

Homing In: Alfred Russel Wallace's Homes in Britain (1852 to 1913)



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Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) lived a life filled with innovative, inspiring and idiosyncratic intellectual endeavour. Having independently co-discovered the theory of natural selection in 1858 with Charles Darwin, he also pioneered the study of animal distribution as the ‘father of biogeography’ as well as innumerable other achievements within the scientific and socio-political realms.

Despite Wallace’s fame, some of the details of his life remain infuriatingly fuzzy. This is particularly the case regarding his homes. Local historians have occasionally studied Wallace’s homes in more detail (Chase 1979; Sowan & Byatt 1974; George 2001). However, the most comprehensive research into his residences was undertaken by George Beccaloni (2008). Now, with greater access to Wallace’s correspondence, we can piece together a more accurate picture of his residences.

This paper supplements Beccaloni’s work, clarifying where Wallace lived from the period of his return from South America in 1852 to his death in 1913, focusing exclusively upon Wallace’s British residences.

Much work has already been undertaken to study the influence of Wallace’s environment on his thinking prior to his work on natural selection. Yet, no such equivalent has been produced for his later life. To understand the power of place on Wallace’s later intellectual development we need to first fix where he was. It is to this important preliminary task this paper turns.

1: LONDON

1.1: Upper Albany Street, Regent’s Park—October 1852 to 26 January 1854

Wallace arrived from South America on 1 October 1852. Here he lived with his sister, Fanny Sims (1812–93)—who had recently married the photographer Thomas Sims (1826–1910)—and his mother, Mary Ann Wallace (1788–1868). He took 44 Upper Albany Street but ‘while it was getting ready I took lodgings next door’ at number 43.

Wallace was familiar with Upper Albany Street prior to his departure for South America in 1848. Before leaving for Pará, Brazil (via Liverpool) with Henry Walter Bates in April 1848, they had lived at 50 Upper Albany Street.¹ The location was perfect. Close to the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and his agent Samuel Stevens' house, it was an ideal base from which to undertake his natural history work (Wallace 1905:1:313).

1.1a: 43 Upper Albany Street—early October to Christmas 1852

Wallace addresses a letter to *The Zoologist*—recalling his tumultuous return journey from South America to Britain—from number 43 on 19 October 1852.² This confirms that he moved here sometime between 1–19 October.

1.1b: 44 Upper Albany Street—Christmas 1852 to 26 January 1854

No correspondence currently clarifies the date he moved into number 44. However, in *My Life* Wallace claims it was at Christmas 1852 (Wallace 1905:1:313). Correspondence does confirm that his longer residence on Upper Albany Street was at number 44.³ Beccaloni suggests Wallace left this address when he leaves for the Malay Archipelago in March 1854. However, by late January Wallace had already left for Portsmouth, explaining on 8 February 1854 that 'I have left the [HMS] "Frolic" this afternoon after being fourteen days on board'.⁴

1.2: 5 Westbourne Grove Terrace—early April 1862 to March 1865

Wallace arrived back in England in late March (with live Birds of Paradise).⁵ Within days he was settled at his brother-in-law's house at 5 Westbourne Grove Terrace and was sorting through his vast collections (Wallace 1905:1:385).⁶ Beccaloni suggests Wallace leaves Westbourne Grove in April 1865. However, in February Wallace explained he was 'preparing for moving, as I leave here in March & do not yet know where I am going'.⁷ No current correspondence confirms this March date.⁸

1.3: 9 St Mark's Crescent, Regent's Park—March 1865 to 22 March 1870

Wallace rented St Mark's Crescent for five years. However, during the middle year he lived in the house of his father-in-law, William Mitten (1819–1906), to aid writing *The Malay Archipelago* (March 1869) before returning to St Mark's (Wallace 1905:1:414).

1.3a: First Residence: 9 St Mark's Crescent—March 1865 to 6/20 July 1867

Wallace lived here with his mother and was again close to the ZSL library in Hanover Square, where he went 'very often to consult books of reference'. Whilst living here Wallace admitted he saw the 'most of my few scientific friends' (Wallace 1905:1:411).

On 5 April 1866 the 42-year-old Wallace married 20-year-old Annie Mitten (Slotten 2004:522). On 22 June 1867 they also had their first child, Herbert Spencer Wallace.⁹

Wallace explains in *My Life* that they moved to Hurstpierpoint from 'Midsummer 1867' (ie between 21–25 June 1867) during which time he sublet St Mark's (Wallace 1905:1:414). Nonetheless he was still addressing a letter from St Mark's on 6 July.¹⁰ However, Wallace receives a letter at Hurstpierpoint on 20 July, meaning he moved to Hurstpierpoint sometime between 6 and 20 July.

1.3b: Interim Residence: Treeps, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex—6/20 July 1867 to early July 1868

Wallace retained a presence in London during this interim period. Wallace wrote to Darwin in October 1868: ‘I am now staying chiefly in the country at Hurstpierpoint but come up to town once a month at least.’¹¹



1.3b ‘Treeps’, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex. This was the house of William Mitten, Wallace’s father-in-law. Copyright AR Wallace Memorial Fund and George Beccaloni (2011). Reproduced with kind permission.

His address during these visits was 76½ Westbourne Grove.¹² Nonetheless, Wallace had not entirely moved out of St Mark’s. In November he wrote that ‘My Collection is still at 9. St. Mark’s Crescent, but I stay here when in town and get my letters quicker here in Westbourne Grove’.¹³

Wallace addressed a letter to philosopher George Henry Lewes (1817–78) from Hurstpierpoint on 26 May 1868, but a 9 July letter to Lewes was sent from St Mark’s.¹⁴ Consequently, Wallace returned to London permanently between 26 May and 9 July 1868. A move in early July is likely because Wallace’s 26 May letter states ‘I write now because I shall be out of England after the 28th [May] till July’.¹⁵ He most likely moved between his return to England and 9 July.¹⁶

1.3c: Second Residence: 9 St Mark’s Crescent—early July 1868 to 22 March 1870

On 25 January 1869 his daughter, Violet Isabel Wallace, was born.¹⁷ Beccaloni has Wallace at St Mark’s until 25 March 1870. However, in mid-March Wallace twice clarifies that he is to move on 22 March 1870.¹⁸

2: ESSEX

2.1: Holly House, Tanner Street, Barking—22 March 1870 to 25 March 1872

Wallace applied to become the Bethnal Green Museum’s inaugural director in 1869. Believing his chances to be good, he moved to Barking (Wallace 1905:1:415–6). However, when the Museum opened in 1872, no director was appointed (Fichman 2004:60). Wallace saw Holly House (which he once mistakenly calls ‘Holly Lodge’) as ‘a kind of halfway house’ and described it an ‘old cottage’ (Wallace 1905:2:90). Wallace’s third and final child, William Greenell, was born at Holly House on 30 December 1871.¹⁹

Here Wallace remained until 25 March 1872, as earlier in March he had stated that ‘I am now very busy trying to make my house [The Dell] habitable by Lady Day [25

March] when I must be in it'.²⁰ Presumably, Wallace's emphasis on 'must' meant his Holly House tenancy ended that day.

2.2: 'The Dell', Grays—25 March 1872 to 25 June/23 July 1876

The Dell was the first and only surviving house built by Wallace himself. It is also one of the earliest existing shuttered concrete houses. Ironically, it is now Grade II listed for its architectural, rather than historical, merit (Beccaloni 2008:7–8). Whilst at The Dell, Wallace's eldest son, Herbert, died on 24 April 1874 at Hurstpierpoint.

Wallace suggests he left The Dell in August 1878 (Wallace 1905:2:258), but the correspondence corroborates Beccaloni's July date showing that Wallace had moved to Dorking by 23 July 1876.²¹ We know The Dell went up for auction on 15 June 1876 and that 'possession [by the new owner] will be given on Completion of the Purchase'.²² We do not know when the purchase was completed. Wallace mentions to Darwin on 23 July that 'I should have replied sooner [to letters Darwin sent on 17 and 25 June]...but *they* reached me in the midst of my packing *previous* to my removal here'.²³ Wallace's reference to both letters arriving *before* he'd moved to Dorking places his Dorking move between 25 June and 23 July 1876.



2.2 'The Dell', Grays, Essex. Wallace built this from shuttered concrete. Reproduced from Alfred Russel Wallace, *My Life*, 2 vols (London: Cassell & Company, 1905), vol 2, p 92 (facing).

3: SURREY

3.1: Rose Hill, Dorking—25 June/23 July 1876 to March 1878

Wallace claimed to leave Dorking after an American Spiritualist medium suggested that the family should go 'to a more bracing place' in order to improve the health

of his ailing son, William (Wallace 1905:2:397). Elsewhere Wallace offers a more mundane reason: it was ‘chiefly’ to send his children to school (Wallace 1905:2:98).

Both Wallace and Beccaloni suggest the family moved from Dorking in March 1878 (Wallace 1905:2:397; Beccaloni 2008:33). There is limited correspondence for this period to confirm the March moving date.²⁴ However, we know Wallace was in Croydon by 8 April.²⁵

3.2: Croydon—March 1878 to 5 May 1881

Wallace spent three years at Croydon living in two rented houses: Waldron Edge and Pen-y-Bryn. Only Pen-y-Bryn still exists (now 44 St Peter’s Road). In Croydon, Wallace worked on his next great biogeographical work: *Island Life* (October 1880).

3.2a: Waldron Edge, Duppas Hill Lane—March 1878 to March/June 1880

Both Beccaloni (2008:34) and Sowan & Byatt (1974:87) suggest Wallace moved from Waldron Edge to Pen-y-Bryn between 9 January and 11 October 1880. Little correspondence exists but we know he moved between March and June 1880 as he addresses a 27 March letter from Waldron Edge and by 24 June he is addressing one from Pen-y-Bryn.²⁶

3.2b: Pen-y-Bryn, St Peter’s Road—March/June 1880 to 5 May 1881

Wallace spent only a year at Pen-y-Bryn before moving into the second house he built for his family: Nutwood Cottage, Godalming. In April 1881 Wallace explained that ‘after May 5th’ he would be in Godalming.²⁷ Wallace confirms this in a short note post-marked 5 May explaining ‘we are just in & are in great confusion’.²⁸

3.3: Godalming—5 May 1881 to 24 June 1889

Wallace’s residence at Godalming is more complex than originally thought. He had two residences in the town: Nutwood Cottage and a temporary rented house he took on letting Nutwood—not sold until late-1901 (Wallace 1905:2:227)—but before moving to Dorset.

3.3a: Nutwood Cottage, Frith Hill—5 May 1881 to 16 March 1889

The Godalming period was comfortable for Wallace. Financially, from January 1881 the Civil List pension offered him some respite from money concerns and socially he appeared content, surrounded by masters at Charterhouse school of whom many Wallace befriended. He also developed his garden and greenhouse and ‘cultivated

at one time or another more than a thousand species of plants’ (Wallace 1905:2:103).

Wallace’s writing—which developed a significant socio-political bent²⁹—kept him increasingly busy. His time



3.3a 'Nutwood Cottage', Godalming, Surrey. Reproduced from Alfred Russel Wallace, *My Life*, 2 vols (London: Cassell & Company, 1905), vol 2, p 103 (facing).

at Godalming neatly bookends his early involvement in the newly-formed Land Nationalisation Society (March 1881) and his final conversion to socialism.³⁰ At Godalming he wrote *Land Nationalisation* (May 1882), *Bad Times* (November 1885) and his popular *Darwinism* (May 1889) which developed alongside the American Lecture tour he undertook between October 1886 and August 1887.

3.3b: Temporary House—16 March 1889 to 24 June 1889

Wallace vacated Nutwood a few months before moving to Dorset. *My Life* suggests he let Nutwood from Lady Day (25 March) 1889 (Wallace 1905:2:203). However, on 22 February he noted that he was letting his house from 16 March.³¹ Furthermore, on 7 April 1889 Wallace explains they were ‘in a temporary house till we fix on a permanent one’.³² All his correspondence between April and 24 June 1889 is addressed simply ‘Godalming’ rather than his usual ‘Frith Hill, Godalming’.

The search for a new home was a long-protracted process. However, on 14 May they had—‘after thoroughly exploring Ryde, Ventnor, and Parkstone’—taken a house in Parkstone and were moving in from Midsummer.³³ They couldn’t move in straight away, however. Wallace explains to William on 9 June that:

Last Tuesday I went to Parkstone to meet the landlord & see the alterations in the house. He is doing it very nicely & I think it will be a very snug little place with enough garden for us & very pretty country near. It is not only a tiled roof but it is one of the prettiest & best built little houses I ever saw. I do not think there is one in Godalming so pretty.³⁴

By 17 June Wallace was giving his address ‘after June 24th’ as Corfe View.³⁵ By 24 June the family had vacated the house, but Wallace remained until 26 June to arrange moving his plants.³⁶

4: DORSET

4.1: ‘Corfe View’, Parkstone, Dorset—24 June 1889 to 18/20 September 1902

It is small, very pretty, and uncommon house, with lovely views, very sheltered, backed up by a hill & fine wood, with beautiful country all round, a small but pretty garden that we can manage ourselves—flowers only—orchises growing on the lawn, and not a hundred yards from Parkstone station whence Bournemouth is reached in 5 minutes... I think Ma is quite pleased with it though there are no cupboards, & a bedroom where the cellars usually are, but that makes it all the more uncommon.³⁷

4.1 ‘Corfe View’, Parkstone, Dorset. Painted by Annie Wallace. Copyright AR Wallace Memorial Fund and George Beccaloni (2010). Reproduced with kind permission.



Wallace originally rented Corfe View before purchasing it in 1890, adding a new kitchen, bedroom and enlarged drawing room. Wallace believed—again—he was ‘settled for life at Parkstone’ and began to attempt to grow orchids: a passion harboured since childhood.

“...Ma is quite pleased with it though there are no cupboards, & a bedroom where the cellars usually are, but that makes it all the more uncommon.”

Wallace remained busy, appearing as a witness for the Royal Commission on Vaccination in 1890 and publishing *Vaccination a Delusion* (February 1898) and *The Wonderful Century* (June 1898).

From mid-1900 Wallace was again house-hunting in places like Sussex. As he explained to Raphael Meldola: ‘we think of leaving here as we are getting entirely built round, & the place does not agree with any of us.’³⁸ However, it was not until two years later that he’d agreed to ‘be out of here [Corfe View] by Sept[ember]. 20th. to let the paperers & painters put the house in order, have a new kitchen put in etc’.³⁹ By 2 September he was informing people they would be ‘moving about the 18th’.⁴⁰ Certainly, by 22 September he was in ‘diggings’ in Broadstone.⁴¹

4.2: Broadstone—18/20 September 1902 to 7 November 1913

Wallace was 79 years old when he moved to Broadstone. Despite his age, Wallace threw himself into the building work. Wallace anticipated Old Orchard cost him nearly £1,500 and left him in debt to about £100 but added that it would be ‘well worth it’.⁴²

4.2a: 57 York Road—18/20 September 1902 to mid-November 1902

Wallace explains on 13 September 1902 that he would be ‘at “diggings” on the way to the “Old Orchard”’ by 22 September. These diggings were Jane Clark’s house who was the ‘mother of our engineer’, Charles Gilbert Clark.⁴³

4.2b: ‘Old Orchard’—mid-November 1902 to 7 November 1913

Wallace’s *My Life* suggests they were in Old Orchard by Christmas 1902. However, his children recollected that ‘We moved into the new house at Broadstone at the end of November, 1902, before it was quite finished’ (Marchant 1916:2:120). His children appear to be correct; although not occupying the whole house, the Wallaces were already living in Old Orchard from November. Indeed, Wallace wrote on 26 October about moving in during November.⁴⁴ On 15 November—having hot water and lavatories—he declared the study ‘habitable’. However, he appears to be still in their ‘diggings’ as his letter opens with ‘having got home early this evening’ and is addressed from ‘Broadstone, Wimborne’—his convention whilst in his ‘diggings’.⁴⁵ Once settled in Old Orchard he addressed letters from ‘Broadstone, Dorset’.⁴⁶ Wallace confirms that they had moved into the house—or rather a small part of it—soon after



4.2b 'Old Orchard', Broadstone, Dorset. Wallace built this house and lived in it from 1902 until his death in 1913. He is buried nearby. Copyright A. R. Wallace Memorial Fund and George Beccaloni (2010). Reproduced with kind permission.

buried in Broadstone cemetery on 10 November 1913. Thus ended one of the most interesting, innovative and—as this study has helped to show— itinerant lives of the 19th and early-20th centuries.

CONCLUSION

Clearly gaps still exist and it is unlikely we will ever be able to fully confirm Wallace's residences as we can with Darwin (especially regarding the early and middle periods of his life). However, as Wallace's body of correspondence continues to be collected and catalogued, we will learn more about his homes. Hopefully this will help to provide a better understanding of the role of Wallace's diverse residences and environments on his later and equally fascinating intellectual evolution.

Main Archives

All letters include a 'WCP' number. This can be easily searched for on the Wallace Letters Online page (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/collections/library-collections/wallace-letters-online/index.html>).

BL: British Library (Wallace Papers)

CUL: Cambridge University Library (Darwin, Newton, and Croll Papers)

NHM: Natural History Museum (Wallace Collection)

OUMNH: Hope Entomological Library, Oxford University Museum of Natural History

RBG: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (DC English Letters)

RGS: Royal Geographical Society (Correspondence Block (CB4))

ZSL: Zoological Society of London (Letters to the Secretary)

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Notes

1. ARW and HW Bates to WJ Hooker, 30 March 1848. RBG (1848, vol.26.) [WCP3802].
2. *The Zoologist*, vol 10, no 119 (November 1852), 3641–3643.
3. For example, ARW to H Norton Shaw, 19 November 1853. RGS [WCP3560].
4. ARW to WA Bailie-Hamilton, 8 February 1854. RGS [WCP4306]. A copy of this letter was included with the letter sent by Wallace to Norton Shaw on 8 February 1854.
5. Wallace informed Sclater of the 'prosperous termination of my journey & the safe arrival in England' in this letter addressed from the Pavilion Hotel, Folkestone: ARW to PL Sclater, 31 March 1862. ZSL [WCP1723].
6. ARW to Sclater, 4 April 1862. ZSL. [WCP1724]; to Sclater, 7 April 1862. ZSL. [WCP1719]; to Darwin, 7 April 1862. CUL (MSS.DAR.106:B1) [WCP1847].
7. ARW to Alfred Newton, 19 February 1865. CUL (Add.9839/1W/70) [WCP4006].
8. WCP suggest (on 18 April 2014) a letter from Wallace to Charles Lyell, addressed as 9 St Mark's Crescent, was sent on 19 March 1865 (WCP4871). However, the year is not

included on the original and reference to Andrew Murray's *Geographical Distribution of Mammals* (1866) suggests a later year (most likely 1867 as Lyell and Wallace were then corresponding on the distribution of mammals).

9. The Wallace family prayerbook—still held by the family—reads: 'Herbert S[pencer] Wallace | Born June 22nd. 1867.'
10. ARW to Lyell, 6 July 1867. Darwin-Lyell Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia [WCP4873].
11. ARW to Darwin, 1 October 1867. CUL (MSS.DAR.106:B43–44) [WCP1882].
12. ARW to Darwin, 22 October 1867. CUL (MSS.DAR.106:B46–47) [WCP1884].
13. ARW to Newton, 22 November 1867. CUL (Add.9839/1/W/85) [WCP4021].
14. ARW to GH Lewes, 9 July 1868. BL (Add.46439,ff45–46) [WCP3003].
15. ARW to Lewes, 26 May 1868. BL (Add.46439,f.44) [WCP3002].
16. WCP suggests (on 18 April 2014) Wallace received a letter at Hurstpierpoint on 2 June 1868. However, the letter contains no evidence that it was addressed to Wallace at Hurstpierpoint: SEB Bouverie-Pusey to ARW, 2 June 1868. BL (Add.46441,ff19–20) [WCP3083].
17. The family prayerbook reads: 'Violet Isabel Wallace | Born Jan[uar]y. 25th. 1869.'
18. ARW to HT Stainton, 13 March 1870. NHM (Catkey-418320) [WCP669] and to James Croll, 14 March 1870. BL (Add.41077,ff46–47) [WCP3353].
19. The family prayerbook reads: 'William Greenell Wallace | Born Dec[embe]r. 30th. 1871.'
20. ARW to Darwin, 3 March 1872. BL (Add.46434,f.236) [WCP1951].
21. ARW to Darwin, 23 July 1876. BL (Add.46434,ff271–272) [WCP1970]; to Newton, 23 July 1876. CUL (Add.9839/1W/117) [WCP4054].
22. 'The Particulars and Conditions of Sale of the Detached Residence Known as "The Dell," Grays, Essex' (London, 1876). Local Studies, f.205. Grays Library, Thurrock Public Libraries.
23. Darwin to ARW, 25 June 1876. BL (Add.46434,ff268–270) [WCP1969]; Darwin to ARW, 17 June 1876. BL (Add.46434,ff264–7) [WCP1968]; ARW to Darwin, 23 July 1876. BL (Add.46434,ff271–272) [WCP1970].
24. WCP suggests that a 19 March letter was sent to Wallace at Waldron Edge by FJ Bell suggesting Wallace was already living there. However, the letter contains no evidence confirming it was addressed to Waldron Edge: Bell to ARW, 19 March 1878. BL (Add.46435,ff383–384) [WCP2357].
25. ARW to Assistant Secretary of the BAAS, 8 April 1878. George Griffiths Letters Collection, Greater Manchester County Record Office [WCP1758]. Additionally Wallace's preface to *Tropical Nature* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1878) reads 'Croydon, April 1878'.
26. ARW to Robert McLachlan, 24 June 1880. OUMNH (ARW227) [WCP4576]. WCP suggest Wallace received a letter from Arthur Hobhouse at Pen-y-Bryn on 8 May 1880. However, the letter does not provide any evidence to support that: Hobhouse to ARW, 8 May 1880. BL (Add.46441,ff54–55) [WCP3107].

27. ARW to CM Ingleby, 17 April 1881. C.a.26(37). Folger Shakespeare Library [WCP4346].
28. ARW to Raphael Meldola, 5 May 1881. OUMNH (ARW263) [WCP4605].
29. In a letter to FWH Myers, Wallace notes 'I am now devoting my attention more especially to politics—the Land Question especially': ARW to Myers, 30 January 1881. NHM (WP2/6/3/3/2) [WCP1567].
30. The earliest reference to Wallace's Socialist conversion is a letter to Grant Allen. In this, Wallace notes his move from Godalming adding: 'I have just read "Looking Backward" and it has convinced me of the practicability and desirability of Socialism. It is a work of true genius.' See: ARW to Allen, 22 July 1889. Robert M. Stecher Collection (Correspondence—1850–1900), Cleveland Health Sciences Library, Case Western Reserve University [WCP4652].
31. ARW to EB Poulton, 22 February 1889. OUMNH (ARW17) [WCP4364].
32. ARW to ED Girdlestone, 7 April 1889. Private Collection [WCP3607].
33. ARW to Violet Wallace [VIW], 16 May 1889. NHM (WP1/2/1) [WCP202].
34. ARW to William Greenell Wallace [WGW], 9 June 1889. NHM (WP1/1/1) [WCP1].
35. ARW to George Nicholson, 17 June 1889. RBG (1857–1900, vol.104) [WCP3826].
36. ARW to VIW, 30 June 1889. NHM (WP1/2/2) [WCP203].
37. ARW to VIW, 16 May 1889. NHM (WP1/2/1) [WCP202].
38. ARW to Meldola, 15 July 1900. OUMNH (ARW196) [WCP4544].
39. ARW to WGW, 23 August 1902. NHM (WP1/1/61) [WCP61].
40. ARW to CEC Wilson, 2 September 1902. Private Collection (JG Wilson) [WCP4800].
41. ARW to WGW, 13 September 1902. NHM (WP1/1/63) [WCP63].
42. ARW to WGW, 15 November 1902. NHM (WP1/1/66) [WCP66].
43. ARW to WGW, 13 September 1902. NHM (WP1/1/63) [WCP63]. Other details from 1891 and 1901 Censuses.
44. ARW to WGW, 26 October 1902. NHM (WP1/1/64) [WCP64].
45. ARW to WGW, 15 November 1902. NHM (WP1/1/66) [WCP66].
46. The earliest use of 'Broadstone, Dorset' currently available is ARW's letter to WGW, 30 November 1902. NHM (WP1/1/67). Consequently we can be fairly confident he was in Old Orchard by the end of November.
47. ARW to WGW, 19 December 1902. NHM (WP1/1/68) [WCP68].

