

## The Sarawak Association

**The Sarawak Association and the British Malaysia Society will hold a joint meeting at 6pm on 20th March 2017 at the Royal Overseas League, to show the \_docu-drama film :**

### SEARCHING FOR ALI WALLACE

During the making of the film that you will see, the intention of the team led by Gathorne Cranbrook and film-maker Jamie Curtis-Hayward was to create a coherent number of clips that will be put together by two Indonesian colleagues, June Thio (professional film-maker) and Saleh Amin ('Ale'), narrator, to compose a documentary in *bahasa* that will justify the standing of **Ali Wallace** (as he named himself) as a self-taught naturalist-collector and Indonesian hero, whose endeavours saved the life and helped to create the reputation of his employer, Alfred Russel Wallace.

A.R. Wallace is famous as the co-originator, with Charles Darwin, of the theory of evolution by natural selection, arguably the most significant advance in biology of the 19th Century. He developed the theory as a naturalist-collector in island south-east Asia, including Sarawak from November 1854 to January 1856. At the start, he was accompanied by a young English assistant, Charles Allen. In December 1855, Wallace was invited to join Rajah James Brooke (and Spenser St John) at the Rajah's hill-top bungalow, Peninjau. Here he made such fantastic collections of moths that he returned in January 1855. At this time, Allen declared his intention to resign and, on his second trip to Peninjau, Wallace brought a new recruit, a Malay youth known only by his name, Ali. In his contemporary journal, his letters home and in later publications, Wallace consistently referred to Ali in terms such as 'My Borneo boy', or 'My Sarawak lad', but gave no other clues to his background. This conundrum is the core issue tackled in the film.

In his autobiography (*My Life*, 1905) Wallace published a posed studio photograph of Ali, taken in Singapore. He acknowledged his debt to Ali for his loyalty, often acting as nurse during Wallace's many bouts of debilitating illness, as well as his skills as a collector and man-manager. Other glimpses of Ali are found in *The Malay Archipelago* (1869): he was a Muslim; he married in Ternate, and at first stayed on that island with his new wife while Wallace continued his collecting trips. His clothing and appearance can be seen in two illustrations. From indications such as these, the film makers dressed and coached the young amateur, Rafael, who played the part of Ali. Wallace was played by the professional actor, Hal Scardino. Other actors were friends, ourselves or helpful characters found locally.

The result is a 'behind the scenes', light-hearted film about the journey of the film crew retracing the footsteps of Wallace and Ali from Sarawak to Ternate. Decisive episodes in the story of Ali include his achievement in collecting and bringing in to his astonished employer the extraordinary new species of bird of Paradise, subsequently described, not as Ali's, but Wallace's Standard Wing *Semioptera wallacii*.

The film was first shown in Kuching, sponsored by the Friends of Sarawak Museum in October 2016 and later had its UK Premiere at the Suffolk Aldeburgh Documentary Film Festival in November 2016.

The Sarawak Association will hold a joint meeting with the British Malaysia Society at the Royal Overseas League in London on 20 March 2017 at 6pm to show the film, with an introductory talk by the Earl of Cranbrook, Dato Sri Dr Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy. The film will be presented by Jamie Curtis Hayward, the film director.

There will be a cash bar available for the evening. Tickets, priced at £10, are obtainable from the Hon. Secretary, The Sarawak Association. Please contact by email [Sarawak.association@gmail.com](mailto:Sarawak.association@gmail.com) or by post to 50, Brewery Road, Woking GU21 4NA, with cheques payable to *The Sarawak Association*. Alternatively payment may be made direct to the Association account, details of which will be given by the Hon Secretary on request.