



Who was Alfred Russel Wallace?

Alfred Russel Wallace was a great Victorian explorer, naturalist, author, geographer, philosopher and anthropologist. Born in Usk, Gwent, in 1823, his formal education ended when he left school at thirteen yet his interest in the natural world and insatiable desire to learn and discover propelled him to become one of the evolutionary thinkers of the nineteenth century.



Image courtesy of the Natural History Museum

He co-published the theory of evolution by natural selection with Charles Darwin in 1858 and through his extensive explorations of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Amazon became the leading expert on the geographical distribution of species.

Today Darwin is a household name, few people know about Wallace, a major contributor to the ideas and processes which explain how species gradually change to create new types of beings, a theory now recognised as evolution!

Wallace in Neath



Image courtesy of the Natural History Museum

His family's impoverished circumstances meant that Wallace was unable to continue in formal education and had to find work, after a variety of jobs in London and Hertford, Wallace joined his brother William to work as a surveyor in Neath in 1841.

However there was not always enough work for both brothers and Wallace found himself with a lot of spare time that he used to further his self education and scientific pursuits.

Although he only spent five years in the Vale of Neath it was not without adventure and an important time in his life that he attributed to the development of his fascination and knowledge of nature and the natural world.

I cannot call to mind a single valley that in the same extent of country comprises so much beautiful and picturesque scenery, and so many interesting special features, as the Vale of Neath.

