uk)). We and the users of WLO will be very grateful for your help!**

## Citing information

If you wish to cite the reference number of an item catalogued in WLO (*e.g.* in an article you are writing), then please give the item number plus the WCP number of the parent record *e.g.* “WCP56.78”, where “56” is the number of the parent record and “78” the number of the child record. This allows the exact item (*e.g.* an enclosure to a letter) to be precisely identified.

Please use the following reference format to refer to WLO:

Beccaloni, G. W. (Ed.). (2013). *Wallace Letters Online* <<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/wallacelettersonline>> [accessed 20 May 2013\*].

\* Please give the precise date you used the WCP Database.

To refer to a particular transcript please use the following reference format:

Wallace, Alfred Russel. (1846). [WCP340.340: Letter to Henry Walter Bates, dated 11 April 1846]. *In*: Beccaloni, G. W. (Ed.). *Wallace Letters Online*.

<<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/collections/library-collections/wallace-letters-online/340/340/T/details.html>> [accessed 16 April 2014\*]

\* Please give the precise date you used the WCP Database.

Note that the url given is the one displayed when the transcript is viewed on screen.

Citing the source of such information is not only good scholarly practice, but it enables any errors to be tracked back to where they originated.

## References

Darwin, F. (Ed.). 1893. *Charles Darwin; His Life Told in an Autobiographical Chapter and in a Selected Series of His Published Letters*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 365 pp.

Marchant, J. (Ed.). 1916. *Alfred Russel Wallace; Letters and Reminiscences*. London & New York: Cassell and Co. 2 vols., 507 pp.