

# ST.AUBYN MINERAL COLLECTION CATALOGUES

## Natural history collection

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Alongside Sir John St. Aubyn's mineral collection, Plymouth City Museum also holds several catalogues that relate to the collection. Some of these catalogues have been typed and others been hand written, but each one has been compiled during a different time in the collections' history.

These catalogues are really important because we can form a general impression of how large Sir John St. Aubyn's mineral collection was and where his minerals came from, before it was split by Isaiah Deck. We can also establish how and when his collection changed in size, because each catalogue describes the collection at a specific time in its history.

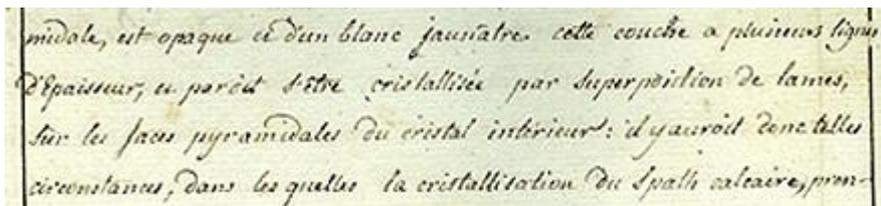
### Dr. William Babington's catalogue

In 1799, Dr. William Babington published a catalogue titled 'A New System of Mineralogy'. The catalogue, written using Baron Born's Lavoisierian principles of new chemistry, described approximately 2,000 British and foreign minerals that made up Babington's collection. The catalogue is important because it describes the minerals that Sir John bought from Babington in 1799, most of which had previously been owned by the third Earl of Bute.

### Comte Jacques Louis de Bournon's catalogue

Between 1794 and 1815 under the persuasion of Dr. Babington, an expatriate from the French Revolution named Comte Jacques Louis de Bournon was employed by Sir John St. Aubyn. He was to curate and catalogue his mineral collection. In order to carry out his work, the minerals were kept in London alongside the mineral collections of Sir Abraham Hume and Sir Charles Greville, which de Bournon was also employed to work on.

Bournon's arrangement follows closely with the theories of crystal structure advocated by the Abbé Haüy and, unlike Babington's classification, Bournon's catalogue is not structured on orders, genera and species. Instead, there is a general subdivision which is in the form of different codes and symbols on the specimen labels. Unfortunately, de Bournon never completed his catalogue because Sir John moved his collection back to Cornwall in 1806 to 1807.



Above is a section from Comte de Bournon's catalogue. If you look closely you may be able to notice that the writing is in French.

### Translating Comte de Bournon's catalogues

In recent years, there has been some ambiguity with de Bournon's catalogues because both volumes have been written in French. This has made it very difficult for the natural history department to understand how the catalogue relates to St. Aubyn's collection.

However, using a grant given by the [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#), a member of staff at the [Royal Cornwall Museum](#) translated the catalogues. Three essays can be found in the Museum's research and projects area that are really important because they show us the ideas that the scientific community had about geology almost 200 years ago.