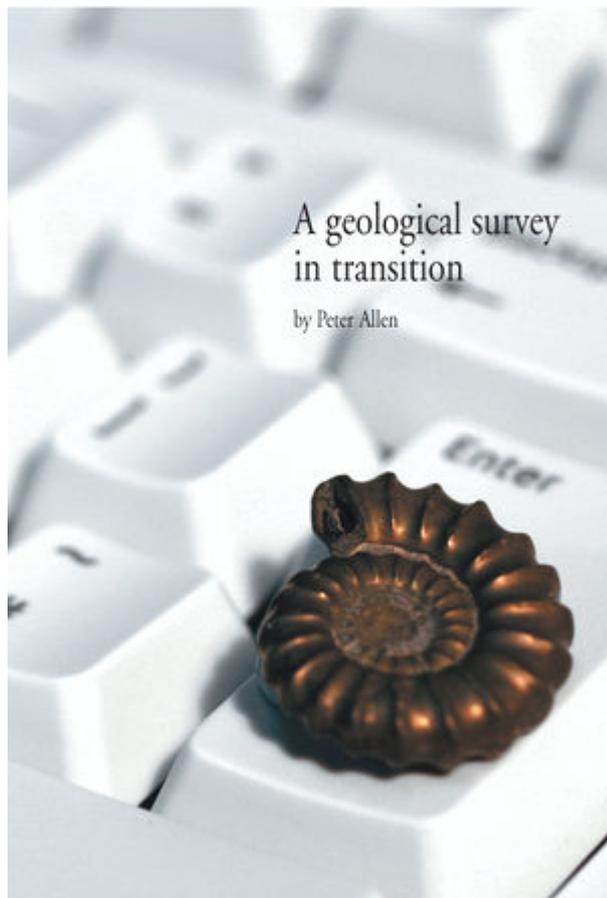


Geological survey in transition

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Preface

This book is Peter Allen's account of the events that affected the role, status, organisation and management of the British Geological Survey during the latter part of the twentieth century. The author is particularly well qualified to write this account. He joined the Survey (then the Institute of Geological Sciences) in 1967. After a period working overseas he transferred to the Land Survey in 1970 and was based in the Leeds Office. His interest in the way the Survey was run soon found expression in trades-union activity. He was active within the Leeds Subsection of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants during the 1970s and was chairman of the IGS Section of IPCS between 1978 and 1981. In 1978, when the transfer of staff to the new headquarters at Keyworth was already under way, he took part in a Staff Side initiative that led to the establishment of a working party to identify and assess the scientific and organisational considerations for and against the centralisation of IGS staff in England and Wales. As a result of this, district offices were opened in Aberystwyth and Newcastle and the Joint Official/Staff Side Committee on Keyworth (JOSCK), which oversaw the move, was established. In 1985 he was secretary to the Survey's first Strategic Plan Working Party.

His first management position was Programme Manager for the Lower Palaeozoic, Southern Uplands and Lake District, which he took up in 1984 when he was based in Newcastle. Following this, after a short period in charge of the South-western England Programme, based in Exeter, he became an Assistant Director in 1987 and served on the Directorate until he retired at the end of June 2000.

Peter started this book during his last weeks of service and completed it during his retirement. To a certain extent it is a personal story, reflecting his own experiences and viewpoint, but it is well researched and provides an authoritative account of the period. Nearly all of the events described have been in the public record for some time, but much of the background information and analysis is published here for the first time. In gathering this information the author has been allowed access to confidential BGS papers as well as documents that are in the public domain. Throughout, he sought documentary evidence to support his analysis rather than rely on his memory.

The book covers a time of transition for all public services in the UK; a time of change in the perception of how a public-service organisation should be run; a time when the public services were forced to become increasingly commercial in their outlook, with a concomitant change in the nature of their customer base; a time of stringency in public-sector budgets; and, not least, a time of revolution in information technology.

The British Geological Survey shares some experiences in common with other parts of the public sector during this time, but in other respects it is unique. This book, therefore, is a case history of a public body undergoing change. It will be read by those interested in the recent history of the BGS, but it should also attract a wider readership among students of the history of geological surveys, public administration and the management of science in government. The book provides insights into how one public body has responded to changes in the political, social and technological environment within which it exists. Many of the ideas for change came from outside the BGS; others were internally stimulated. Not all were well conceived and the book covers in detail the way in which the Survey resisted and, ultimately, defeated some of the worst of them. The reader may find it heartening to learn that so many of the least appropriate proposals were eventually defeated, but may also be more than a little dismayed at the enormous expenditure of time, effort and money required to achieve this end, all of which could have been better spent carrying out the geoscientific research for which the BGS exists.

I am indebted to Peter for providing this invaluable record for us.

David A Falvey, PhD

Executive Director

Foreword

There are five histories of the British Geological Survey (BGS) currently available. The first was written by Sir John Smith Flett, *The first hundred years of the Geological Survey of Great Britain*. It was a memorial volume to celebrate the centenary of the Survey and contained a full and systematic account of its growth and development. In 1952, Sir Edward Battersby Bailey published the *Geological Survey of Great Britain*. In the preface he says that he wrote it originally for the British Council, to appear in their series *Science in Britain*, but the series was discontinued so he published it as a book rather than waste the effort he had put into it. He also covers the period since the Survey was founded in 1835, but he put more emphasis on scientific progress than did Flett. Harry Wilson wrote another full account, *Down to Earth*, bringing the history up to the sesquicentennial year, 1985. Two other accounts have been published as BGS technical reports covering only recent

history. Peter Cook, on his retirement at the end of 1997, published his review of the period he was Director, *A history of the British Geological Survey 1990-1997*. Finally, in 1999, Dennis Hackett, who had been the BGS Secretary since the mid-1980s, compiled *Our corporate history. Key events affecting the British Geological Survey, 1967-1998*, which contained brief summaries of major events since the formation of the research councils in 1965, including a detailed commentary on the development of the Survey at its site at Keyworth.

I planned this book to carry on from where Harry Wilson finished. My original aim was to concentrate on the period from 1985, which is where he ended, to 2000, which was when I retired. Much of what happened in that time, however, was influenced by earlier events. Reference to them, often in some detail, is unavoidable. Thus, though the end date is fixed at the year 2000, the start date for this history is variable.

It must always be a temptation to regard one's own time in an organisation as being the most exciting in its history and I admit sometimes to succumbing to that thought. In fact, it was this that stimulated me to write the account in the first place. The British Geological Survey is an instrument of Government, though a very small part of it, and its fortunes wax and wane according to policies of Government as interpreted by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), which has been the Survey's parent body since 1965. When Peter Cook came to the end of his directorship at the end of 1997, he calculated that the BGS had been subjected to a major review at the rate of one every two years since 1985 and pleaded with the NERC Science and Management Audit team in 1997 to recommend a period of calm. I strongly sympathised with his plea. Because of my involvement in the development of the 1985 Strategic Plan I was in a central position among BGS senior management even before I became an Assistant Director in 1987, and looking back on the fifteen-year period now, it seems that the whole of it was in turmoil. It was full of reviews, management reorganisations, funding crises, periods of bullishness in NERC HQ, demands to adapt and adjust to something new from Government and, hanging like a black cloud over all of this from 1988 to 1997, was the threat of privatisation. Throughout, the BGS seemed to be set in a responsive mode. Much of the energy expended by BGS management during this period was used up fighting external threats and reacting to external demands; too little to the job of managing the organisation. But there is no doubt that, despite the odds, this was a very vigorous and creative period, which has left the Survey now a totally different organisation from the one that celebrated its sesquicentenary in 1985.

This book is laid out thematically, with a chronological overprint. I have concentrated on the major events, usually those surrounding the reviews to which Peter Cook referred. My purpose has been to look at these outside influences to see how they affected the BGS and how the Survey reacted to them. In this respect, this book is quite different from the other histories of the BGS. I have paid little attention to the science or the structure of the work programme or the Survey's achievements during this period. These could lead to a major study in its own right. My justification for missing these out is that they were not the central theme of the book I wanted to write. Besides, there are good summaries of all the Survey's scientific achievements in its annual reports.

Throughout the book, I have tried to remain true to the factual evidence at my disposal, but it is unavoidable that in places I have offered interpretations or made judgmental comments. Where this has happened, the responsibility for them is mine alone. This is particularly true of the analysis I have presented in the final chapter. My source material has primarily been from the official files for the period, but I have been able to use the personal files I kept through the turbulent period 1985 to 1988. I have also referred to various published sources, such as the BGS and NERC annual reports, the NERC corporate plans, the BGS business plans (which were internal documents, not available outside BGS) and a number of brochures, pamphlets, the BGS office notices and NERC notices. A list of sources is presented in Appendix 3.

The British Geological Survey came into existence under that name in January 1984. From 1965 until then it had been called the Institute of Geological Sciences. In order to avoid confusion, I have, as far as possible, tried to avoid using the name Institute of Geological Sciences, preferring to use British Geological Survey or the BGS or simply the Survey, even when referring to the organisation prior to 1984.

I have written this book in the third person, but in places, where I have recounted events in which I was intimately involved, I found it difficult to sustain without making the text clumsy and I have slipped into the first person.

Many people have helped me. I have had lengthy conversations with Innes Lumsden and Geoff Larminie, both past Directors. Dennis Hackett and Tony Reedman have read and commented on the whole book. Doug Fettes and Ian Jackson have read and commented on parts of it. It was edited by Henry Haslam, who also made useful comments about the content. David Gray, an Assistant Director in the early period, also provided information. In addition many current members of staff sought out information for me. Among these, Graham McKenna, the chief librarian, has been very helpful, often finding things that other mortals have forgotten about. To everyone, I am extremely grateful. I am most grateful to the current Executive Director, David Falvey, for allowing me unconstrained access to all relevant official files and for giving permission to publish this book.

Peter Allen August 2001

Notes on the British Geological Survey

The British Geological Survey is the sole national body responsible for the acquisition, interpretation, management and dissemination of geoscientific data relating to Great Britain and the surrounding continental shelf. This is done primarily through nationwide geological, geochemical, hydrogeological and geophysical surveys and monitoring, a programme of underpinning research and development and the publication of maps and descriptive accounts. In addition, the BGS carries out commissioned geoscientific research in the UK and overseas on behalf of Government, other public bodies and the private sector. The BGS manages and maintains the national geoscientific archive of maps, documents, rocks, fossils and borehole core and samples. Much data are in digital form.

The British Geological Survey has been a component body of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) since 1965.

Between 1965 and 1983, the Survey was known as the Institute of Geological Sciences. In 1984 the name was changed to the British Geological Survey.

The headquarters of the Survey formally moved from London to Keyworth, near Nottingham, in 1985. Staff from several London offices and Leeds were transferred there during the period 1976 to 1989. In 1990 the Keyworth site was named the Kingsley Dunham Centre, in honour of the first Director of the Institute of Geological Sciences. Other offices are in Edinburgh (regional office) and Wallingford, where hydrogeological staff share premises with the NERC's Institute of Hydrology. There are small offices in Exeter and Belfast; one member of staff is retained in Cardiff and a London Information Office with sales outlet maintained in The Natural History Museum.

Staff grades and titles in the Survey

The organisational structure of the British Geological Survey and the responsibilities of senior staff

between 1980 and 2000 are shown in [Figure 2](#), [Figure 3](#), [Figure 4](#), [Figure 5](#), [Figure 6](#), [Figure 7](#), [Figure 8](#), [Figure 9](#), [Figure 10](#).

Until 1985, the Survey was headed by a Director at Grade 3 level. There was a Deputy Director at Grade 4 (between 1982 and 1984 there were two Deputy Directors). In 1985 the post of Deputy Director was abolished and the Director became Grade 4 (See Appendix 2).

There were between nine (1980) and five (2000) Assistant Directors (ADs), each heading a Division or Directorate. They were at Grade 5 level (later called Band 2). Together with the Director, Deputy Director(s) and BGS Secretary (head of administration), the ADs formed the Directorate, the governing body of the Survey (See Appendix 2).

Each Division (or Directorate) was composed of a number of Units, later known as Groups or Programmes. Most were headed by Senior Principal Scientific Officers (SPSO, later termed Grade 6 and now Band 3), though some were headed by more junior grades. The SPSOs in charge of units in the Land Survey (whose main work was systematic geological mapping) were known as District Geologists (DGs).

The career grade for a scientist was Principal Scientific Officer (PSO; Grade 7; Band 4). Below this level were Senior Scientific Officers (SSO; Band 5), Higher Scientific Officers (HSO; Band 6), Scientific Officers (SO; Band 7) and Assistant Scientific Officers (ASO; Band 8). There were equivalent grades for nonscientists.

Individual Merit Promotion (IMP; formerly Special Merit Promotion) enabled particularly successful scientists to be promoted to SPSO (Grade 6; Band 3) or higher and continue with scientific work, without the managerial responsibility normally associated with their grade.

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