The Geological Survey Act and the creation of the Geological Survey of the United Kingdom (Great Britain & Ireland)

Contents

1 History of the British Geological Survey
2 Brief timeline
3 List of Directors of the British Geological Survey
4 Survey name changes
5 Location of Survey headquarters over time
6 Links
   6.1 British Geological Survey - the legislative framework
   6.2 Full text histories of BGS on Earthwise
   6.3 BGS admistrative archives
   6.4 Timeline
   6.5 Biographical information on early Survey staff
   6.6 Photographs and archives on Geoscenic
   6.7 Assorted topics
   6.8 BGS maps and publications
History of the British Geological Survey

Brief timeline

1830 — Henry De la Beche begins mapping geology of Devon as a private endeavour

Henry Thomas De la Beche (1796–1855), a Fellow of the Geological Society of London, had already published some papers on the geology of the Devon and Dorset coast when in 1830 he set about adding geology to the Ordnance one-inch topographical map of south-east Devon. When his private income became insecure, he sought to obtain official backing for the continuation of this work, which he saw as being of great practical utility to the nation.

1832 — De la Beche secures funding from Board of Ordnance to complete mapping of Devon

Thomas F Colby, Superintendent of the Ordnance Survey, recognised the practical value of adding geological information to the Ordnance map. He supported De la Beche’s request for financial assistance from the Board of Ordnance to complete a geological survey of Devon. De la Beche delivered his first completed map for engraving in May 1832 (Old Series one-inch sheet 22, SE Devon, surveyed 1830–31).

1835 — Ordnance Geological Survey

The success of De la Beche’s work in Devon led to the establishment of the Ordnance Geological Survey in July 1835 as a branch of the Ordnance Survey, initially to extend the mapping into Cornwall, but ultimately with a view to surveying the whole country; De la Beche became its first Director. The support of both Colby and the Geological Society was a crucial factor in securing the future the Geological Survey.

1835 — 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 furnished with a chemical laboratory which opened for commercial work in June 1839, while the museum itself was accessible to personal callers from August of that year, although its formal date of opening is usually stated to be 1841.

1840 — Mining Record Office

In April 1839 approval was given by Treasury for the Museum of Economic Geology to take custody of a proposed collection of mining records; this led to the establishment of a Mining Record Office following the appointment of a Keeper of Mining Records in October 1840. Statistical information on mineral production and trade was collected for selected minerals from 1845 but was expanded thereafter as an annual publication covering a wider range of minerals produced and traded in the UK from 1853. Responsibility for mineral statistics passed to the Home Office in 1881 and returned to BGS in the 1960s.

1845 — The Geological Survey Act and the creation of the Geological Survey of the United
Kingdom (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 a 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 — A new Museum of Practical Geology

Having outgrown the limited accommodation at Craig’s Court, arrangements were put in hand in 1845 for erecting a new museum and offices for the Geological Survey. On 12 May 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, the new Geological Survey and Museum of Practical Geology was formally opened by Prince Albert in Jermyn Street, a prime London location. The Survey offices and library were situated in the rear of the building, which fronted onto Piccadilly. Also included was a lecture theatre, laboratories and the Mining Record Office.

1851 — School of Mines

In November 1851 De la Beche inaugurated the Government School of Mines and of Science applied to the Arts, which would go on to become the Royal School of Mines. The school, based in the museum at Jermyn Street, provided instruction in chemistry, natural history with palaeontology, mechanical science, metallurgy, geology, and mining and mineralogy.

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)

1872 — Separation of the Geological Survey and Museum from the Royal School of Mines

The Royal School of Mines and its teaching facilities was relocated from Jermyn Street to South Kensington, although the transfer was not fully completed until some years later. The School thus ceased to be part of the Geological Survey and Museum.

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 the United Kingdom (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 Institute is renamed British Geological Survey

On 1 January 1984 the Institute of Geological Sciences was renamed the British Geological Survey. The next year the headquarters was relocated to Keyworth, near Nottingham and the offices and exhibits 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, 1835–1855. Director General from 1845

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


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 contracted to map the geology of Devon

1835 Ordnance Geological Survey

1845 Geological Survey of the United Kingdom (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 Initially operating from temporary field addresses, but from 1845 based at the Museum of Economic Geology, 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, backing onto Piccadilly, 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**


**Full text histories of BGS on Earthwise**


*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**


**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:


References

1. In 1857 the Survey’s governing Department of Science and Art was formally transferred from the Board of Trade to become the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, a move that displeased Murchison because he would no longer have direct access to a Minister of State (the President of the Board of Trade) but had instead to
deal with an intermediary (the Privy Council on Education)


Category:
- History of the British Geological Survey

Navigation menu

Personal tools
- Not logged in
- Talk
- Contributions
- Log in
- Request account

Namespaces
- Page
- Discussion

Views
- Read
- Edit
- View history
- PDF Export

More

Search

[Search] [Go]

Navigation
- Main page
- Recent changes
- Random page
- Help about MediaWiki