The Oxfordsparks podcasts. Episode 6. Explosions. Part II.

Life on Earth… It wasn’t always as diverse and interesting as it is today. That all change with the Cambrian explosion.

500 million years ago life suddenly evolved in a very rapid burst, what we see in the fossil record is the sudden appearance of animals where there were no animals before.

Hi! I’m Allison Daley and I’m a paleontologist at the University of Oxford.

So, what was life like before there were animals? Let’s go back in time to see the early Earth.

The Earth is about 4.5 billion years old. And for about 3.5 billion years all of life was very simple. It was microbio, single-celled, usually not very complex, and it lasted for 3 billion years. Life was simple and microbio. Then around 600 million years ago we see first multi-cellular life but we don’t get animals about 500 million years ago.

So, to put this another way, if we reduced all of the history of Earth into a single day, where Earth was first born at midnight, we would see the origin of a single cell life at about four o’clock in the morning. And this microbio world would persist until nine o’clock at night.