



St Aubyn collection

News on the project – July to September 2008

Monday 7 July

Today, members from the Natural History and Conservation team met in the [National Museum Cardiff](#) to have a mineral conservation training day. Soon after arriving, we were introduced to Caroline Buttler, the museum's conservator, who was going to teach us for the day. The group was first taken on a tour around the National Museum's geology collections, so that we could see how they had stored their collections. After lunch, we were given talks about all of the mineral types that can be difficult to store, and at the end of the day Caroline showed us how to clean our specimens without damaging them.

Wednesday 23 July

This morning, the Keeper of Natural History and I spent some time in Devonport with the intention of photographing as many references to Sir John's life and his collection as possible. It was an extremely hot and sunny day, and we managed to take lots of photographs.

Friday 25 July

Today, all of the transcribed information from the St Aubyn herbarium was handed to our documentation team so that they could start entering all of the notes into the database. Our data entry assistant, who has been working on the museum's mineral collection, will be doing most of this work. We think that she will be glad for the change and will enjoy typing up these botanical notes.

Monday 28 July

In the morning, I met our Keeper of Natural History at Audley End train station with the intention of spending some time in the [Saffron Walden Museum](#) in Essex. Soon after arriving we met their Natural History Officer, Sarah Kenyon, who took us to her stores to show us the museum's collection of St Aubyn minerals. Sir John used to live at Shortgrove Hall which is very close to Saffron Walden, and apparently he donated this small number of minerals to the museum in 1834. After a cup of tea, we got straight to work in packing the minerals in acid free tissue paper and small boxes.

After packing the minerals ready for transporting them back to Plymouth, we wanted to find two of Sir John's houses – one at Shortgrove, Essex and the other at Woolmers in Hertfordshire. When we arrived at Shortgrove we were not sure if we should enter the estate as the road was labelled as being private, but keen to carry on with our research, we continued. As soon as the car drove past the large entrance, there was a beautiful avenue of oaks. Unfortunately though, Sir John's house was no longer standing. After seeing Shortgrove, we drove on to Woolmers, which had become a polo ground. In the distance from the roadside we could see a large white house, but it was too far away to photograph properly.

Tuesday 29 July

The day started with the Keeper of Natural History and I walking to Saffron Walden Museum at 9am to collect the minerals which we packed the day before, we then made our way to the [Sedgwick Museum](#) in Cambridge to see some of Sir John's minerals. Upon arrival, we were introduced to Steve Laurie who showed us their St Aubyn specimens. After photographing these specimens, Steve then showed us some of the Abraham Hume minerals. We were interested in these because firstly Sir Abraham Hume was friends with Sir John, and secondly [Comte de Bournon](#), who catalogued Sir John's minerals, also catalogued Sir Abraham Hume's minerals.

After lunch, we decided to drive back to Plymouth via Chertsey in Surrey to try and find another one of Sir John's houses at Woburn Farm. When we set off on the M25 we were in high spirits, but when we exited on junction 12 for Chertsey our spirits were dampened. Not only had we gone off on the wrong exit, but when we did finally find Woburn Farm it was all fenced off with imposing gates and pillars.

Friday 8 August

Today, our documentation and IT department completed the photography of Sir John St Aubyn's minerals. They will now optimise the photographs so that they can be attached onto the database later on next year.

Thursday 14 to Friday 22 August 2008

This week, all of the old labels on Sir John's minerals were recorded in an electronic format. Illustrations on the style of each label and all of its graphical and written data were drawn in a small word document. Each document was then saved with its accession number so that it could be attached onto the database. Our documentation assistant has been working hard to attach all of these documents so that when we access one of Sir John's minerals, it is possible to see all the labels.

Thursday 11 September

After identifying all of the herbarium specimens and updating the species names, it was apparent that we would need some assistance with updating the names of the mosses. In order to find some help, we contacted Dr David Long, a well known bryologist at the [Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh](#). David was very interested in the herbarium because so few people were collecting mosses in the eighteenth century. Within a few days David had updated nearly all of the scientific names for the mosses and had supplied us with lots of references and interesting information. The most intriguing of which was the news that we are likely to hold some type specimens in the collection. A type specimen is extremely important in Natural History because it is the specimen on which the description and naming of a species is based.

Friday 12 September

Cherry Lewis from the [University of Bristol](#) visited the natural history department at Plymouth City Museum today to have a look at the St Aubyn collection. We were really pleased to have Cherry visit us because she is currently writing a book on the origins of the [Geological Society of London](#). Two of the founding members of the society were Dr William Babington and the Count de Bournon, both of whom knew [Sir John](#) well, and Sir John himself became Vice-President of the society in 1810. Cherry was extremely interested to see our minerals and catalogues, and after much rigorous discussion, both Cherry and I learnt many things that we had not previously known. We hope to keep in touch with Cherry and are all looking forward to seeing her new book!