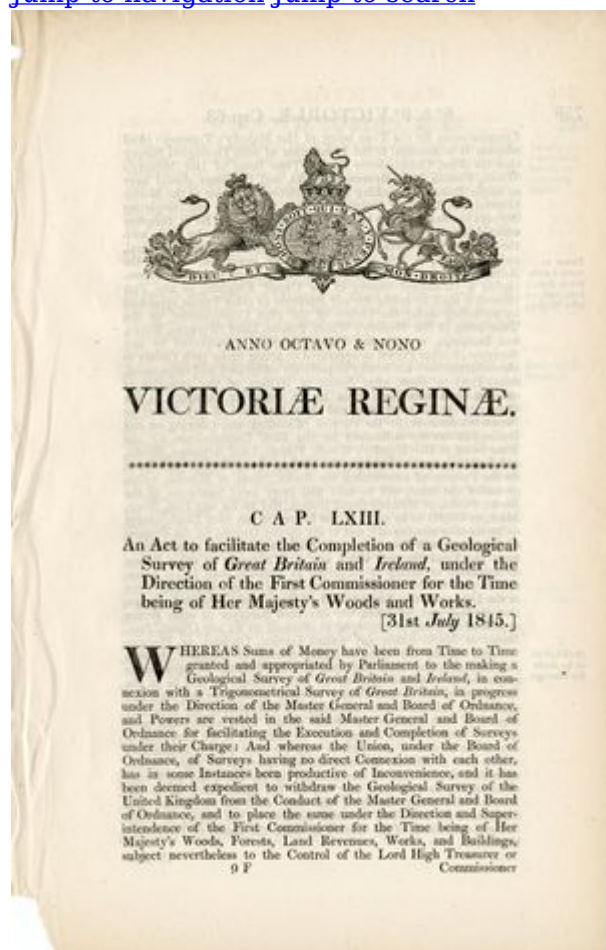


# History of the British Geological Survey

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The Geological Survey Act and the creation of the Geological Survey of Great Britain & Ireland

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# History of the British Geological Survey

## Brief timeline

### **1832 – Henry De la Beche begins mapping as a private endeavor in Devon and Cornwall**

Thomas F Colby, Superintendent of the Ordnance Survey, recognised the practical value of a geological examination of the country and supported Henry Thomas De la Beche, Vice-President of the Geological Society, to undertake a geological survey of Devon.

### **1835 – Ordnance Geological Survey**

The success of De la Beche's work in Devon and Cornwall led to establishment of the Ordnance Geological Survey in 1835 under the Board of Ordnance; De la Beche became its first Director.

### **1835 – The Museum of Economic Geology**

In August 1835, De la Beche obtained funding from the Board of Works to establish a museum at Craig's Court, Whitehall, London; the Museum of Economic Geology was opened in 1841. One of its most important acquisitions was some building stones proposed for the new Houses of Parliament.

### **1839 – The Mining Record Office**

By 1839, the Survey included a new Mining Record Office that collected and stored abandoned mine plans, which was set up in response to a mining disaster in C. Durham when flooding occurred in a mine from nearby old workings. From about 1847 the Survey also started collecting and publishing mineral production statistics and then international trade statistics; an activity which still happens today.

### **1845 – The Geological Survey Act and the creation of the Geological Survey of Great Britain & Ireland**

The Geological Survey Act of 1845 provided the Survey with a legal framework designed 'to facilitate the completion of a geological survey of Great Britain and Ireland.' Responsibility for the Survey, which now incorporated the geological department in Ireland, passed from the Board of Ordnance to the Office of Woods, Forests, Land Revenues, Works and Buildings. This transition meant that field officers of the Survey were no longer required to wear the military-style uniform of blue serge with brass buttons and a top hat!

### **1851 – The new Museum of Practical Geology opens**

The site was between Jermyn Street and Piccadilly a few yards east of St. James's Church. The Museum had a lecture-room capable of holding an audience of 600. It was famous for its 'penny lectures' — 'six lectures for sixpence'.

### **1853 – The Survey passed from the First Commissioner of Woods and Forests to the Department of Science and Art**

### **1856 – The Survey passed from the Department of Science and Art to the Education Department of the Privy Council, (Board of Education from 1899)**

## **1905 – Geological Survey of Great Britain**

On 1 April 1905, The Geological Survey of Ireland was transferred to the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland. The Geological Survey of Great Britain & Ireland was renamed Geological Survey of Great Britain.

## **1919 – The Survey passed to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research**

On 1 November 1919 the Geological Survey and Museum was transferred to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR). Subsequently, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research Act of 1956 amended aspects of the management of research functions and placed the DSIR under the charge of a Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; the forerunner of the current Research Councils.

## **1965 – The Science and Technology Act and the creation of the Institute of Geological Sciences**

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)—the BGS parent body—was confirmed by Royal Charter as a result of the 1965 Act. The Geological Survey and Museum was combined with the Overseas Geological Surveys (OGS) in the following year and renamed the Institute of Geological Sciences (IGS).

## **1984 – The Survey is renamed to the British Geological Survey**

On 1 January 1984 the Institute of Geological Sciences was renamed the British Geological Survey. The next year the headquarters was established at Keyworth, near Nottingham and the offices at the Geological Museum at South Kensington were relinquished to the Natural History Museum, which now form the Earth Galleries.

## **2018 – British Geological Survey (and NERC) becomes part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)**

UKRI brings together seven existing UK research councils, Innovate UK and the Research and Knowledge Exchange functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) into one unified body.

## **List of Directors of the British Geological Survey**

Sir Henry Thomas De la Beche, 1835-1835

Sir Roderick Impey Murchison, 1855-1871 Director General

Sir Andrew Crombie Ramsay, 1871-1881 Director General

Sir Archibald Geikie, 1882-1901 Director General

Sir Jethro Justinian Harris Teall, 1901-1914

Sir Aubrey Strahan, 1914-1920

Sir John Smith Flett, 1920-1935

Bernard Smith 1935-1936

Sir Edward Battersby Bailey 1937-1945

Dr. William Francis Porter McLintock 1945-1950

Sir William John Pugh 1950-1960

Sir Cyril James Stubblefield 1960-1966

Sir Kingsley Charles Dunham 1967-1976

Dr. Austin William Woodland 1976-1979

Dr. George Malcolm Brown 1979-1985

G. I. Lumsden 1985-1987

F. G. Larminie 1987-1990

Dr. Peter Cook 1990-1998

Dr. David Falvey 1998-2006

Professor John Ludden CBE 2006-2019

Dr. Karen Hanghøj 2019-

## **Survey name changes**

1832 Henry De la Beche begins mapping as a private endeavour in Devon and Cornwall

1835 Ordnance Geological Survey

1845 Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland

1905 Geological Survey of Great Britain

1965 Institute of Geological Sciences

1984 British Geological Survey

## **Location of Survey headquarters over time**

1841-1851 Craig's Court (cul-de-sac on the south side of Whitehall, 100 yards from Trafalgar Square)

1851-1933 Museum of Practical Geology, Jermyn Street, London

1933-1984 New Museum of Practical Geology, later called The Geological Museum, Exhibition Road, London

1984- Keyworth, Nottingham

## Links

### British Geological Survey - the legislative framework

Bowie, R. [The legislative framework of the British Geological Survey](#). OR/11/019.

### Full text histories of BGS on Earthwise

Flett, Sir John S. 1937. [The first hundred years of the Geological Survey of Great Britain](#). (London: HMSO)

Cook, P J. 1998. [A history of the British Geological Survey, 1990-1997](#). British Geological Survey Technical Report WQ/98/1.

Hackett, D. 1999. [Our corporate history: key events affecting the British Geological Survey, 1967-1998](#). British Geological Survey Technical Report WQ/99/1.

Allen, P M. 2003. [A geological survey in transition](#). (Keyworth: British Geological Survey). [available to buy online]

Dixey, F. 1957. [Colonial Geological Surveys, 1947-56: a review of progress during the past ten years](#). Colonial Geology and Mineral Resources, Supplement Series no. 2.

[Instructions for the Local Directors of the Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland Henry de la Beche 22nd May 1845](#). Geological surveying procedures and administrative instructions issued when the Survey became the independent 'Geological Survey of Great Britain & Ireland in 1845.

[Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland: A contemporary account of the Survey, 1897. Summary of Progress, 1897](#). [A contemporary account of the function and workings of the Survey]

### Scotland

Wilson, R.B. 1977. [A history of the Geological Survey in Scotland](#). NERC, IGS.

Browitt, C. 1997. [The British Geological Survey in Scotland](#) Unpublished ms.

### Others to follow:

Bailey, Sir Edward. 1952. Geological Survey of Great Britain. (London: Thomas Murby)

Wilson, H E. 1985. Down to earth: one hundred and fifty years of the British Geological Survey. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press) (Including the activities of the former Overseas Geological Surveys)

### BGS administrative archives

[BGS Archive](#) Online catalogue to the administrative archives of BGS.

### Timeline

[Origins of BGS — a poster \(download PDF\)](#)

## **Biographical information on early Survey staff**

[Pioneers of the British Geological Survey](#) — brief details of all Survey staff up to c 1933. Includes listings of biographical works and obituaries.

[Staff list of the Geological Survey and Museum, 1835-1935](#) (from Flett's history)

[Henry De la Beche](#)

[Alexander Henry Green](#)

[Joseph Hooker](#)

[Robert Kidston - biographical information](#)

[The Kidston Collection of fossil plants, with an account of the life and work of Robert Kidston](#)

[William Edmond Logan](#)

[Benjamin Neeve Peach - biographical information](#)

## **Photographs and archives on Geoscenic**

[Geoscenic](#) contains a wealth of Survey photographs from the 1890s to the present as well as a number of special collections by Survey staff below:

[Henry Mowbray Cadell collection of photographs and archives](#)

[A.G. MacGregor archive — 1936 Royal Society expedition to Montserrat](#)

[Ben Peach sketches](#)

[Dr. R. Kidston Carboniferous fossil plants](#)

[Survey staff photographs. Geological Survey and Museum and Royal School of Mines, 1850-1910. IGS1.639](#)

[Museum of Practical Geology, Jermyn Street, London. c1855 -1900. GSM.MG.E.5](#)

[Joseph D. Hooker collection of microscope slides](#)

[E.O. Teale photograph collection 1900s-1930s \(mostly Africa\)](#)

[J.V. Stephens Italy collection taken during the Second World War](#)

[George Scott Johnstone collection - Scottish mountains](#)

## **Assorted topics**

[A century on film—a brief history of photography in BGS](#)

[Geologists at War 1939-1945](#)—contributions made by geologists to the war effort

[The Royal Hammerers and The Grizzly Bears - the dining clubs of the early Geological Survey](#)

## **BGS maps and publications**

[BGS maps portal](#)—view all the BGS published maps and sections including all the 'Old Series' maps, sections and the various 'index of colours'.

[Irish historical geological maps](#)—view all the Irish historical maps and sections that were published during the Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland days (up to 1905).

[BGS publications viewer](#) - View most historical and current memoirs and other publications.

## **References and further reading**

For more information on the history of the British Geological Survey, former Overseas Geological Surveys and related organisations, see the following published works:

Bate, D G. 2010. Sir Henry Thomas De la Beche and the founding of the British Geological Survey. *Mercian Geologist*, 17 (3). 149-165.

Allen, P M. 2003. A geological survey in transition. (Keyworth: British Geological Survey). [available to buy online]

Bailey, Sir Edward. 1952. Geological Survey of Great Britain. (London: Thomas Murby)

Cook, P J, and Allen, P M. 1994. The example of the British Geological Survey: past, present and future. In: National Geological Surveys in the 21st century. Geological Survey of Canada Miscellaneous Report 55, 15-23.

Cook, P J. 1998. A history of the British Geological Survey, 1990-1997. British Geological Survey Technical Report WQ/98/1.

Dixey, F. 1957. Colonial Geological Surveys, 1947-56: a review of progress during the past ten years. *Colonial Geology and Mineral Resources*, Supplement Series no. 2.

Flett, Sir John S. 1937. The first hundred years of the Geological Survey of Great Britain. (London: HMSO)

Hackett, D. 1999. Our corporate history: key events affecting the British Geological Survey, 1967-1998. British Geological Survey Technical Report WQ/99/1.

Herries Davies, G L. 1983. Sheets of many colours: the mapping of Ireland's rocks 1750-1890. (Dublin: Royal Dublin Society.)

Herries Davies, G L. 1995. North from The Hook: 150 years of the Geological Survey of Ireland. (Dublin: Geological Survey of Ireland.)

McKenna, G. (Ed) [Unpublished manuscript] Instructions for the Local Directors of the Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland (330 KB pdf) by Henry De la Beche 22nd May 1845. Selected documents from the BGS Archives No. 1.

McIntosh, R P. 2012. Geological Survey of Great Britain and Ireland — a contemporary account of the Survey, 1897. Extract and illustrated from 1897 Geological Survey of Great Britain. Summary of Progress. [Unpublished].

McIntosh, R P. Origins of the British Geological Survey.

Portlock, J E. 1843. Report on the geology of Londonderry, and of parts of Tyrone and Fermanagh. (Dublin: HMSO), Preface pp. iii-xi, for an account of the origins of the geological department of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland.

Seymour, W A. (ed.) 1980. A history of the Ordnance Survey. (Folkestone: Dawson)

Wilson, H E. 1985. Down to earth: one hundred and fifty years of the British Geological Survey. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press) (Including the activities of the former Overseas Geological Surveys)

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