

RECOGNISING 'ERRANT' BRITISH GEOLOGICAL SURVEY (BGS) SPECIMENS

BGS and its collections have used many different names in the past and any of these may appear on its labels or documentation:

Ordnance Geological Survey	1835 – 1845
Museum of Economic Geology	1837 – 1851
Geological Survey of Great Britain	1845 – 1965
Museum of Practical Geology	1851 – 1935
Geological Survey of Scotland	1896 – 1965
Overseas Geological Surveys	– 1965
Geological Museum	1935 – 1986
Institute of Geological Sciences (IGS)	1965 – 1984
British Geological Survey (BGS)	1984 –

The collections are dominantly British, but due to its historical remit, also include some Irish, Northern Irish and Commonwealth material, plus worldwide comparative material. Historic collections include the British fossils from the Geological Society of London Collection, material collected by Darwin, Hooker and De la Beche, and the collections of the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall.

The collections are broadly divided into:

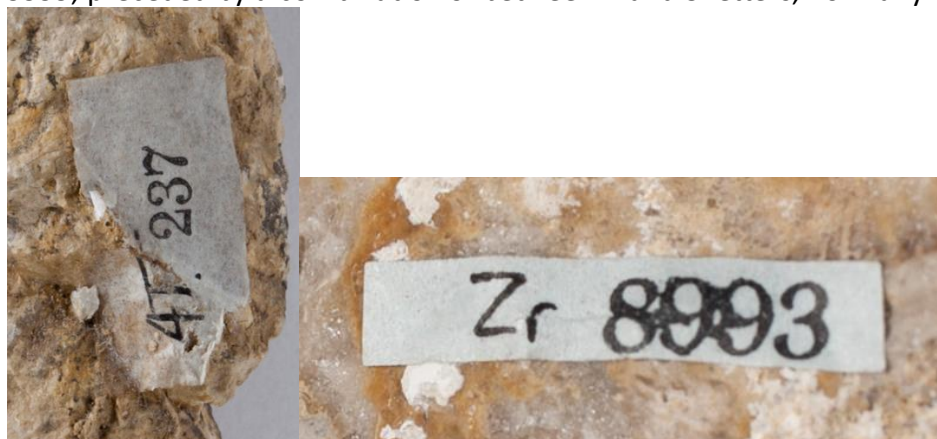
- Fossils and biostratigraphy, including microfossils
- Mineralogy & Petrology, including thin sections, resin mounts, & analysed powders
- Boreholes, including drillcore, core samples, cuttings and various prepared samples.

Almost all BGS specimens will have a glued paper label with a registration number, generally with one to three letters followed by one to five digits. Generally, the letters are handwritten in Indian ink and the numbers pre-printed, but sometimes the reverse is true. Computer printed labels bearing the wording 'Brit. Geol. Surv.' were introduced in 2001.

Fossil Specimens

Main Survey Locality Collections – England & Wales

The majority of fossil specimens will have a white or pale blue label with a printed number in the range 1 – 9999, preceded by a combination of between 1 and 3 letters, normally hand-written in Indian ink.



Main Survey Locality Collections – Scotland

The majority of fossil specimens will have a white label with a four-digit printed number prefixed by one or two letters, or by one or two digits and the letter 'E'. Numbers with a single letter prefix may also have a single letter suffix.

Examples: M1234a; 15E4567; ER2233

Museum / Reference Collections

Normally numbered in a white oval label, sometimes without any letters. If letters appear, they will be either GSM, GSL or GSE. GSM is frequently omitted.



19th Century "tablet" numbers may appear on some old specimens, referencing their position in the Museum of Practical Geology. They will generally have a GSM number added, although the 'GSM' will often be omitted.



Geological Society of London UK Fossil Collection

This collection was transferred to BGS in 1911, with the foreign material going to the Natural History Museum. The main series is denoted by red or green oval labels, bearing four-digit handwritten numbers. Green denotes figured specimens and red other material. Lesser specimens are registered with GSa, GSb, GSd or GSc numbers.



Other collections

Some donated collections, such as the Kidston plant collection (four digits, see below) retained their original numbers.



If you find any material associated with known BGS specimens it is worth checking with us in case it is one of these collections.

Micropalaeontological and Slide Collections

The slides will typically have similar labels to those used for petrological thin sections (see below), but will carry a characteristic prefix:

Fossil thin sections: PF, PS

Calc-micro in cardboard slides: Mic, SAB, MPA, MPK

Palynology, including acritarchs: MPA, MPK, Mik, Mil, SAA - SAZ

Mineralogy and Petrology Specimens

Many specimens just carry a collecting number, a white (not pale blue) rectangular label with a one to four-digit pre-printed number, preceded by a generally two or three-digit prefix (e.g. BN328 below).

Selected specimens may then be re-registered into one of the main archive reference collections (e.g. MR31611, MR34557 below).

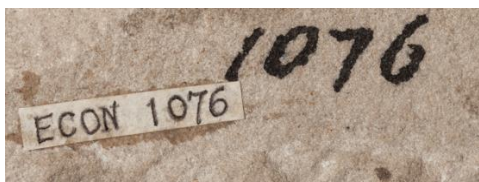


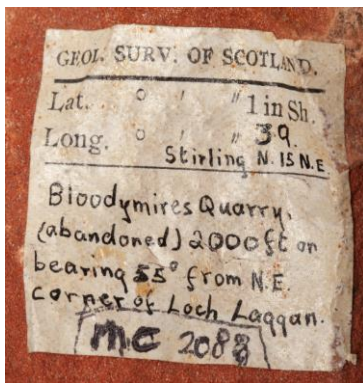
The main mineralogy & petrology archive collection prefixes include:

Hand specimens only: MR, MC

Hand specimens and thin sections: E, F, N, S, ED

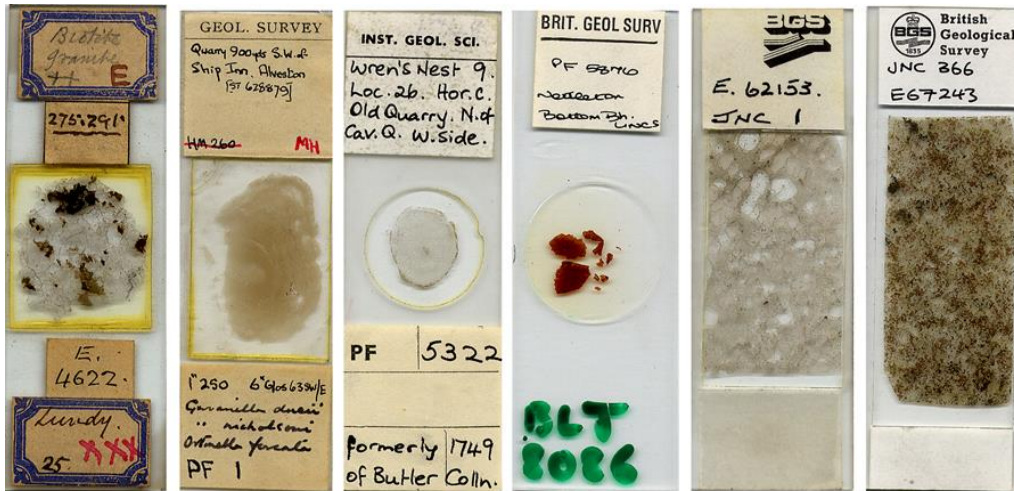
Building stones collections: ECON





Petrological thin sections and polished blocks

Probably most easily recognised by the printed labels, but also by the format of the registration numbers, which are the same as for the above.



Borehole Specimens

Subsamples from boreholes are often held in a series of collecting bags with the borehole name and depths. If you find material of uncertain origin, it is always worth checking with BGS as the National Geological Repository. Email kwcorestore@bgs.ac.uk , including as much detail as possible.

Many boreholes have been broken up and archived as a series of hand specimens. These will commonly have registration numbers in the following series: B, Ba – Bz, BDA – BDZ, BEA – BEB, BKA – BKL, BLA – BLM, SBO

Some boreholes are represented not by solid core, but by recovered rock chips or cuttings. These are generally held in tubes, plastic containers, canvas bags or small thick brown paper envelopes. They will generally be labelled with a borehole name and a depth.

Offshore hydrocarbon wells (UKCS) will often carry a well name of the general format 110/02- 6

What to do

If you find any specimens or samples that might possibly belong to BGS, please email enquiries@bgs.ac.uk with as much information as possible, preferably including photographs of the specimens, labels and any paperwork.

11th February 2022